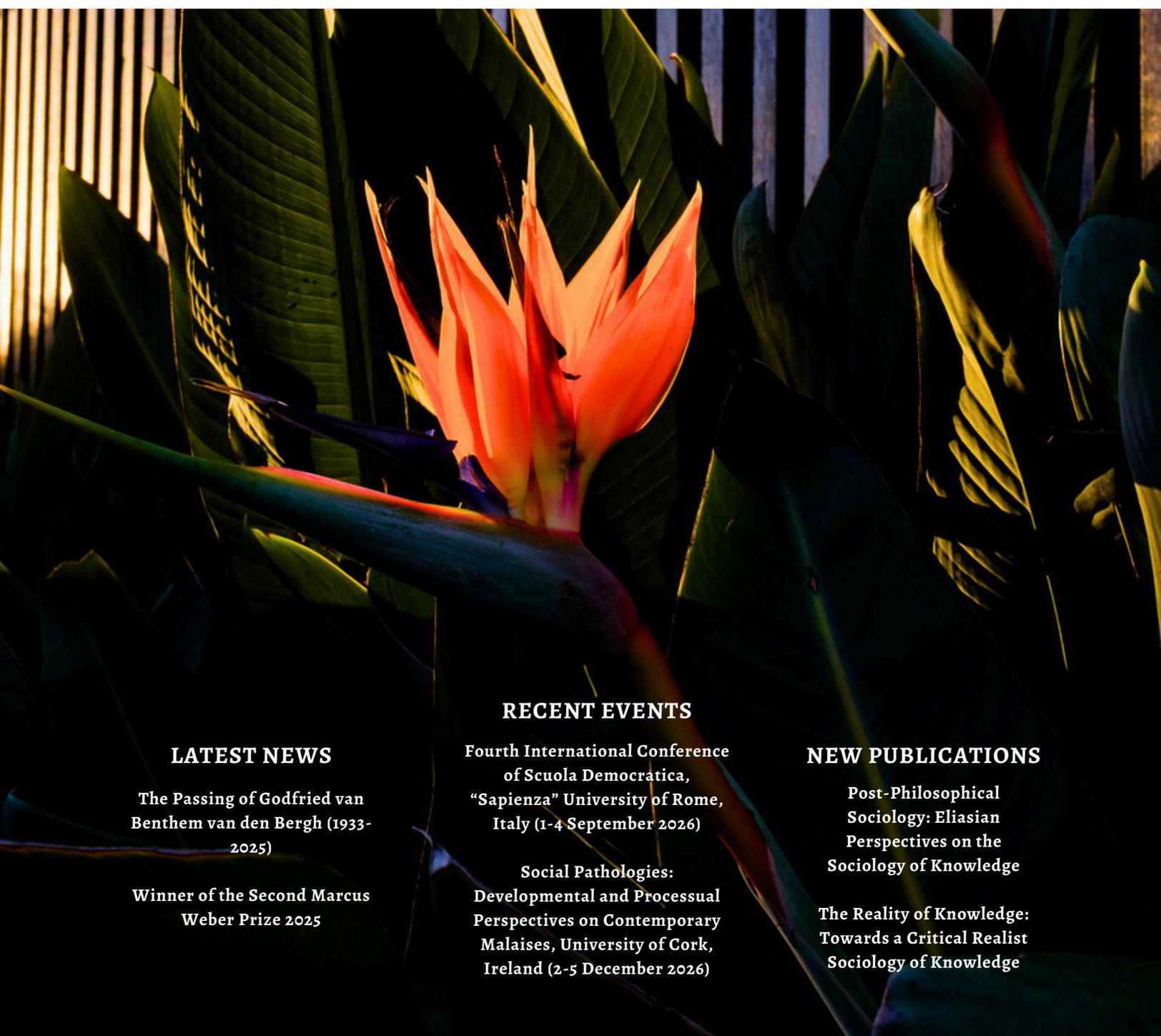


FIGURATIONS

The Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation

ISSUE 64 | FEBRUARY 2026



LATEST NEWS

The Passing of Godfried van
Benthem van den Bergh (1933-
2025)

Winner of the Second Marcus
Weber Prize 2025

RECENT EVENTS

Fourth International Conference
of Scuola Democratica,
“Sapienza” University of Rome,
Italy (1-4 September 2026)

Social Pathologies:
Developmental and Processual
Perspectives on Contemporary
Malaises, University of Cork,
Ireland (2-5 December 2026)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Post-Philosophical
Sociology: Eliasian
Perspectives on the
Sociology of Knowledge

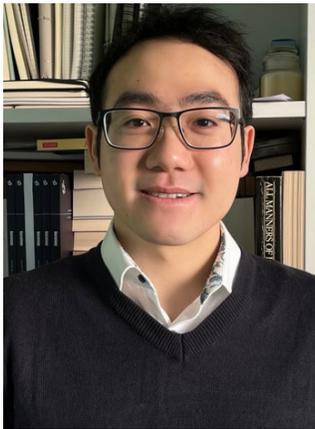
The Reality of Knowledge:
Towards a Critical Realist
Sociology of Knowledge

EDITORS



ALEXANDER MACK

Alexander Mack is an Independent Researcher & Photographer currently based in Brisbane, Australia. One of his photographs has been reproduced on the front covers of *The Palgrave Handbook of International Political Theory* volumes I and II published by Palgrave Macmillan. He has also written a handbook chapter that appears in volume II.



WAI LAU

Wai Lau (AKA Leon Lau) is a postdoctoral researcher of sociology at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom. He is interested in examining civilising processes in East Asia. Currently, he is examining Japanese and Chinese societies from an Eliasian perspective. In addition, he is the author of *On the Process of Civilisation in Japan* (2022) published by Palgrave Macmillan and the recipient of the Norbert Elias Book Prize in 2023. He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and an Associate Fellow of the HEA.

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Contributions should preferably be e-mailed to the Editor in the form of MS Word (.doc or .docx), Rich Text (.rtf), plain text (.txt) or Open Office Text (.odt) files. Do not use embedded footnotes. Where possible, Word files are preferred to PDF. Hard copy is accepted reluctantly. Photographs should be submitted in JPEG format.

The next issue of *Figurations* will be mailed in July 2026. News and notes should be sent by 5 June 2026 to the Editors at figurations@norbert-elias.com.

Cover Page: Alexander Mack (2024). Paradise Sunset, 30th of June. Plus photos on pages 6, 19, 29 and 40.

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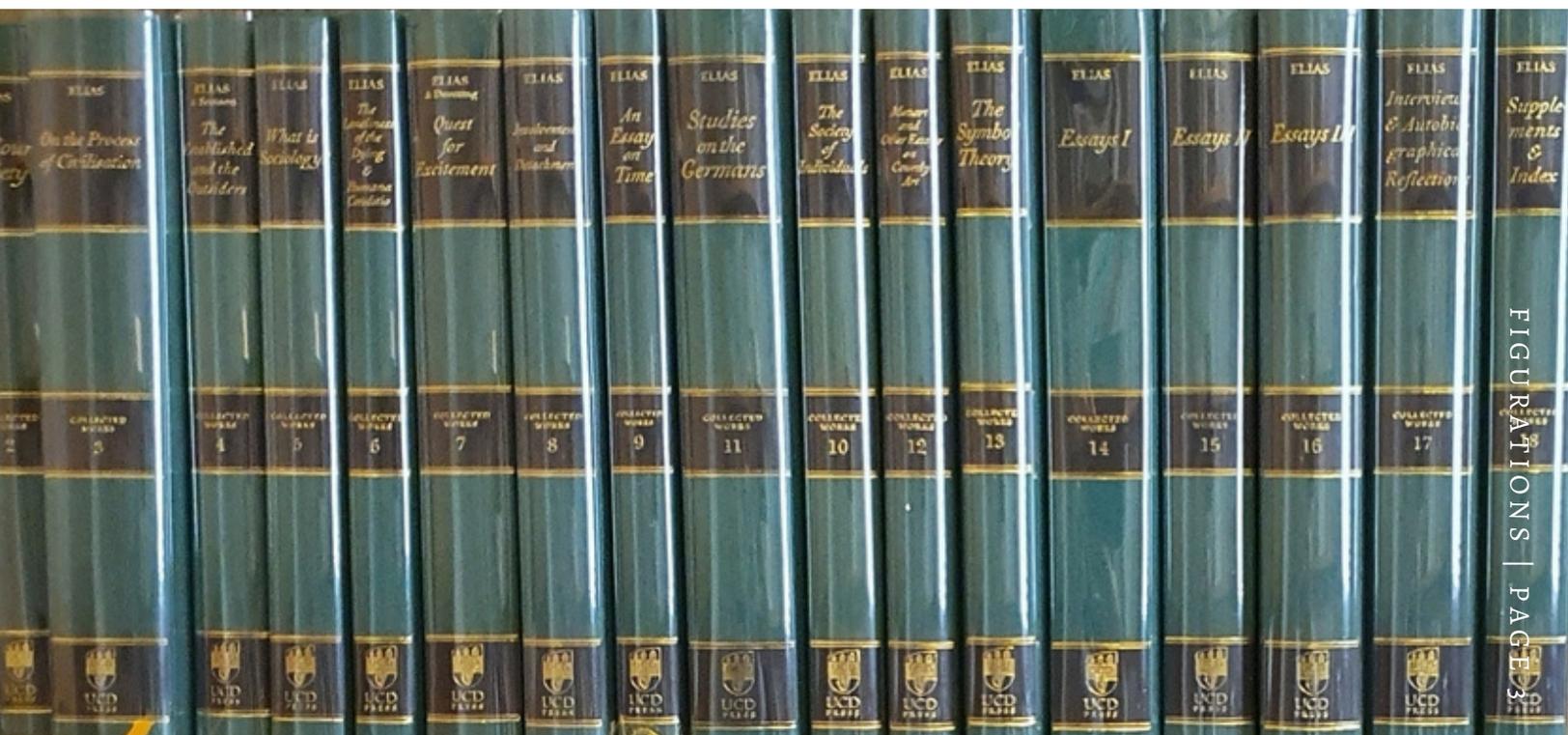
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NEXT ISSUE



A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

As we move into the second quarter of this century, we hope you have had a strong and inspiring start to the year. We are pleased to share with you another vibrant issue of *Figurations*, one that reflects the intellectual energy and enduring connections of our community.

Looking ahead, 2026 promises to be a particularly active year. No fewer than four conferences lie before us, spanning Rome, Kassel, Vitória, and Cork. These gatherings offer valuable opportunities for the *Figurations* community to grow, to exchange ideas, and to reconnect with friends and colleagues across continents. We hope many of you will be able to participate and help sustain the spirit of dialogue that has long defined our field.

We are also excited by the return of *Human Figurations*. As a dedicated space for processual sociology, it remains an invaluable forum for the development, exchange, and refinement of ideas within the field. The journal continues to embody the spirit of open dialogue and intellectual curiosity that sustains our community, and we look forward to seeing how readers and contributors alike will use this space to share, challenge, and advance thinking in the years ahead.

Most significantly, this issue also introduces

a new *Memoirs* section, created as a space to reflect on the lives, works, and continuing relevance of past members of the community. We warmly encourage readers to contribute to this section and help it develop into a collective act of remembrance and reflection.

Yet, alongside these good tidings, we must also mark a moment of loss. Last year, the *Figurations* community lost an esteemed member, Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh. A towering presence in the field and one of our longest-standing members and readers, he will be deeply missed. A full obituary, written by Stephen Mennell, together with photographs by Arjan Post, appears on pages 45 to 48 and honours both his life and his lasting contribution to our shared intellectual consciousness.

The cover image, a bird of paradise flower taken at sunset, symbolises the cycles of growth and renewal. From a distance it resembles a flame that changes with each passing season.

As always, we welcome your thoughts, tributes, quotes, or ideas for future issues and cover pages. Please get in touch by 5 June 2026 if you like to contribute to the next issue.

We hope you enjoy reading Issue 64 of *Figurations*.

