

## [The Formation of the “Figurational Family”] Generational Chains of Process-Sociological Thinking in Europe<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* Norbert Elias explained that «there are more generations needed to fulfil» the aim of establishing process theoretical thinking. Now we realize that in fact it was and still is continued. Having been embedded in a specific phase of modernisation after World War Two the scientific reception of Norbert Elias’s work impressed a whole generation. Elias had an enormous impact and meaning for a generation that is now in retirement: whilst he was a «grandfatherly teacher», an «intellectual grandfather» or friend for the ones he was also a «sparring partner», «window opener» and «giant» of Sociology for others. By interviewing ten of his scholars, assistants and colleagues I therefore ask for the fascination of Norbert Elias as a person and as a scientist embedded both in changing international and national scientific communities. Focusing his oeuvre and biography the conditions of reception and interpretation of sociology from exile became clear within a European carrier group of the «second generation» of process sociological thinking. «In- and Out-group» relations, «Master-Scholar» relations developed in a continuously ambivalence of intellectual friendship, competition, recognition as well as rivalry.

*Keywords:* Norbert Elias, Processual Sociology, Eliasian Scholarship.

### Introduction

The topic of scientific schools, of scholar generations and sociology of intellectuals came into focus again in recent times (Möbius 2010; Bude 2002; Jung 2012; Welz 2012). In the following, a specific, so far neglected generation of post-war European sociologists will be considered as they stood, and may be still stand, beside the popular mainstream sociology of Marxism, on the one hand, and Empiricism on the other. In the meantime, we have learned a lot about Talcott Parsons, Theodor W. Adorno, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, as to mention some of the most popular and classical sociologists. Although Norbert Elias’s (1897-1990) famous book *The Civilizing Process* is by now amongst the top ten of the ISA sociology bestseller list, in the international context we know little about the founder of process theory, his biography and oeuvre outside the Eliasian expert world and the interdependent dissemination of process-sociological thinking in current European sociology. Studying society beyond the traditional antagonism of individual versus society or macro versus micro sociology, Elias’s theory was, and indeed still is, very inspiring and innovative to enforce sociological thinking about social developments and humans in terms of interdependencies, balances, forward and backward movements of society instead of, for example, disruptive changes. Moreover, he is one of the few sociologists helping to look simultaneously at macro and micro developments of society. Elias, as a Jewish-German intellectual, was also one of the first European sociologists coerced to go into exile. Especially from this exile position and experience not being able to return to Germany, he lived and worked in many European countries. As one of the non-intended side-effects of this specific situation he built up a school, although he did not want to.

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In my article, I focus on this singular scientific school-building process by asking to what extent it is an actual school and what its specific glamour is. I will do this by regarding the conditional framework of a particular space-time, scientific and social constellation of academic friendships, competition and rivalries, because of their effect on the history of reception and the establishment of process theory:

The success and the efficiency of sociology during a certain epoch, its topics and theories, its fashions and methods, are substantially shaped by the respective generation that bore it and their relationship to the preceding and succeeding generation. (Wolf, Burkhart 2002: 421)

The examined scientists from Europe are more or less presented in a chronical order of Elias's life course, starting from the first meeting via the academic influence up to the personal meaning that Elias had for the interviewees. They represent the next and still living first or rather second generation<sup>2</sup> of process-sociologists that had been decisively shaped by Norbert Elias, in the post-war era, while Elias himself experienced from a specific position the German Empire, the ascent and downfall of the Weimar Republic and the cumbersome new beginning. Already in its early days, sociology had been immediately exposed to these extreme political shifts. The Nazi terror and the subsequent Second World War caused a massive caesura both in the German and in the European scientific community this has not only left its marks on the efficiency and compatibility of the sociological "schools of thought". For sociology in the late Weimar period this also meant that the Jewish sociologists, like Horkheimer and Adorno, Mannheim and Elias, Freudenthal and Freund, were exiled, and their academic careers were abruptly interrupted or even aborted. Due to a specific conditional framework of a sociology in and coming from the exile that will be subsequently outlined, Elias's figurational sociology, his process-theoretical thinking, had only been belatedly received by the members of the 1968 generation in the Federal Republic. It is astounding to track, how the gradual reception of Norbert Elias's process theory had evolved from a «decades-long lack of response» (Schröter 1997: 201) to overcrowded lecture theatres and the appreciation of the «persuasiveness of (his) reasoning» (ibid.: 7). Therefore it is worthwhile to interview the most popular and dense connected competing members of the "figurational family" or network reflecting "how it all began".