Wai Lau & Alexander Mack

FROM THE FOUNDATION

Dear Readers,

The past year has been marked by significant loss for the Norbert Elias Foundation and the wider figurational community. We mourned the passing of three towering figures in figurational sociology: Hermann Korte, Cas Wouters, and Jonathan Fletcher. As many of you will have already seen, a special issue of *Figurations* (63A, December 2025) was devoted to honouring their immense contributions to our field, and we encourage readers to revisit those tributes. In this issue, Stephen Mennell remembers another cherished colleague, Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, whose scholarship and collegiality enriched our community for decades. The loss of these scholars has reminded us as a Board of our responsibility to sustain and develop the intellectual tradition they helped to build.

As previously announced, *Human Figurations* is returning to Leicester — the university at which Elias gained his first permanent academic post — and will be hosted on the university's open journals platform. The Editorial Team has now convened, and the new website is live at <https://journals.le.ac.uk/index.php/hf/index>. We have received an excellent number of applications for our International Editorial Board, the composition of which we will finalise and announce in the coming months. The first issue of the reborn journal is planned for later this year, marking an im-

portant milestone in making figurational scholarship more widely accessible.

Access to Elias's work itself is also set to improve dramatically. After lengthy negotiations, we have secured a partnership for the publication of **Norbert Elias's Digital eBooks**. This means that researchers will no longer need to choose between weighty print volumes or unauthorised PDFs. Instead, high-quality digital editions corresponding to the *Collected Works* will be available at reasonable prices, making Elias's original texts more accessible to scholars worldwide. More details will be announced in the near future.

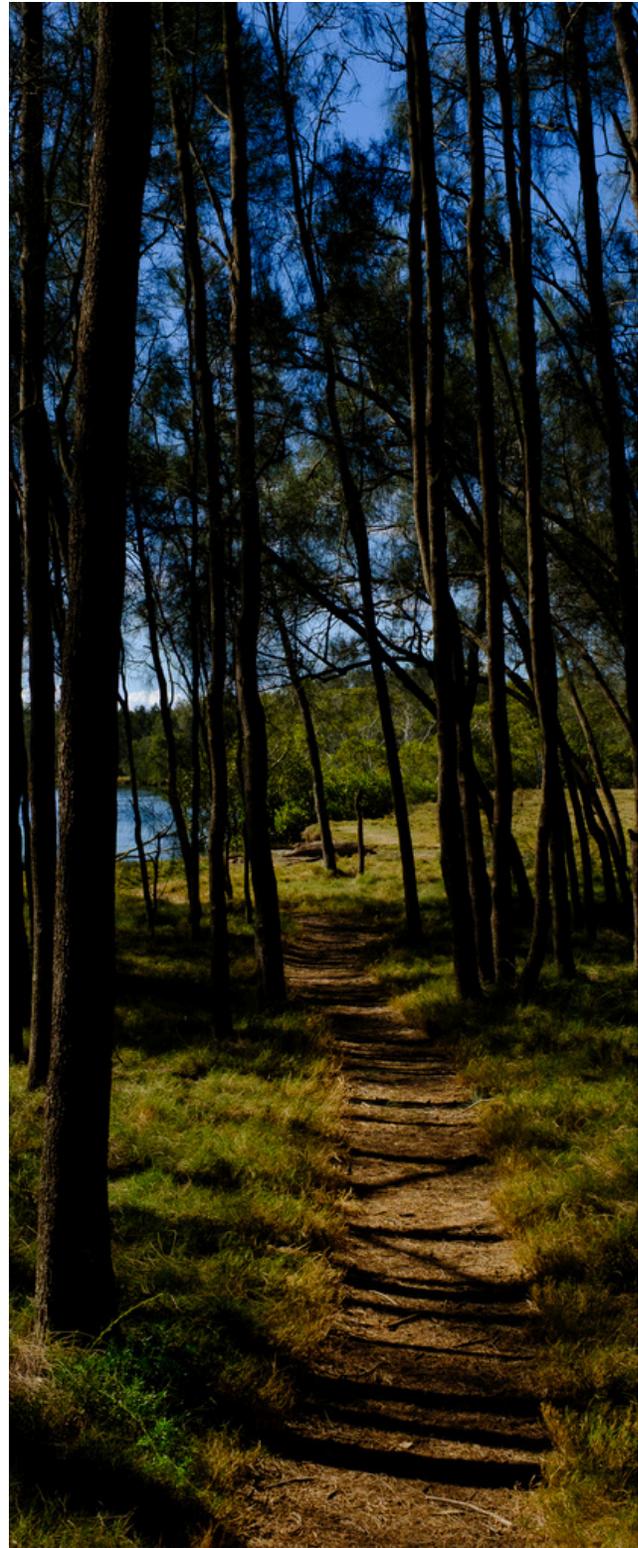
The calendar for figurational sociology is filling with a number of promising events. A conference in Kassel (9–10 October 2026) will focus on migration and group dynamics, bringing process-sociological perspectives to bear on one of the defining challenges of our time. Most significantly, the **2026 World Congress of the Elias Community** will take place in Cork, Ireland, from 2–5 December, examining the historical dynamics of social pathologies. The theme addresses pressing contemporary concerns — from chronic health conditions and mental health crises to violence, inequality, environmental degradation, and the construction of moral panics — while also welcoming papers on flourishing, health, and well-being. Cork offers an excellent venue for international ex-

change, and we anticipate strong participation from across the global figurational community. The full call for papers appears elsewhere in this issue. Additional conferences and events are being planned for the coming and future years. We will announce these as details are confirmed.

Following the loss of its long-time home after Nico Wilterdink's death, the Foundation has found warm shelter in Christien Brinkgreve's house, not far from Nico's (and Joop Goudsblom's). With that, it is continuing to reorganise its operations while carefully managing Elias's estate, and a number of generous endowments, including those most recently left by Cas Wouters and Hermann Korte. These legacies ensure that we can continue to support emerging scholars, facilitate access to Elias's work, and foster international dialogue across various scholarly communities.

Thus, as the Foundation enters its 36th year since Norbert Elias's death, we do so on a sound footing, looking forward while remaining deeply grateful for those who helped shape the intellectual community we continue to build together.

Kind regards,
The Board of the Norbert Elias Foundation
January 2026



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annual Award Ceremony of the Markus Weber Prize 2025

by Adrian Jitschin

On Monday 6th October 2025, the second Markus Weber Memorial Prize was awarded. Markus Weber (1973-2023) was a sociologist who died unexpectedly, and his family honours the best thesis at his university (see [*Figurations* 62](#) for more details on the first award ceremony). This year, Olivia Schumann was honoured.

Prof. Dr Thorsten Bonacker spoke on behalf of the Sociology Institute at the University of Marburg, while program coordinator Franziska Dahlmeier handled the actual organisation. Bonacker and Dr Adrian Jitschin, board member of the foundation, spoke at the ceremony. Bonacker, who was also the second reviewer of the award-winning thesis, emphasised its outstanding quality, his extensive knowledge of the current state of research, and the relevance of the findings. In his speech, Jitschin recalled Markus Weber and the rich tradition of the University of Marburg, which has produced outstanding sociologists throughout history, such as Lars Schmitt, Jens Jetzkowitz, and Stefanie Ernst. He emphasised the exceptional value that such an award can create, ensuring it can be passed on from one generation of graduates to the next, thereby providing the continuity and growth of the sociology program at Marburg.

Approximately 80 listeners, including stu-

dents, faculty, and friends of Markus Weber, attended the ceremony. The Weber family, in their continued dedication to Markus's legacy, invited for coffee afterwards, making it a thoroughly successful afternoon that connected the past, the present, and, with an up-and-coming sociologist like Olivia Schumann, the future.

Here is the information of the thesis:

Olivia Schumann (2025). *Socialisation to Distance? The Influence of Masculinity Norms on Male Friendships During Adolescence*. Bachelor Thesis, Marburg, 49 Pages.

Abstract in English: This thesis examines the influence of social norms of masculinity on the quality and stability of male friendships during adolescence. It compares how, depending on different social spaces, emotional and physical intimacy among men is either suspected of homosexuality and delegitimised in accordance with the patriarchal order, or appears to be compatible with cultural norms of masculinity.

The thesis aims to highlight the pressure on adolescent boys to conform to societal images of masculinity, including its effects on the lack or loss of close friendships, and thus to emphasise the need to re-evaluate assumptions about male friendships, in which close relationships are no longer considered, 'girlish', 'gay' or 'childish', but are understood as human.

To this end, existing research findings on friendships between men and boys were illustrated by analysing a scene from the feature film, 'Close', in which an intimate friendship between boys is suspected of being homosexual. This case study was then contrasted with Marion Müller's study findings on contact systems in men's soccer, which examines the phenomenon of general suspicion of heterosexuality in men's soccer. Within the analysis, the two supposedly antagonistic theoretical approaches of socialisation and interaction theory are combined, since male adolescents internalise social gender images through socialisation processes on the one hand, and on the other hand, they themselves produce these images in interactions with their peers in accordance with the concept of doing gender.

Overall, it is clear that the decline in the quality and stability of intimate homosocial male friendships can be mainly attributed to socially determined norms of masculinity. The conventional norms of masculinity in Western cultures leave little room for emotional and physical intimacy among men, as these are considered deficient in a social order characterised by patriarchy and male hegemony. Even social spaces such as men's soccer, which seem to overcome this limitation of male relationships, can ultimately be traced back to behavioural rituals and physical practices that also function according to the logic of the male hegemonic order.

To discuss the thesis, please contact the au-

thor at olivi.schumann@gmail.com.

Abstract in German: Die Bachelorarbeit untersucht den Einfluss gesellschaftlicher Männlichkeitsnormen auf die Qualität und Stabilität von Männerfreundschaften im Laufe der Adoleszenz. Dabei wird gegenübergestellt, wie in Abhängigkeit verschiedener sozialer Räume emotionale und körperliche Intimität unter Männern entweder unter einen Homosexualitätsverdacht gestellt und entsprechend der patriarchalen Ordnung delegitimiert wird oder mit kulturellen Männlichkeitsnormen vereinbar scheint. Ziel der Arbeit ist dabei, den Anpassungsdruck adoleszenter Jungen an gesellschaftliche Männlichkeitsbilder mitsamt seiner Auswirkungen des Mangels an oder Verlusts von engen Freundschaften aufzuzeigen und damit die Notwendigkeit einer Neubewertung der Annahmen über männliche Freundschaften zu verdeutlichen, in der enge Beziehungen nicht mehr als ‚mädchenhaft‘, ‚schwul‘ oder ‚kindlich‘ bewertet, sondern als menschlich verstanden werden.

Hierfür wurden die bestehenden Forschungsergebnisse zu Männer- und Jungenfreundschaften durch die Analyse einer Filmszene aus dem Spielfilm ‚Close‘, in welcher eine intime Jungenfreundschaft unter Homosexualitätsverdacht gestellt wird, veranschaulicht. Anschließend wurde dieses Fallbeispiel mit den Studienergebnissen von Marion Müller zu Berührungssystemen im Männerfußball kontrastiert, welche das

Phänomen des generellen Heterosexualitätsverdachts im Männerfußball untersucht. Innerhalb der Analyse werden die beiden vermeintlich antagonistischen Theorieansätze der Sozialisations- und Interaktionstheorie miteinander kombiniert, da männliche Jugendliche zum einen gesellschaftliche Geschlechterbilder durch Sozialisationsprozesse internalisieren und diese zum andern in Interaktionen mit Gleichaltrigen entsprechend des Konzepts Doing Gender selber herstellen.

Insgesamt wird deutlich, dass die Abnahme der Qualität und Stabilität von intimen homosozialen männlichen Freundschaften maßgeblich auf gesellschaftlich determinierte Männlichkeitsnormen zurückzuführen ist. Die konventionellen Männlichkeitsnormen westlicher Kulturen lassen kaum Raum für emotionale und körperliche Intimität unter Männern, da diese in einer patriarchal und hegemonial männlich gekennzeichneten sozialen Ordnung einen defizitären Status erhalten. Selbst soziale Räume, wie der Männerfußball, die diese Begrenzung männlicher Beziehungen zu überwinden scheinen, lassen sich letztendlich auf Verhaltensrituale und Körperpraktiken zurückführen, welche ebenfalls nach der Logik der männlich hegemonialen Ordnung funktionieren.

Correction to *Figurations* 63

by Wai Lau & Alexander Mack

The Editors acknowledges an editorial error in *Figurations* 63, in which an incorrect obituary was published for Nico Wilterdink. This error has been corrected and the issue updated (see *Figurations* 63). The Editors regret the mistake and offer their sincere apologies for any confusion or distress caused.

Thank You Notice to the Readers of *Figurations* Special Issue 63A

by Wai Lau & Alexander Mack

The Editors would like to thank an eagle-eyed reader, Adrian Jitschin, who kindly drew our attention to a small number of minor errors in the special issue. We are grateful for this careful engagement, which helps us maintain the accuracy and editorial standards of the newsletter. Corrections have been made where appropriate, and the updated version is now online (see *Figurations Special Issue 63A*). Furthermore, we would like to express our thanks to Reinhard Blomert for identifying Dieter Claessens in one of the photographs included in the special issue. Finally, we would like to thank readers who wrote to us following the publication of the special issue honouring our three late friends, mentors, and colleagues. We appreciate these messages and the care with which the special issue has been received.



Winner of the Second Markus Weber Memorial Prize 2025
From left to right: Franziska Dahlmeier, Thorsten Bonacker,
Olivia Schumann, and Adrian Jitschin.

**WHICH DIRECTIONS GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT
WILL TAKE, NO ONE CAN TELL. WHETHER THE
AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES OF CHINA AND RUSSIA
WILL AVOID THE PROBLEM OF THEIR
DEPENDENCE ON GLOBAL FINANCE AND THE
GLOBAL REACH OF THEIR OWN CORPORATIONS
ALSO REMAINS UNCERTAIN. A LOSS OF
FUNCTIONS OF ALL NATION-STATES IS CLEAR
ENOUGH, BUT, LARGE AND SMALL, THEY ALL
WANT TO PRESERVE (OR INCREASE) THEIR
POWERS. THAT SHIBBOLETH STILL HANGS OVER
HUMANITY AS A WHOLE.**

GODFRIED VAN BENTHEM VAN DEN
BERGH

*Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh (2012). Norbert
Elias and the Human Condition. Human Figurations, 1(2),
Online. Link:
[https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0001.202/
--norbert-elias-and-the-human-condition?
rgn=main;view=fulltext](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0001.202/--norbert-elias-and-the-human-condition?rgn=main;view=fulltext)*

OBSERVATIONS

Making Coffee for Norbert Elias

by Ad van Iterson

This is an English translated excerpt from the Dutch book titled *J.J. Viottastraat 13: Norbert Elias en zijn Amsterdamse kring*, which can be purchased at <https://www.panchaud.nl/j-j-viottastraat-13/>.

"Mister Iterson, you must tell me how you are doing! And how is your partner, with whom you have moved into the apartment, getting on? The baby, a girl, wasn't she? What was her name again? Is she taking her first steps in this world?"

Elias didn't notice that I got up to make coffee. I call out that I can't hear him: "Too far away. I'll be back! Give me one moment, please!"

"Ah, you're in the kitchen? In that case, could you...?"

"Strong, perhaps?"

"Yes, yes! Could you please make a strong coffee today?"

"I already did!"

"What did you say? I can't hear you very well! You need to speak louder!"

Elias calls from the living room located on the street side. I know he's sitting at the short end of the large dining table, which has become a worktable, his fingers resting on

the surface or on loose sheets of paper that I typed up yesterday or the day before, which I then handed over to him to read the next day so he could pick up where he left off.

Two o'clock in the afternoon - the beginning of his workday. The request for strong coffee has been fulfilled - a cup for him and a cup for me. I sit down behind my Brother Deluxe typewriter - for the nineteenth, maybe the twentieth time now - and shake my fingers in preparation for the confrontation with the keys, which are yellowed like a smoker's teeth. I want to see the hammers dance! I want to hear the bell that warns me: *You're nearing the end of the line!* I want to push the carriage back to the right: *Rrrrrrt!* The assistant seeks action!

Elias is still going through the typed pages with his one functioning eye, moving right to left and upward, holding a pen in his free hand, poised to attack the wide margin with further reflections. Something falls on the floor. Among the papers lies a narrow unopened envelope.

"Do you want me to fetch a pair of scissors or a knife to open the letter? I'm willing to do that. Should I also read it aloud?"

"Yes, please, yes, please! Because who knows how long this letter has been lying around? Maybe it's urgent. Can't be delayed any longer," Elias remarked with urgency.

I read aloud: It's a request from a service club in the Eemland region to give a lecture. The

topic is open, but the date is set for after the New Year's speech by the president on Friday, 4 January, 1985.

"Next year!" I exclaim.

"It doesn't need to be answered," replies Elias. "It can go in a folder."

What time would he have got up? According to some former assistants, he sleeps until noon and then starts the day with a cold shower. Others dispute this claim: Norbert swims every morning at the Zuiderbad on Hobbemastraat, as he has done his entire life, wherever he may have stayed.

"You know, he always has a swimsuit tucked in the inside pocket of his jacket, just in case he finds somewhere to swim?"

Others can't believe it – "Swimming, at his age?" – without being able to tell you what Elias does in the morning.

Being alone, that he does, in any case. Wandering around by himself, in thought, from the bookshelf to the kitchen and back; standing by the window, on the balcony, sitting at his worktable. He even gives the impression of being alone when I'm with him. When he's at his table, it's still manageable, however small he may seem behind that expansive piece of furniture. But when I find him leaning on his cane, turning left, turning right, in the room with the still-unpacked moving boxes... After his flight

from Frankfurt in the 1930s, and his years in Paris, London, Leicester, Accra, and Bielefeld in the following half-century, he is now in Amsterdam, his new temporary home. Another new urban environment to which he has entrusted his daily routine. It seems to go effortlessly. He doesn't look around in wonder.

Loneliness. I have no experience with that; I don't know what it is. I've always sought places where you can laugh and encounter erotic subjects. I fear his loss – his possible loss. How lonely is Elias? How immeasurable is his gap? I can't say for certain, but I suspect: total. Despite the Amsterdam network of followers and protectors around him – fifty people, or a hundred if one counts broadly – I fear that Norbert Elias is a lonely man. He wouldn't entirely disagree with me. Loners often insist they have their work. Elias can't use that argument. His work doesn't compensate for his loneliness; his work and his loneliness overlap. He has had to do it all alone, in dull, unnoticed isolation, year after year, moving in and out of the workday. He even feels the loneliness of his theory when he isn't working, when he lets himself sink into the pool water and when he lifts himself out again. When he starts his usual evening meal at the pizzeria, and when he pushes the plate away. When he turns the knob of his transistor radio and hopes he can sleep.

He had to leave the great minds behind.

"We must go beyond Marx!"

"I took up the torch from Freud and carried it further."

How lonely must one feel then? How little do we mean to him if there isn't a single scientist who can walk alongside him?

I move my fingers back and forth once again. He should start dictating now.

Yes!

"As I have already pointed out, comma, we live together in a social universe that is unknown to us, comma, in which we must try to orient ourselves, comma, so that we act less blindly, period. No, semicolon. Change the final period to a semicolon."

Elias falls silent again, and I think: he must indeed have pointed this out before, undeniably, but not yesterday. The first sentence of today doesn't connect to where he left off yesterday. But don't ask me what that last sentence of last night, at quarter past ten, was. All I know is this: every working session with Elias is a break from the previous one, though not necessarily a break from the one before that, or the one before that. He connects, you feel it, but you have no idea to what. To something of his own, once. That's your only certainty.

"[...] in which we must try to orient ourselves, semicolon, that begins with the realisation that we are fundamentally disoriented, period."

He falls silent again.

Elias is still silent. His eyes, behind the monumental lenses, are closed. I watch his large chest rise and fall – an animal rhythm. He's still alive; something is coming soon. A word, a string of words, released at high speed, like the tongue of a motionless chameleon suddenly flicking out.

But it takes a long time. I don't know what to do with my idle fingers, so I bring my hands to my cheeks - you have to do something. The scent of my baby lingers at my fingertips: the sweet, slightly sickly scent of my newborn daughter, whom I changed just before two o'clock at home in the Pijp neighbourhood. Oh my God – speaking of people in the plural and invoking a long-term perspective that spans generations, as Elias calls upon us to do! Now I understand! What the man at the short end of the table – while I'm sitting at the long end – is dictating, my wife and I have been putting into practice for the last few months: a network of three people, with the newcomer possibly at the base of a new human network, forming her future family, and so on. Dialectics and evolution in the era that is said to have no future.

Behind the Pages: Seeing Norbert Elias as Scholar and Person with Ad van Iterson

by Wai Lau

Working with Ad van Iterson on editing excerpts from his book for Issues 63 and 64 of *Figurations* was a genuinely rewarding ex-

perience. Reading the text alongside him was a pleasure, and his careful and thoughtful approach, taken from his experience as the former editor of *Propria Cures* and other related works as a writer, made the work both personally enjoyable and illuminating.

Our conversations were always lively and productive, as we explored word choices, the nuances of translation, and how Elias's personality and ideas could shine through. Talking with van Iterson offered not only a deeper understanding of the material, but also insight into his own reflections on Elias, creating a collaborative rhythm that I found both inspiring and enriching.

Upon reading and editing these excerpts, I felt as if I was encountering Elias not just as a towering sociologist, but as a real person, someone quietly present behind the pages. He struck me as curious, reflective, and surprisingly warm, with a patience and attentiveness that made every detail matter. Occasionally, a flicker of dry humour appeared, hinting at a life lived with thoughtfulness and experience. Yet, alongside this, there was a subtle sense of loneliness, a human fragility that van Iterson captures from his time as Elias's research assistant. These moments stayed with me. I found myself pausing and imagining him at work, ever watching, reflecting, and thinking. Working with van Iterson to bring these passages to life felt almost like stepping into Elias's world alongside him. They reminded me that the brilliant ideas and meticulous analyses were rooted in someone

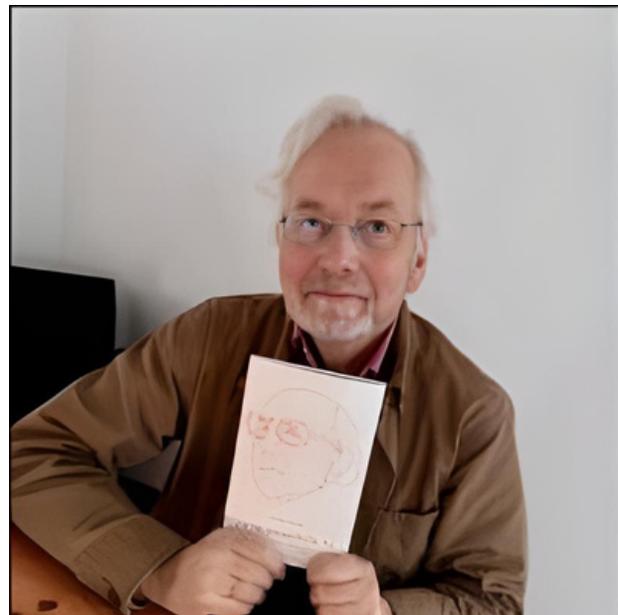
who observed the world with quiet attentiveness and subtle curiosity.

For me, collaborating with van Iterson on editing these short excerpts was more than an editorial exercise. It became a journey into understanding the person behind the work. It deepened my appreciation not only for Elias's ideas, but for the human qualities that give them their lasting resonance.

With that being said, I hope one day to see an English translation of the entire book, so that more readers can enjoy this intimate and illuminating portrait of both Elias and the people who knew him.

Editors' Note:

If readers are interested, another English translated extract can be found on Pages 11 and 12 in *Figurations* 63.