Some studies have already been presented about the young Elias in the circle of the Heidelberg sociologists during the interwar period, his time in exile, in England and in the Netherlands (Blomert 1999; Hackeschmidt 1997, Korte 2013; Goodwin, Hughes 2011; Goudsblom 1990, 2011). The following reflections for the first time delineate the development of a successive establishment of process-theoretical thinking in West Germany and Europe from the narrative perspective of reciprocal interrelations of Elias's (by now retired) companions. This process of establishment took place via England, the location of his exile and the Netherlands, where Elias had lived since the early eighties until his death in 1990. During his engagement with the transition of power relations, social inequality and civilization processes, Elias formulated the thesis that it takes three generations to recognize effective changes in societal processes and modes of thought.

The insights, gathered in the following, into the becoming of a figuration of process-sociologists are not only made as an examination of the establishment process of a sociological approach from outsiderdom to the classics. Moreover, the study, which surveyed ten to eleven selected second-generation process theorists, also aligns itself with the newest perceptible advance in disclosing «sociology as a key science of the (young) federal republic» (Rehberg: 2010).

An indispensable contribution was provided by Norbert Elias, who spoke from a specific exile position as a Jewish-German intellectual and outsider. The insights in this particular nexus help in particular to answer the question on what kind of a constellation of personality this school-founding mode of thought is based. On the other hand, it renders comprehensible to what extent the look on long-term societal changes had been neglected in post-war sociology and gradually asserted itself, not least due to the power relations in a developed international network of researchers. Elias had to face these power relations in the context of his multiply and biographically

<sup>2</sup> The interviewees have met each other during this era on many conferences and other occasions. Some became friends, colleagues or supervisors of younger scientists in the network. Three of them represent the Dutch, English and German members of the Norbert Elias Foundation some had been Elias's assistants. The Dutch colleagues represented the Figurational Sociology Research Group at the sociological institute of the University of Amsterdam whereas the English and German colleagues researched at different universities.

defining new beginning and for each of the given constellations of academic friendships and rivalries: in a quasi-permanent state of uncertainty on the run via Switzerland to Paris, where he mingled with the milieus of exiles and literati. Then, after his emigration to England, he arduously earned anew his reputation while in Leicester; this eventually culminated in him being widely accepted as a renowned sociologist.

Against this backdrop, the present article is going to reconstruct the international / European nexus of a specific scientific community which played an essential role in the scientific process of establishment of Norbert Elias and his process theory. The timeframe here considered stretches from the time of his escape in 1933 via the 1950s in English exile to the 1970s and the belated Elias reception in Germany. Since the 1980s, an institutionalization of process-theoretical research is recognizable that has been marked, inter alia, with the establishment of the Elias Foundation in Amsterdam. This analysis will concentrate on the first, the founding generation with its founding father Elias and the second generation of figurational sociologists, who were born in the time interval from 1932 to 1953 and who will be introduced according to the stations of Elias's exile. The examination is based on the evaluation of guided German and English interviews with selected first-generation process theorists, who, as colleagues, friends and pupils in England, the Netherlands and Germany are counted amongst the inner and broader circle of the figurational-sociological scientific community and, by association, as the first supporters. In Germany, it was predominantly the members of the '68 generation for whom Elias and his process-theoretical approach had a great appeal. The extent to which Elias's approach offered them alternatives to the antagonizing main currents of Positivism and Marxism is likewise going to be elaborated.

Firstly, after a brief look at the work and biography, central terms, like exile, figuration and intellectual friendship, will be clarified. After that, the accesses to process theory - also in their application upon themselves - will be outlined, before the pertinent '68 generation will be portrayed, using selected passages, as a generation of its time. In doing this, a particular nexus of «in- and outgroup» relations is made visible. They have emerged, around Elias as a «master of self-dramatization», from a «master-pupil-relation» in the context of a constant ambivalence of intellectual friendship, colleagues, competition and appreciation in different cultural scientific traditions. By way of example, processes of getting to know the other person, the collaboration and the personal efficiency for the mode of thought of the (self-proclaimed) Eliasians will be looked at.