Ad van Iterson holding his book *J.J. Viottastraat 13*.

MEMOIRS

Reflective Comments on Violence and Civilisation by Jonathan Fletcher

by Alexander Mack

In our current times, it is easy to judge the importance of a book by the number of citations found on Google Scholar, or the number of copies it sells. This form of quantitative valorisation easily obscures the contribution of Jonathan Fletcher's *Violence and Civilization* to the intellectual trajectories of present and past readers of this newsletter.

In the 1990s, English translations of Elias's work were scattered across a range of publishers. It was very difficult to find a more softer point of entry into process sociology. This situation changed with the publication of Jonathan's book in 1997, followed by Stephen Menzell's *Norbert Elias: An Introduction* in 1998. Together, these works remain important overtures into process scholarship, which assist newcomers to find their way and craft their own scholarly journey.

In *Figurations* 59, Stephen shared an email from Andrew Linklater sent in January 2002. Within this message, Andrew mentions that he had been reading Jonathan's book to assist his investigation of international harm conventions. This remark corresponds with my own recollections. Andrew mentioned with admiration that it was Jonathan's book

that helped spur his journey into process sociology (I dare say he repeated this to his other students). Andrew once said to me that he and Jonathan shared the same publisher (Wiley) at the time, so first came across his book via a physical book catalogue that publishers often sent out. It should come as no surprise that Andrew's *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-Systems* published two decades later shares a common name with Jonathan's book, as there are interesting interconnections between both works. Also in *Figurations* 59, Florence Delmotte poignantly mentioned the "intellectual souvenir" of Andrew's article 'Norbert Elias, the 'Civilising Process' and the Sociology of International Relations', which helped her own intellectual journey. This Andrew piece was published in 2004, two years after the email to Stephen, and cites Jonathan's book.

The intellectual trajectories of many readers present and past have been directly and indirectly effected by Jonathan's work. His book has helped to expand the community of process scholarship by attracting researchers who might not initially identify themselves as 'sociologists'. That is a fine legacy.



Cas Wouters's Final Tension Balance

by Arjan Post

During one of our evening bar sessions – I had just graduated – I spoke with Cas about blues, jazz and Pink Floyd. At least, I thought we were talking about that. To those who didn't know him well, he had a somewhat chaotic, rambling narrative style. For those who knew him well, that was equally true, but then at least you knew that he was using sharp associations and powerful metaphors to work his way towards his one true subject: sociology. His sociology, that is. That is how I learned that blues is to jazz as pain is to desire, and that informal human escape valves correspond seamlessly with Charlie Parker's saxophone valves. I still don't know what he thought of Pink Floyd; we never got further than the title of my favourite album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*. That was, of course, a grateful lead-in to the subject of the rest of the evening: the dark side of people and their dangerous emotions.

It was only later that I realised we had also been talking about his own dark sides. At first, I couldn't quite grasp the indications he gave of them. I took them for angry drunkenness or a 'decontrolled decontrolling of emotional controls'. It took me a while to realise that the 'emancipation of emotions' was also at work in him, especially in him, and that it entailed much more than just 'pleasurable excitement' (as Elias would call it). The image he helped cultivate of the free-spirited, passionate hippie intellectual in colourful shirts was only half of who he was.

Charming as he could be too, he usually kept his darker sides guarded, though never entirely hidden – I was on bad terms with him for a while, and in that respect, I was in good company. He lived his own work and his own theory without reservation. He embodied informalisation from head to toe, just as his research agenda resonated one-to-one with his emotional interests: the struggle against the established order, against blindly accepted authority, against perverted men, too. Anyone who knows about his unpleasant childhood will recognise this.

The way he died was vintage Cas: according to his own plan, on his own terms, and surrounded by his loved ones. The sudden death of his beloved Truus, with whom he planned to step out of it romantically, did not deter him from his strong conviction that 'it had been enough'. It was only towards the end of his life that I realised what I had known all along: how much he had always been concerned with death. Both in his work on end-of-life care, mourning rituals and euthanasia, and in his personal life. From an early age, he flirted with death. Only his children kept him in balance, but the idea of ending it all was familiar to him. On the cover of the trade edition of his dissertation *Van minnen en sterven*, 'Of loving and dying' (Wouters 1995), death sits patiently on a chair next to the bed of a naked woman. As a student, I found that a bit creepy, but I didn't give it much thought. For him, however, it was not about contradiction or the denial of life. Quite the contrary. At the Foundation's office, we keep a letter from Cas to Arlie Hoc-

hschild, in which he writes that he is not concerned with paradoxes: they are tension balances of competing but interdependent forces that can even amplify each other. All his work revolves around this radical ambivalence, contrary to ingrained dualisms.

And so, he also leaves behind a toolbox full of 'universally applicable' tension balances. At first there was only one, the balance of informality and formality, but soon there were more. I remember that, having just graduated in the lessons of informalisation, I felt somewhat dizzy when he talked about all those balances: social/self-controls, distance/involvement, we/I, love/lust, and so forth. It seemed to me like a funfair where everything was shaking, vibrating and shifting. Yes, he said, but that's how reality is! Initially, he counted seven of these balances (Wouters 2014), then it became eight, and thanks to his 'third father', Joop Goudsblom, he realised that the triad of controls is a 'super-balance'. Ultimately, he distinguished nine tension balances (Wouters 2019).

In the final weeks before his death, his steadily progressing Alzheimer's sometimes made it difficult for him to find the right words. But what he had to say was crystal clear. Looking back on his life, death had also been given a seat at the table. Where most people talk about themselves and each other as a 'barrel full of contradictions', and at most dismiss this as an unreflected paradox, Cas demonstrated a tension balance that is also an intrinsic part of human beings. So, we could actually add a tenth balance to his rep-

ertoire: that of Eros and Thanatos as the two major driving forces in life (cf. Brinkgreve 2018; Waldhoff 2017). The light and dark sides of a person are not mutually exclusive. At most, it is people themselves who obscure this, according to social and emotional standards, by disowning their destructive impulses as well as their own transience. Cas was not very good at that. In fact, his life and his work teach us that the only way to start controlling destructive forces and dangerous emotions is to first acknowledge them.

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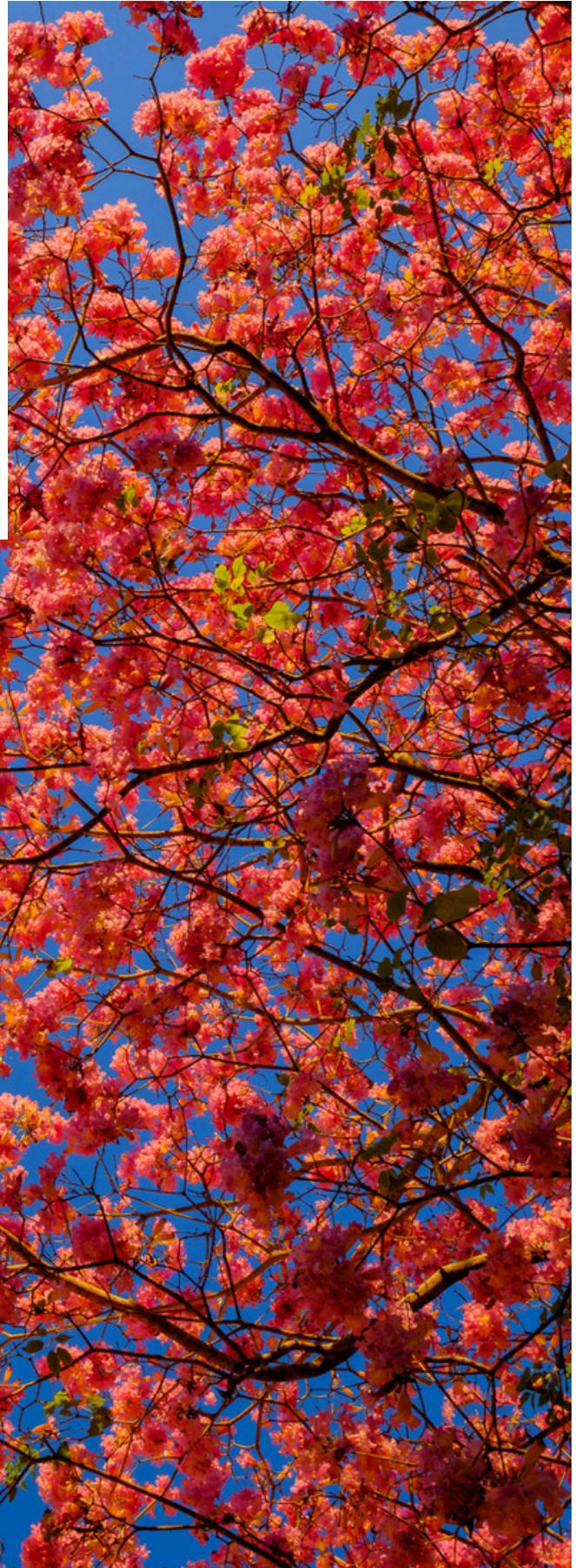
Waldhoff, Hans-Peter (2017) *Eros und Thanatos als Triebkräfte des Denkens. Psychoanalytische und erkenntniskritische Perspektiven* [Eros and Thanatos as driving forces of thought: Psychoanalytical and epistemological perspectives], Weilerswist: Velbrück Verlag.

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Wouters, Cas (2014) *Universally Applicable Criteria for Doing Figurational Process Sociology: Seven balances, One Triad, Hum-*

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Wouters, Cas (2019) Universally Applicable Criteria for Analysing Social and Psychic Processes: Nine Tension Balances, One Triad, in: Cas Wouters & Michael Dunning, eds., *Civilisation and Informalisation: Connecting Long-Term Social and Psychic Processes*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 161–183.



**FROM WITHIN THE ART ESTABLISHMENT,
BLACK & WHITE SERVED AS
A MARKER OF DISTINCTION FROM THE RISING
TIDE OF CRASS COMMERCIALISM FOUND
IN THE COLOUR ADVERTISEMENTS OF GLOSSY
MAGAZINES, AND THE UNREFLECTIVE
ACTIVITIES OF THE AMATEUR IMAGE-MAKING
MASSES WHOSE BRIGHTLY SATURATED
SNAPSHOTS SERVED AS FODDER FOR THE FAMILY
ALBUM. FOR MANY IN THE ART
ESTABLISHMENT, COLOUR REPRESENTED A
SLIPPERY SLOPE INTO THE COMMERCIAL
ABYSS, AND AS SUCH, IT WAS RESISTED AND
SOMETIMES VEHEMENTLY DERIDED.**

JONATHAN FLETCHER

Jonathan Fletcher (2019). Informalisation Through the Lens: Black & White and the Development of Photography as Art. In: Wouters, C., Dunning, M. (eds) Civilisation and Informalisation. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/
978-3-030-00798-0_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00798-0_7)

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

Fourth International Conference of *Scuola Democratica*, “Sapienza” University of Rome, Italy (1-4 September 2026)

The Fourth International Conference of the journal *Scuola Democratica* is devoted to examining the vital interplay between learning and democracy — two essential pillars for building societies that are just, inclusive, and sustainable. The theme Learning for Democracy/Democracy for Learning not only reaffirms the enduring significance of democratic values but also calls for their critical rethinking and their concrete realisation in everyday educational and social practices. In a global landscape marked by democratic backsliding, widening inequalities, and accelerated digital transformation, it has become imperative to reconsider how education and democracy can be reconnected to cultivate conscious, critical, and actively engaged citizens. The Conference brings together Italian and international scholars and researchers in a broad, multidisciplinary conversation aimed at reimagining education and training as instruments of emancipation and as living practices of democratic citizenship — rooted in the present, yet responsibly oriented toward the future.

Website: <https://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net>.

Development of Orders through Difference? Societal Integration Processes Interpreted with Norbert Elias along Axes of Social Differentiation, University of Kassel, Germany (9–10 October 2026)

Norbert Elias’s work has profoundly shaped sociological analyses of power and inequality. His concepts of social order, figuration, and interdependence offer powerful tools to understand processes of integration and exclusion in society. This conference invites contributions that explore the dynamics and transformation of social differentiation within figurations.

Social difference is not only an expression of power relations but also a constitutive mechanism in the formation of orders. Historical axes such as gender, class, race, nationality, generation, disability, sexual orientation, and others play a central role in negotiating boundaries and belonging. These orders are neither static nor one-dimensional; rather, they are processual and relational—shaped by ongoing interdependencies and shifting power balances.

The conference aims to highlight current societal integration processes — between solidarity/exclusion or established/outsider dynamics — through the lens of Elias’s process sociology. We invite analytical or em-

irical contributions that advance our understanding of these dynamic relationships and their impact on belonging and participation today.

Possible Topics:

- Theoretical/methodological developments around “Established and Outsiders” along axes of difference
- Interdependencies between categories like migration, gender, nationality, and disability
- Intersectional/diversity-oriented perspectives
- Historical/(inter)national views on social order
- Empirical/practical approaches to changing figurational power structures
- Methodological reflections: researching with Elias (e.g., figurational analysis)

We seek papers that examine how processes along multiple axes of social differentiation interact to shape changing social orders across fields such as family, neighbourhoods, friendships, education/work contexts, and communities (cultural, religious, digital), among others. Special attention will be given to the political dimension—how politically framed negotiations enable or restrict integration processes—and to Elias’s writings on group charisma/shame.

Submission: Abstract 300 words (max.) & Short Bio 150 words (max.).

Deadline: 15 April 2026.

Email: tatevik.mamajanyan@uni-kassel.de.

XXI International Symposium on Civilising Processes – Memories, Resistances, and Pluralities, Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil (16–19 November 2026)

In 2026, the International Symposium on Civilising Processes (SIPC) will celebrate 30 years of work that began at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP) in 1996. The SIPC was created within the School of Physical Education by a group of graduate students (master’s and doctoral) advised by Professor Ademir Gebara and Professor Maria Beatriz Ferreira da Rocha.

Since its creation, the SIPC has grown, with researchers gathering and expanding Eliasian theories into other research fields throughout Brazil and Latin America, creating investigative networks and enabling the sharing of Norbert Elias’s thought and Process Sociology. Along this historical trajectory, the Norbert Elias Foundation joined us, offering support and engaging researchers from the European context.

We will celebrate SIPC’s 30-year anniversary at the XXI International Symposium on Civilising Processes – Memories, Resistances, and Pluralities, to be held in the city of Vitória/ES and hosted by the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES). From November 16 to 19, 2026, we will gather around the thought of Norbert Elias, in partnership with other institutions.

The event is coordinated by the research

group 'Policies, Management, and School Inclusion: Contexts and Social Processes (GRUPGIE)' at UFES, represented by Professors Reginaldo Célio Sobrinho, Edson Pantaleão, Euluze Rodrigues da Costa Junior, and a large organising team.

We are structuring the activities to include all levels of Eliasian research and to welcome undergraduate and graduate students, as well as experienced researchers, with the aim of advancing Norbert Elias's theories. To this end, the event will include:

Keynote lectures and round tables
Interinstitutional panels and workshops
Oral communication sessions
Publication of a digital proceedings' booklet
Cultural and academic integration activities

Soon, we will release the dates for paper submissions. Prepare to join us as we celebrate 30 years of the SIPC!

Website: <https://grupgie.ufes.br/>.

Social Pathologies: Developmental and Processual Perspectives on Contemporary Malaises, University of Cork, Ireland (2-5 December 2026)

The conference will address the historical dynamics of social pathologies. It is concerned with disease in a broad sense, of disorders of development, function and structure, expressed in symptoms that indicate an underlying condition. These result in a lack of ease, or pathos – suffering. His-

tory is marked by concrete socially driven diseases, from plagues, to social epidemics of chronic conditions, addiction and mental health problems. There are also the discontents of civilisation – disorders such as melancholy, anxiety and insatiability that seem to be baked into social development. Social pathology is not limited narrowly to health and well-being, but rather to a wider spectrum of social problems such as violence, mass incarceration, injustice, exclusion, and failures to provide for people's needs, that are systemic and that produce social suffering. While social pathologies can be seen as concrete, where the suffering involved is all too real, its scale all too apparent, and the causal links to historically shaped political and social organisation all too clear, they can also be primarily symbolic. The social problems that are deemed pathological, are frequently political constructions, public dramas, or scapegoating exercises where behaviours and people once considered unremarkable become pathologised as sick, infectious, subversive, and to be corrected. Thus, civilising offensives, projects of normalisation, the construction of folk devils and the secondary harms caused by these processes, are an equal concern of the conference. The antonym of malaise is comfort and well-being. Our topic can be understood through its opposite, as much as through itself, so we welcome papers on health, flourishing and wholeness as well.

Crucially, the goal is to challenge a-social and a-historical biomedical and psychological perspectives that view conditions and syndromes as individual cases, reducing is-

sues to the body, psyche or the self, conceptualised in disconnected professional discourses, with individual treatments and forms of self-help. Rather, they are seen as rooted in collectively experienced conditions of historical development and social transformation, and their shape can only be adequately drawn through delineating their origins and processual nature.

We welcome in particular papers that combine an empirical focus, methodological sophistication and theoretical analysis. All schools of historical sociology are welcome, and we hope for fruitful exchanges and innovations in these.

Suggested Themes / Sessions

- Health and illness: processes, trends, and interventions
- Flourishing, well-being, health, wholeness
- Melancholy, mental health and the discontents of civilisation
- Neurodiversity and social processes: power, habitus, and interdependence
- Traumatization in long term civilising offences: historical processes expressed in contemporary social pathologies
- Golden ages and renaissances
- Violence, aggression, and state formation: civilising & decivilising processes
- Imperialism, neo-imperialism
- Decolonial & postcolonial perspectives on historical sociology

- Political, social and institutional fragility
- Systemic injustice, exploitation, inequality and discrimination
- Distortion of gender roles and relations
- Neglect, care failures, and disavowal of welfare needs
- Gender-based violence
- Crime and punishment
- Public dramas, scapegoating and moral panics
- Digital malaise: constructing and deconstructing human figurations in online spaces
- Environmental degradation and exploitation

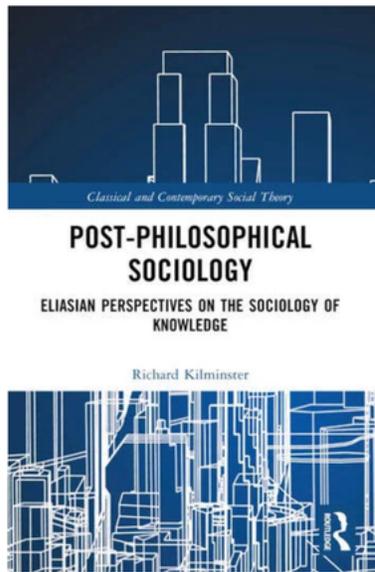
A workshop for PhD students will take place on the 2nd and 5th December, with participants in the workshop also participating as attendees or speakers at the conference in the two days in-between. Applicants to the workshop should apply via this [link](#), including their name, affiliation, conference paper abstract should they be delivering a paper, PhD title and outline, and application for financial assistance should they be seeking this. We have a small number of bursaries available. You can access our conference website through this [link](#).

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted via this [link](#) by 15 May 2026.

You can pose questions and enquiries about the conference to:
information@socialpathologies2026.com

Website: <https://socialpathologies2026.com>

RECENT BOOKS

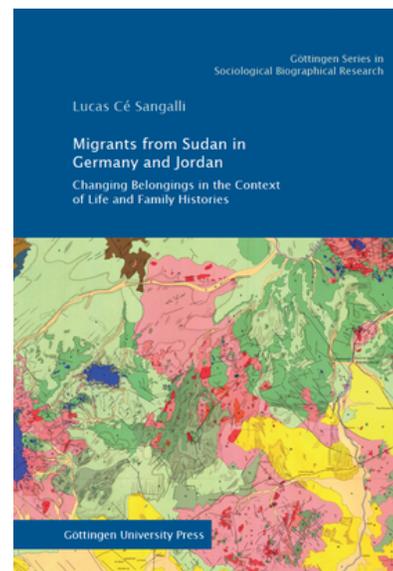


Richard Kilminster (2024). *Post-Philosophical Sociology: Eliasian Perspectives on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge. Link: <https://www.routledge.com/Post-Philosophical-Sociology-Eliasian-Perspectives-on-the-Sociology-of-Knowledge/Kilminster/p/book/9781032045276>

Abstract: In a hyper-individualistic age and in the face of the narrowly focused, policy-oriented research ubiquitous in the social sciences, this book revisits the humanistic world-view that is integral to Norbert Elias's pre-eminent figurational-process sociology, with the aim of increasing the fund of sociological knowledge that has the human condition as its horizon.

Clarifying the contentious 'post-philosophical' aspects in order to supplement standard histories of sociology with new insights, it offers incisive evaluations of some of the be-

wildered attempts by prominent sociologists to diagnose the malaise of contemporary globalised society. It also challenges the orthodox limitation of the empirical scope of sociology to 'modernity'. With its ominous warnings of the destructive prevalence of 'overcritique' in the discipline and lack of in-depth sociological psychology, *Post-Philosophical Sociology* will appeal to scholars of sociology, psychoanalysis, social philosophy, cultural theory and social and political theory with interests in developmental and dynamic thinking and the history of the discipline.



Lucas Cé Sangalli (2024). *Migrants from Sudan in Germany and Jordan: Changing Belongings in the Context of Life and Family Histories*. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press. Link: https://univerlag.uni-goettingen.de/bitstream/handle/3/isbn-978-3-86395-643-1/GBSB11_cesangalli.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Abstract: This book offers a transnational comparison of Sudanese diasporas and different generations of migrants in Germany and Jordan. It provides an empirically based framework to study the power dynamics that Sudanese individuals and groupings experience as they construct their life, family, and collective histories. This notion of autobiographical constructions shows that belonging among Sudanese migrants and their descendants is linked not only to their experiences and processes of remembering, but also to socio-historical power inequalities and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. This approach provides empirical insights into how different versions of the socio-historically constructed past interrelate with experiences of violence.



Peter Ludes (2025). *Stummes Wissen als digitale Beute: Wechselspiele und Gamechanger*. Freiburg: wbg Academic in der Verlag Herder GmbH. Link: <https://www.herder.de/wissen/shop/p8/94106-stummes-wissen-als-digitale-beute-gebundene-ausgabe/>

Abstract in German: In der Tradition der Werke von Michael Polanyi werden seit mehr als einem halben Jahrhundert explizite und oft formalisierte Komponenten professionellen Wissens von impliziten, persönlichen Erfahrungskomponenten unterschieden, die sich zu stummem Wissen verdichten können. Wechselspiele zwischen Gedankenexperimenten (Kapitel 2, 6 und 7) und Essays (3 bis 5) sollen diese Wissensdimensionen veranschaulichen, etablierte Raum-, Zeit- und Möglichkeitsorientierungen problematisieren und neue Wahrnehmungsweisen vorstellen. Diese Wechsel gewinnen Anregungen aus den Werken von Ernst Bloch, Norbert Elias, Hannah Arendt und Agnes Heller und münden in der Identifikation neuer Gamechanger. Denn in den nächsten Jahren werden neue Kategorien stummen Wissens identifiziert und digitalisiert werden im Hinblick darauf, wie leicht und profitabel sie zu verwerten sind.

Diese neueren Wertschöpfungsketten beuten zunehmend bisher nicht direkt wahrnehmbare "Rohstoffe" aus: Ehemals stummes Wissen wird systematisch erkundet, als neue Form des Data Mining, von Augenblicken zu Hautwiderständen. Unterschiedlich zugängliche Datensets werden monopolisiert und damit "persönlichem Wissen" enteignet, digitalisiert und vernetzt. Hegemoniale Ausgrenzungen werden hierbei fortgeschrieben und verfestigt. Gamechanger könnten aber auch konventionelle Machtwissens-Vorstellungen überwinden, sie in einen stummen Chor von Worten, Bewegungen, Bildern und Formen umbilden.

Die Digitalisierung und Vernetzung stummer Dimensionen von Wissensprozessen generiert nicht nur neue Einsichten, sondern auch bisher unbekannte Gefährdungen: Denn wir können nicht wissen, was uns aus unseren gewohnten Balancen wirft, aber wir können sich widerstrebende Schlüsselerzählungen aus diesen Gedankenexperimenten als Elemente für Prompts erproben: Immer schneller, vernetzter, aktueller, durch DeepSeeks oder ChatGPTs erweitert und erheitert?

Abstract in English: Conscious actions and explicit statements interplay with tacit dimensions and blind processes. Cultural practices condition a wide variety of situations and multimodal perspectives. Tacit knowing floats beyond and beneath words and emerges via competing or conflictual modes of habituation, existential certainties, common sense, professional experiences, sanctions, constraints, repression, exploitation, surveillance, or the cutting off of authentic expressions.

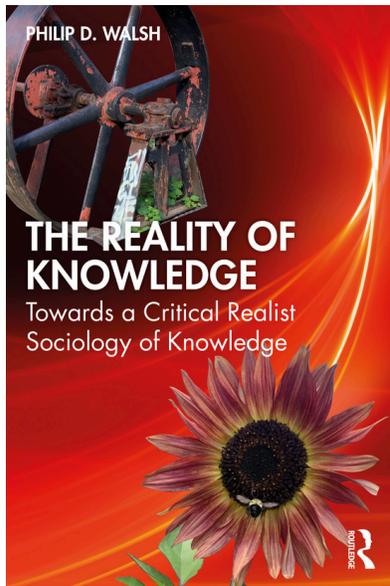
The accelerating digitalisation and networking of tacit expressions transforms previously hidden dimensions of implicit knowledge. New aspects and connections are digitised, especially with regard to how easily and cheaply they can be exploited. These value chains for profitable behaviour patterns allow for new modes of data mining, e. g., of micro eye glances or skin resistances. Digital value creation (chapter 1) increasingly exploits automatically identifiable modes of sensory expression (chapter 2), of tacit knowing and blind processes (chapter 3). Existential certainties (chapter 4) base and

frame sustainable understanding (chapter 5), but confront new adaptations (chapter 6) and abysmal movements (chapter 7). The exploitation of digitised preys contributes to correspondingly modelled means of communication and excommunication, inclusion and exclusion. Sketching two outstanding projects connecting several generations, functional realms, and states, namely the New Silk Road and a more social European Union, from these perspectives leads to interplays with ever stronger gamechangers. New types of tacit multimodal narratives restructure basic values and fundamental demarcations, fears, and hopes, across cultures and generations.

All of us thereby lose balances previously assumed to remain safe; we are shattered and forced to re-model our skeletons and fasciae, movements and institutions in areas of human non-perception. We cannot clearly know what throws us out of our balances, into unknown places of hate. But we can try contradictory key narratives, via accelerating prompts in terms of, e. g., DeepSeeks or ChatGPTs. Their emerging interplays between tacit phases and explicit ones will be networked and exploited in unprecedented modes.

Editors' Note: The English abstract was provided by the author.





Philip Walsh (2026). *The Reality of Knowledge: Towards a Critical Realist Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge. Link: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Reality-of-Knowledge-Towards-a-Critical-Realist-Sociology-of-Knowledge/Walsh/p/book/9781032156323>

Abstract: This book proposes a new approach to the sociology of knowledge, providing a cross-section of some of the major theories that have influenced and continue to influence the field.

Through a series of engagements with the history of the discipline, it brings a critical realist perspective to bear on key themes within the sociology of knowledge. Moving away from the notion of critical realism as an under-labourer for the social and human sciences, it seeks to affirm a more fully sociological account of knowledge and, as such, emphasises its social meaning. In addition, this book presents an account of the under-appreciated convergence between crit-

ical realism and Norbert Elias's approach to the sociology of knowledge.

This book will appeal to scholars and students of sociology and social theory with interests in the sociology of knowledge and critical realist thought.





RECENT BOOK CHAPTERS

Stephen Mennell (2025). *A Modest Little Book with an Immodest Title*. In Mangee, G. B. & Deng, K (eds.) *The European Miracle and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Professor E. L. Jones*. Palgrave Studies in Economic History. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. pp. 69-84. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-90248-2_4.

Abstract: This chapter reflects on the collaboration between Eric (E. L.) Jones, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell in a seminar on very long-term social processes at the University of Exeter in 1988, out of which grew their immodestly titled joint book *The Course of Human History: Economic Growth, Social Process and Civilisation* [Goudsblom et al., *The Course of Human History: Economic Growth, Social Process, and Civilization*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe (1996)]. Goudsblom and Mennell were adherents of the sociology of Norbert Elias, who is most famous for his theory of civilising and state-formation processes, first set out in his book *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, first published in 1939, but not widely known until decades later. That book, linking the development of ‘civilised’ manners to the growth of states in Europe since the Middle Ages, was in itself very much at odds with the dominant spirit of post-war sociology: Elias criticised ‘the retreat of sociologists into the present’. Moreover, in his later work, Elias extended his vision to the whole development of human society. Goudsblom was at the time of the seminar following Elias’s lead, writing his

great book *Fire and Civilization* (1992)—an interest which neatly connected with Jones’s own writing about the history of fire. Jones’s contention that the ‘European miracle’ owed a great deal to catastrophes elsewhere in the world also chimed with Elias’s and Eliasians’ scepticism about free-floating cultural influences (such as Weber’s Protestant ethic, so worshipped by mainstream sociologists) as a driving force in history.



**NOWADAYS, THE STRENGTH OF SOCIAL
INFORMALISATION AND ITS 'THIRD-NATURE'
HABITUS IS PUT TO THE TEST IN
CONFRONTATIONS WITHIN NATION-STATES
BETWEEN ESTABLISHED GROUPS AND GROUPS OF
OUTSIDERS SUCH AS IMMIGRANTS FROM
COUNTRIES WHERE POWER BALANCES ARE
RELATIVELY UNEQUAL. IT IS ALSO TESTED IN
CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN NATION-STATES,
PARTICULARLY BETWEEN OLD ESTABLISHED
ONES AND RISING OUTSIDER NATION-STATES. IN
MANY OLD ESTABLISHED NATION-STATES,
ANOTHER SOURCE OF CONFRONTATIONS STEMS
FROM A RISE IN SOCIAL INEQUALITIES
RESULTING FROM A RELATIVE WEAKENING OF
THE POWER OF POLITICIANS AND THEIR
POLITICAL CENTRES IN COMPARISON TO THE
POWER OF THOSE WHO ARE ORGANISED AND
REPRESENTED IN INCREASINGLY GLOBAL
MONETARY ORGANISATIONS AND CENTRES.**

CAS WOUTERS

*Cas Wouters (2017). Informalisation and Evolution:
Four Phases in the Development of Steering Codes. Human
Figurations, 6(1), Online. Link:
[https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0006.106/
--informatisation-and-evolution-four-phases-in-the-
development?rgn=main;view=fulltext](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0006.106/--informatisation-and-evolution-four-phases-in-the-development?rgn=main;view=fulltext)*

RECENT JOURNAL ARTICLES

Tim Newton (2025). What Is Social Science? A Comparison with Biology. *Sociological Theory*, 43(3), pp. 238–263. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/07352751251353197>.

Abstract: What is social science? This article examines this perennial question by addressing the relation between human biology and social science, exploring whether social science constitutes a “science” in the sense conventionally denoted. In suggesting that social science is defined by a “spatiotemporal specificity” different from life science, I will explore the historicist traditions represented by writers such as Knies, Schmoller, Weber, and Collingwood. Drawing on processual philosophies in sociology and biology and the example provided by sociotechnical “acceleration,” I argue that the human flair for language, symbolism, and technology distinguishes humanity and is constitutive of the way social science tends toward process particularity and the historical rather than process recurrence and the transhistorical. I then consider implications for historicist conjecture, sociological theory, and natural science; the transposability of theory and data; the design of sociopolitical policy; and the need for epistemological pluralism among sociologists pursuing “biosocial” endeavors.

Lucy Moore (2025). Intervening in unplanned social processes. *Sports Coaching Review*, pp.1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2025.2553071>

Abstract: This paper challenges ontological norms regarding sports policy and begins to showcase that, rather than a mechanistic, rational, “thing”, sports policy is an ongoing, highly involved, emotional, relationship-based process. Coaches constitute the frontline of sports policy and are equally integral to the policy process as those in administrative and managerial roles. This study draws on data from a longitudinal analysis of Olympic sport in the UK, leveraging the author’s dual role as a researcher and professional to gain unparalleled access and insight into the policy process. The methodology included 27 interviews with senior figures within four sports National Governing Bodies (NGBs), the author’s reflexive journal, and a document analysis of 108 publications spanning from 1960 to 2023. The findings underscore that policy is collaboratively created through human decisions and actions, with increasing specialisation and functional democratisation driven by growing public investment. Consequently, policy work necessitates intervention in unplanned social processes, requiring nu-

anced and varied tactics, including the management of emotions. This paper posits that greater efficacy in decision-making could be achieved by professionals more directly considering the human aspect of policy work and integrating coaching approaches rather than controlling ones..

Lucy Moore (2025). Involvement, Detachment, and the Emotional Dynamics of UK Olympic Sport Policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, pp. 1–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2025.2592586>

Abstract: Despite estimates that Olympic and Paralympic sports account for more than half of all sport employment in the UK, there is still a relative paucity of research relating to workers within administrative and managerial roles. Starting from an ontological position that sports governance is fundamentally an emotive, relational process, this paper proposes that the primacy of rational management practices and codification of governance are potentially limiting factors in the efficacy of interventions. Instead, this paper applies the process sociological concept of ‘involvement and detachment’ to explore how sports policy workers navigate their interdependence with others and the impacts of working in a deeply involved way. This article draws upon 27 semi-structured interviews with senior figures within UK NGBs conducted as part of a Doctoral study between 2020–2023. This research demonstrates the necessity of putting people and their relationships at the centre of our understanding of sport policy,

as identity, emotion and affect play a far greater role in policy processes than the literature typically accounts for. As structural and processual features of the Olympic sport policy process contribute to the experiences of individuals, so emotion management and navigating the emotions of others are revealed as key competencies for policy work. Together, these findings suggest that the study and design of Olympic sport policy could be enhanced by a more overt consideration of the feelings and relationships involved.

CULTURE, PRACTICE & EUROPEANIZATION SPECIAL ISSUE VOL 10 EDITION 2

Bernd Sommer, Marta Bucholc & André Saramago (2025). A climate of (de-)civilisation? *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 129 – 132. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-129>

Adrian Jitschin (2025). Climate and civilisation – perspectives from the viewpoint of Norbert Elias. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 133–139. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-133>

Nikolaj Schultz (2025). Expanding the horizon of history: A few notes on Norbert Elias and On the Emergence of an Ecological Class: A Memo. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 140–143. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-140>

Sighard Neckel (2025). The quandaries of transformation. On the socio-ecological dilemma of simultaneity. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 144–157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-144>.

Abstract: This paper provides a specific sociological explanation of the failing in effective climate protection, analysing the unique societal constellations in which a socio-ecological transformation is embedded. Starting with the urgent calls by the IPCC for rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors and systems of society in the current decade, the paper explains why such disruptive change is rather unlikely. Since a fundamental ecological turnaround has to change economics, politics, cultural lifestyles and technical infrastructure at the very same time, socio-ecological transformation is confronted with the dilemma of simultaneity. This precarious figuration of an ecological change gives rise to certain quandaries of transformation as capitalism, climate protection, sustainable life conducts and democracy cannot be smoothly reconciled and coordinated. Therefore, realistic transformation strategies should tackle this dilemma from the outset and strive to avoid getting completely entangled in its quandaries. As outlined in the final section of the paper, sustainable infrastructure and strengthening the common good could be viable ways to navigate the dilemmas of socio-ecological change more effectively.

Marta Gospodarczyk (2025). Accepting the maelstrom? Emotional responses to drought in farming households in Poland and the involvement–detachment continuum. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 158–173. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-158>

Abstract: This article focuses on responses to drought among Polish farmers. Framed by the concept of the involvement–detachment continuum, as proposed by Norbert Elias, this article shows the unbreakable bond between natural occurrences and social life, especially of a specific social group of farmers. Drawing on interviews and participant observations in two research locations in Poland, purposefully chosen to reflect the diversity of the sector in the country, the article describes a response to drought dubbed “weary acceptance”. Based on Elias’s essay “Fishermen in the maelstrom”, the article argues, that when certain structural conditions are met, an objective assessment of the possible actions against drought is being made by the farmers. Based on this assessment, a position of passivity is assumed, wherein the unpredictability and uncontrollability of drought are being accepted as part of the course for farming, and stoicism in the face of hardships is seen as a part of legitimised farming habitus.

Vincenzo Marasco & Angela Perulli (2025). Social habitus and climate change: Rethinking demand-side mitigation through Eliasian figurational sociology. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 174–192. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-144>.

Abstract: This article explores the analytical potential of Norbert Elias's notion of social habitus for understanding resistance and change in everyday practices relevant to demand-side climate mitigation. It unfolds in two steps. First, it revisits the concept of social habitus, emphasising its value for interpreting the emotional and figurational dimensions of social practices. Second, it applies this theoretical lens to focus group data collected in Italy to examine how emotions, identity, and social interdependencies sustain high-carbon habits despite widespread environmental awareness. By integrating theoretical and empirical analysis, the paper shows how the habitus can serve as a key interpretive tool for understanding the emotional foundations of resistance to behavioural change.

Fritz Reusswig, Wiebke Lass (2025). Figurations of socio-ecological decline: The climate crisis as a process of de-civilisation. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 193–221. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-158>

Abstract: Climate change is one of the most important pieces of evidence for what is currently discussed as 'the Anthropocene', the age of human domination of the planet. At the

same time, it poses a real threat to the survival of human civilisation. This article draws on Norbert Elias's theory of civilisation to describe this threat as a process of de-civilisation. To this end, the core analytical dimensions of (de)civilisation processes used by Elias – the state's monopoly on the use of force and control of emotions – will be modified and expanded. Mechanisms and interrelationships of socio-ecological processes will be identified that could bring about the possible collapse of human civilisation in a scenario of severe climate change, combined with a significant decline of social and political adaptive capacities. The emergence of populist narratives and movements is reconstructed in terms of the internal dialectics of the civilisation process that can accelerate this collapse. Finally, the article addresses the question of whether and how re-civilisation could avert collapse and complement the in fact only halved Anthropocene.

Kerrin Langer & Frank Reichherzer (2025). (Not) all is fair in love and war: Norbert Elias's theory of civilisation, military violence, and the protection of the environment in war. *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 222–244. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-144>.

Abstract: Military force has historically shaped human societies and their environments, often leaving profound and lasting ecological impacts. The environmental consequences of military activities – even in peacetime – can endure for generations. This paper examines the en-

vironmental dimensions of warfare in relation to the development of rules and regulations under international humanitarian law that constrain violence against the natural environment during war and armed conflict. We situate military practices and legal constraints within Norbert Elias's framework of the civilising process and explore the intertwined processes of de-civilisation and civilisation inherent in modern warfare. We argue that acts of ecocide represent, on one hand, a regression into unrestrained, primal destruction that de-civilises humanity's relationship with extra-human nature. On the other hand, particularly since the Second World War, humankind has been engaged in a process that establishes boundaries rendering environmental destruction by the military both definable and recognisable as a transgression. In this way, such destruction is neither ignored nor left unacknowledged; it is no longer regarded as self-evident or inevitable, nor defined as a necessary evil or mere 'collateral damage' but rather understood and treated as a 'wrongful act'. This evolution signals an expansion of ethical and legal boundaries consistent with Elias's insights into the codification of restraint in human behaviour.

Matthias Schmelzer (2025). The dialectic of civilisation: Norbert Elias, the triad of controls, and social-ecological transformation *Culture, Practice & Europeanization*, 10(2) pp. 245–271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/2566-7742-2025-2-144>

Abstract: This paper revisits Norbert Elias's

theory of the civilising process in light of the ecological, economic, and political transformations of the 21st century. It argues that Elias's triad of controls – over the self (psychogenesis), over others (sociogenesis), and over nature (ecogenesis) – provides a powerful but incomplete framework for understanding modern social development. By reinterpreting economic growth as a historically specific articulation of the civilising process, the paper highlights how the very dynamics of civilisational progress now generate destabilising effects – ecological overshoot, social fragmentation, and affective exhaustion. Drawing on political ecology and post-growth scholarship, it proposes a dialectical reading of Elias: one that recognises both the stabilising and the disruptive potential of 'civilising' processes under conditions of capitalist modernity. Rather than framing post-growth as a decivilising regression, the paper explores it as a potential reconfiguration of Elias's triad centered on collective self-limitation, localised interdependence, and convivial autonomy.

Editors' Note:

The first article mentioned in page 30 of the journal's special issue is an introduction, while the other two articles are essays.



RECENT PHD THESIS



Ideological Violence and Social Change in Canada and the United States from the 19th Century to Present Day (2025)

by Valarie Findlay

Abstract: In recent years, Canada and the United States have revised national security and public safety priorities to address the domestic threat of extreme social violence that emerges from social, political, and religious views and beliefs that challenge the social order. An imminent threat, extreme ideological views, and movements can inspire like-minded individuals by promoting an idealised social order through enduring stereotypes that elevate their status, sometimes through violence. Developed using a pragmatic approach, this study addresses these views and movements

when they devolve into violent acts. A socio-historical exploration, this study explores social change and Canadian and American historical elements from the 19th century to the present day, linking them with ideological and ideologically themed violence.

In order to address the research question, does social change influence rates of ideological violence?, Norbert Elias's civilising theory and Cas Wouters's seven social balances (Wouters, 2014) are employed to illustrate the social change of the time period. Further, it introduces the analytical concept of ideological themes, where causality cannot be immediately confirmed, to resolve recently formed definitions, such as mixed and composite ideologies. Laying the groundwork for future study areas, the findings propose an applied approach to developing social policies that foster social change that may curtail the destructive aspects of individual and group ideologies.

Editors' Note: A companion or summary report is prepared by the author if researchers wish to use the findings found in the doctoral thesis for practical settings.





**Higher Education Quality and its Contexts.
How People Make Quality in Interdependence
(2025)**

by Kasja Weenink

Abstract: The question ‘What the hell is quality?’ has been subject to heated discussions since Pirsig posed it in 1974 in *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*. To this day no conclusive answer has been formulated. And yet, the notion of higher education quality is here to stay. This dissertation investigates how people in Dutch higher education ‘make’ quality in different situations, while interacting with their environment. Four studies address how governmental policy makers, educational programme directors, lecturers, students and others in universities understand and enact higher education quality. The studies found that they all use their specific room for manoeuvre while facing different issues, such as dealing with student evaluations or combining teaching and research. No single actor can however determine quality directions at the collective level. Quality is therefore a ‘plastic concept’ with limited powers as a catalyst for change.

**Boi-Bumbá de Parintins: Heteronomy,
Competitiveness and Leisure in the Figuration
of Caprichoso and Garantido (2025)**

by Joise Simas de Souza Maurício

Abstract: The Parintins Folk Festival has been held since the 1960s in the city of Parintins-AM. Listed in 2018 by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) and has as its main element the Bois-Bumbás Caprichoso and Garantido that nourish a rivalry since its genesis, adapting and changing through the action of the civilizing process. From the physical clashes between the Bois in the streets to the symbolic, peaceful and admirable manifestation in the arena, we identify the relative autonomy of individuals in this process however, heteronomous actions are also perceived, making figurations of peoplerules and also the state. The theoretical framework contemplates Norbert Elias with his procedural and figurational theory having as general objective to understand how the heteronomy was essential for the changes of the Boi-Bumbá who played in the terreiros until his protagonism that today stands out in the city of Parintins as Boi de arena. It is a research of qualitative approach, which had as method the Oral History with the accomplishment of 17 semi-structured interviews with residents of Parintins who participated or witnessed some event referring to the Boi-Bumbá since the first demonstrations in the city. The interviews were transcribed through the Transkriptor application, analyzed in the N-Vivo program and interpreted from the theoretical framework. In this way, we know the origin and duels between Bois-Bumbás Caprichoso and Garantido as a street folguedo, we record the

memories of people about the process of insertion of Parintins Boi-Bumbá in a controlled space for disputes, evidenced how the control mechanisms present in the Boi de arena influenced the enjoyment of leisure and analyzed the changes in the Parintins Boi-Bumbá front of the demands of the State and society. We can then affirm the thesis that heteronomy permeates leisure activities, such as the Parintins Folk Festival, to meet the development of society where traditions undergo adjustments according to the requirements of the state and social relations to consolidate and remain alive in popular culture.

Physical Activity for a Healthier Society? A Figurational Study on the Physical Activity Inequalities of Chinese Communities in the UK (2025)

by Ximing Fan

Abstract: To what extent do social identities impact the physical activity participation of ethnic minorities? With the increasing trend of migration and ever-changing dynamics in society, the health and physical activity inequalities remain a socially relevant challenge for migrants and marginalised communities. As ‘the most unknown’ ethnic minority in the UK, this ethnographic research investigates the social processes that impact the physical activity behaviour of British Chinese communities. At a cursory glance, the ethnicity of the Chinese communities in the UK seems to share a homogenous identity, but a closer look reveals differences in culture, generation, language and lifestyle decisions. Thus, the research takes a figurational approach a part-

icularly guided by the theory of established-outsider. As a community largely consisting of immigrants and descendants, there remains an overlapping identity for the British Chinese, who simultaneously play the role of ‘the established’ and ‘the outsider’ due to their interdependent network within the society. The ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a Chinese community centre in a large-sized city in England has revealed findings that the we-image of the Chinese themselves creates ‘group disgrace’ that affects their self-identity and prevents them from engaging in physical activity with the established British society. The findings of this research contribute to the policy-making and well-being of ethnic minorities in general and seek to discover the social processes behind health inequalities among migrants.



Olympic Sport Policy as a ‘Sociological Problem’ (2026) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.00108092>

by Lucy Moore

Abstract: Globally, significant resources are allocated towards sporting success at the Olym-

pic Games. Behind Team GB success, steadily increasing investment has seen many more people employed in Olympic sport, estimated at 471,957 roles (UK Sport & The Sports Consultancy, 2024). Yet relatively little research has sought to understand the experiences of those working in Olympic sport in managerial and administrative roles. Within this thesis, process sociology is used both as a sensitising concept to explore the Olympic sport policy process in the UK and as a theoretical framework to guide the method design. This process sociology inspired approach focuses on long-term processes, interdependencies, power relations, and emotions.

The study draws on a multi-method approach consisting of 27 semi-structured interviews with senior national governing body figures conducted between 2020 and 2023, a review of 108 policy documents, and a reflective journal maintained by the author as a sport policy professional. The timing of this research coincided with major global and domestic events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the postponed Tokyo Olympics. Following reflexive thematic analysis, three interrelated themes were generated: the unique 'British State's relationship with Olympic sport policy', policy workers 'playing the game', and the 'personal impact and personal cost' on them.

The policy process is presented as an evolving figuration of interdependent actors shaped by shifting power balances, institutional histories, and emotional investments. Furthermore, policy implementation is bou-

nd up in personal stories, interpersonal struggles, and invisible emotional labour. Policy actors emerge as individuals enmeshed in complex figurations, at once shaping and shaped by institutional structures. This deep level of involvement has implications both for the policy process and for each individual's well-being. This research contributes new knowledge to understanding policy work and policy workers in Olympic sport in the UK, with implications for research and practice.



**WHY SPEAK OF THE 'IDEA OF A
NATION' AND NOT SIMPLY OF
NATIONS AS GIVEN ENTITIES?
NATIONS CANNOT BE DEFINED BY
OBJECTIVE CRITERIA. IT IS NOT
POSSIBLE TO DECLARE THAT THIS
IS A NATION AND THAT IS NOT.
OBJECTIVE CRITERIA, HOWEVER,
CAN BE USED TO A POLITICAL
PURPOSE.**

GODFRIED VAN BENTHEM VAN DEN
BERGH

*Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh (2016). Notes on the
Idea of a Nation. Human Figurations, 5(2), Online. Link:
[https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0005.206/
--notes-on-the-idea-of-a-nation?rgn=main;view=fulltext](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0005.206/--notes-on-the-idea-of-a-nation?rgn=main;view=fulltext)*

CONFERENCE REPORTS

News from Brazil

by Magda Sarat

The community of researchers studying the work of Norbert Elias in Brazil gathered from 5 to 7 November 2025 for the Eliasian Conference, held on Itamaracá Island, Pernambuco State, Brazil. The three-day event featured conferences, research presentations, and cultural activities, bringing together institutions from the Northeast, Central-West, and South of the country with research based on the work of Norbert Elias. The event took place in a historical location with natural beauty, bringing colleagues and members of the Eliasian community in Brazil closer together. We take this opportunity to inform you that the XXI SIPC International Symposium on Civilising Processes will take place in Brazil from 16 to 19 November 2026, in the city of Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil. We invite you all!



Left and Above: A small selection of photographs from the conference.



The First Generation of Eliasians Trained by Professor Dr. Ademir Gebara

From left to right: Dr. Celio Juvenal Costa, Dr. Tony Honorato, Dr. José Luiz Simões, Dra. Magda Sarat, Dr. Edilson de Souza e Dr. Ricardo Lucena.



The Conference

Here is a photograph of those in the conference.



Above and Below: The group enjoying the ray of sunshine at the beach on the island.



OBITUARY



Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh (1933–2025)

by Stephen Mennell

Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh was one of the inner circle that formed around Norbert Elias when he arrived in Amsterdam as visiting professor of sociology in 1968. They were drawn from various disciplines besides sociology, and included Maarten Brands (history), Anton Blok (anthropology), Abram de Swaan (polymath) and, of course, Johan Goudsblom from sociology. Godfried himself had graduated in law and political science, but came to be identified principally with the study of international relations.

I first came into contact with Godfried in 1977, when Joop Goudsblom, as one of the editors of the Festschrift *Human Figurations: Essays for/Aufsätze für Norbert Elias* that we

presented to Elias at a small conference in Aachen, asked me to check over Godfried's contribution. He need not have done so, because Godfried's English (like Joop's own) was near perfect. When we met in Aachen, Godfried and I immediately hit it off together. For one thing, we were both more politically involved than the typical 'figurational sociologist' – at the time I in the British Labour Party and Godfried in the Dutch *Partei van de Arbeid* (neither of which we found entirely satisfactory). On a stroll together, we had a conversation that proved academically more important to me. Reading Elias had already made me disillusioned with much of mainstream sociology, and I wanted to do sociology in the figurational manner – but I was still a novice. I had thought of something in the area of food, though I was not quite sure exactly what, and Elias himself had not been especially encouraging. Godfried, however, was immediately enthusiastic, and that proved crucial to what, eight years later, became my book *All Manners of Food*.

People were often astonished at Godfried's rather grand name. He was indeed a member of the Dutch minor nobility – a *Jonkheer*, an hereditary rank that is I think closest to that of a British baronet (not that many British people would now know what that is!), or perhaps a German *Freiherr*. He was probably quietly proud of his family background, but did not regard it as of any great significance. I once addressed an envelope to 'Jhr prof dr Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh', knowing that he would see it as a tease. Even

so, I think that when he first read Elias's book *Die höfische Gesellschaft*, the world it described may have seemed a little less strange to him than it did to most of us. He always lived not in Amsterdam, the centre of gravity for Eliasians, but in Den Haag, the seat of government and of the monarchy, and was well-connected there. I remember that on one occasion, when I was spending a year in the Netherlands, my friend David Owen – a former British Foreign Secretary – was flying over from London and rang to ask me to arrange a meeting for him with the Dutch prime minister, Ruud Lubbers. My mind boggled, but I rang Godfried and half an hour later he rang back with the necessary appointment.

Yet it is misleading to dwell unduly on this side of Godfried's life. Minor nobility he may have been, but he was not wealthy – he told me that his father had blown the family resources in the classic manner of dissolute aristocrats. No, he was very much a working academic and public intellectual. He taught for decades at the Institute of Social Studies in Den Haag, a world-famous centre for the study of international affairs and development (his work involved a great deal of travel worldwide). His students at ISS admittedly included Princess, subsequently Queen, Beatrix of the Netherlands, but the larger number were drawn from developing countries. He also held a part-time chair at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He held various posts, including chair of the board of the National Theatre and was a long-serving member of the Advisory Council on International Affairs for the Dutch Ministries Foreign Affairs and Defence. And he was for many years one of the editors of the old-es-

tablished and influential Dutch intellectual journal *De Gids*, which carried many of the essays emanating from the early Amsterdam school around Elias.

His first book, in 1962, was on the association of African states with the European Economic Community (as it then was). By the late 1960s, his attention (like that of so many of us) had turned to the Vietnam war, and he exposed this instance of the idiocy of American foreign policy – one of the most blatant of so many – in his book *De ideologie van het Westen* (1969). His attitude to the American foreign policy and defence establishment softened as his attention turned to the dynamics of the Cold War. The book in English for which he is best known beyond the Netherlands is *The Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint* (1992); it was delayed by the speed at which history moved in the 1980s, necessitating several rewrites. The intended title and sub-title had been reversed at the insistence of the publishers, Macmillan, who feared the title *Forced Restraint* would not be understood by the readers to whom they expected to sell copies. For Eliasians, of course, that term would have conveyed the gist of his argument more directly. It was that Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the balance of nuclear armaments between the USA and USSR, had come to serve in world affairs as a functional equivalent (to use Robert Merton's term) of the effective monopoly of physical force within states. The idea of forced restraint is, as we know, central to the theory of civilising processes. This argument drew Godfried into some public controversy, notably with the Interkerkelijk Vredesoverleg (IKV, interden-

ominational Peace Forum), which had pacifist leanings. More relevant to readers of *Figurations*, Norbert Elias disagreed too; in his last decade he was increasingly pessimistic about humanity's prospects of avoiding self-destruction. His disagreement with Godfried remained amicable, however. The crucial point, it has always seemed to me, is what happens when the world ceases to be not two-polar or one-polar but multipolar. In the age of Trump, we may be about to find out. The game models in chapter 3 of *What is Sociology?* at least suggest to me that outcomes of such complex power balances are far less predictable. Godfried, however, stuck to his view that nuclear deterrence would still continue to operate, as he argued in *Naar een nucleaire wereldorde* (2008).

I should like to recall one other idea of Godfried's that I always found insightful: the 'attribution of blame as a means of orientation in the social sciences'. The essay of that title was first written, in Dutch and English, in 1977, published in Dutch in *De Gids* the following year and included in his volume of essays *De staat van geweld en andere essays* (1980). Only a much shortened version was published in English, in Raymond Apthorpe and Andras Krahl (eds), *Development Studies: Critique and Renewal* (1986); the long original version was at one time available on the Norbert Elias Foundation website, but was deleted when the most recent version of the website was launched. So this is not a very well-known essay, but worth knowing. Godfried initially wrote it mainly with reference to international relations, but I always thought

it was more widely relevant in the social sciences. The gist of it is that too often the dynamics of unplanned social processes are inadequately understood because the primary motivation in investigating them is the attribution of blame towards one party or another. That seems to me too often to be the driving force behind a very large proportion of what passes for research in mainstream sociology.

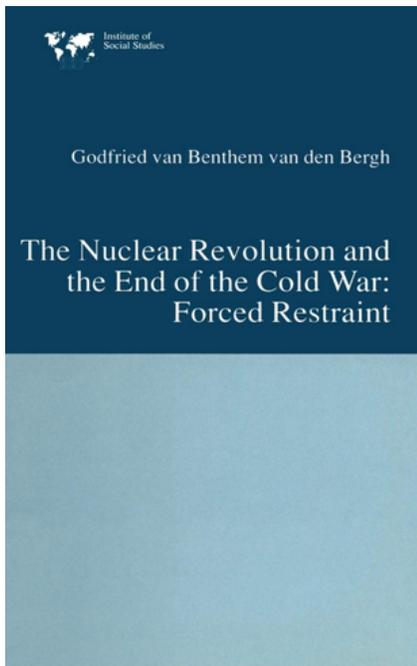
Sad to relate, in spite of all his achievements, the book for which Godfried is best known in the Dutch-speaking world is none of the above, but rather one that he wrote about the depression from which he suffered intermittently for many years. As might be expected of an Eliasian, he at first sought treatment for his affliction through some form of 'talking cure', but to no effect. In the end, the solution was pharmaceutical: his symptoms were relieved by lithium-based medications. He wrote a best-selling book about the experience: *Niet Leuk* ('Not Nice', or 'No Fun', 2006), subtitled 'the world of depression and mania'.

To end on a happier note: Godfried was a passionate sailor. I have fond memories of arriving in Den Haag, saying hello to his wife Thea, and being immediately whisked off to Scheveningen where he kept his boat. We would climb aboard and put the world to rights, while drinking lots of beer, the whole interrupted by Godfried breaking off to explain to me (unsuccessfully) the complexities of his latest navigational gadget. I'm glad to say that we never left the harbour.



A Selection of Photographs of Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh in His Younger Years

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RETROSPECT



Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh (1992). *The Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint*. London: Macmillan for Institute of Social Studies. Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Nuclear-Revolution-End-Cold-War/dp/0333580117>

Abstract: This book studies the impact of the nuclear revolution on the course of the rivalry between the former USSR and the USA. It explains why it has been so different from great power rivalry in prenuclear times, in avoiding war and leading first to a co-operative relationship and then ending peacefully. The book analyses four aspects of the nuclear revolution: reciprocal restraint, security co-operation, the deadlock of nuclear strategy (including strategic defence) and common deterrence.



Carla Penna (2016). *Homo Clausus, Homo Sacer, Homines Aperti: Challenges for Group Analysis in the 21st-Century. A Response to Haim Weinberg's 40th Foulkes Lecture*. *Group Analysis*, 49(4), pp. 357-369. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0533316416672195>

Abstract: In this response I will bring the historical roots of the modern individualism and Norbert Elias conceptualizations on *Homo Clausus* and *Homines Aperti*—also introducing as Agamben's discussion on *Homo Sacer* and other forms of human and societal prejudice and exclusion—to criticize contemporary individualism and discuss the challenges for group analysis in the 21st-century. I build on Haim Weinberg's concerns on 'Impossible groups that Flourish in Leaking Containers' to highlight the importance of 'total situations' and 'applied' group analysis, since 1948 Foulkes tenets until the current group analytic new challenges.

DONATIONS



The current income of the Norbert Elias Foundation derives from copyrights, investment returns, and donations. As the first two decline over the longer-term, future activities of the Foundation will increasingly depend on donations.

For generous gifts during the past years, the Foundation is particularly grateful to the late Pieter Spierenburg (see [Figurations no.51, 2019, p. 13-14](#)), whose bequest made it possible to design and build the new website. The donation of the late [Eric Dunning](#) is intended to organise an international summer school. Andrew Linklater's bequest (see [Figurations no. 59, 2023, p. 10-15](#)) will support various scholarly activities.

The Foundation is grateful for any donation, large and small, specified or general, anonymous or denominated. For any queries relating to donations, please contact Arjan Post at the secretariat of the Foundation, at: secretary@norbert-elias.com.

*Thank
you*

**The next issue will be
published and emailed
in July 2026.**

**Please send any news, works, and notes to
the editors by 5 June 2026.**

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