### *Elias's oeuvre and biography*

In a video recording dealing with Martin Heidegger (Feyerabend, Gembardt 1985) and in his programmatic text on science and the hierarchy of values (Elias 1974), Elias discloses his specific anti-essentialist view on ontological and metaphysical notions of eternity. Elias also counted amongst these personified abstractions the genie cult, taking as an example Mozart (Elias 2010). With hindsight, the cult did distinguish many an Elias admirer, as will be shown in the following. Elias, born in Breslau in 1897, in particular strove against world-enraptured, essentialist conceptions, with which he found himself confronted in the environment of the German Empire and its idealist and historic conception of the world. For him, this reasoning, which additionally did not go beyond a creation of ideal types, was far from the everyday life of the people. His own life, in contrast, was a life full of fractures: he returned as wounded person from the First World War into a world that was «no longer his/one» (Korte 2013: 81); he started an argument about Kant with his doctoral adviser Hönigswald; during his postdoctoral qualification with Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim, he experienced the rise and downfall of the Weimar Republic; he even dared to attend incognito a propaganda event by Adolf Hitler; and, as one of the last members of the institute and before the henchman of the Sturmabteilung arrived, he disposed of incriminating material of the pursued Red Front student body at the Frankfurt Institute of social research (Korte 2013). After that he fled to the French and English exile, where at first he eked out a living with a stipend from the Jewish Refugee Foundation in London. With his Frankfurt colleague, Siegfried Fuchs (Foulkes), he founded a group analytic movement, engaged in adult education and carried out research at the London School of Economics. On Whitsun 1940, he was all of a sudden alleged to be a «hostile foreigner», «potential spy» and «member of the fifth column» (Korte 2013: 89), deported, together with his friend Alfred Glucksmann, to the Isle of Man and interned with Nazi Germans (Glucksmann 1999: 56).

In view of this fate, all individual coping strategies and mental survival units in this exile are relevant in perpetuity. In Leicester, Elias finally began his professional advancement; this led him from being a lecturer to becoming a professor of sociology in Ghana, which had just freed itself from British colonial rule. In the course of the many visiting professorships in Germany (Münster 1965, Konstanz 1972, Aachen 1976/77, Bochum and Frankfurt 1977), the Netherlands (Amsterdam 1969, 1970, Den Haag 1971) and the USA (Bloomington 1979, 1982), Elias, eighty years of age, received belated gratification and recognition when he was awarded the Theodor W. Adorno Prize in the country which had persecuted him decades ago.

Even though it was never meant to be a school<sup>3</sup>, the pertinent generation of process sociologist displayed a specific constellation of personalities (Blomert 1999: 330) along with the affective and hierarchical character of teacher-pupil relationship, as well as family-like coherences (Stichweh 1999: 19-23). Even though one certainly cannot talk of jaundiced guardianship or ritual surreptitious practices, as it had been the case in the circle around the literate Stefan George (Raulff 2009), rituals and cultures of memory, a certain ethos and style in continuing process theory, formed a part of this as well. In answering the question of the figuration sociological nexus of process theory in, and coming from, the exile, it is neither about making Elias the «subject of a case study in psychoanalytical theory interpretation» (Schröter 1997: 193). Nor should the debate on an «idealization pressure of his hungry disciples» (ibid.: 207), or even an Elias exegesis faithful to the original, be addressed. Nevertheless, the question concerning his source of power and affective aspects, his intellectual embedment that affected Elias and his works from 1968 onwards at the latest, is relevant. This should by no means proceed on assumptions about static and essentialist conditions of work and person:

It would be wrong to see Elias as a fully-formed homo clausus, instead he has experienced several developments in his personal opinions and scientific considerations; although one can certainly say that the basso continuo of his sociology, which [deals] with the development of figurations and the people who constituted these figurations with each other, had always been present. (Korte 2013: 58)

One of these situations was the unburdened and hungry post-war generation, of whom Elias was veritably fond and who, in turn, was likewise fascinated by him. His thinking and the central terms will now be briefly illustrated.

### *Figurations*

With the term figuration, Elias has added to his essentialism critique, which was referred to at the beginning of the essay, the questioning of the antagonistic tradition of individual versus society. By contrast, at a comparatively early point, he developed a model of the reciprocal, i.e. interdependent, dependency of humans. In doing this, it was important for him to free himself both of the metaphysical idea of a free-floating or purely instrumentally rational performing actor and of the negative, static and reified concept of power. This means that the cohabitation of individuals is always structured by certain constellations and dynamic networks of relationships, which change in the course of long-term processes. Depending on the significance that one individual has for the others in this field of force, his or her position can turn out to be more or less powerful. The examination of the history of his work, its actors in the context of their reciprocal interwovenness, presents itself as a process-oriented analysis of power that is linked to the context of its time and puts demands on a “distance in engagement”.

<sup>3</sup> Stichweh (1990: 19, 23) states on the topic of scientific schools that though they are lacking explicit entry and membership rules, one never quits them but continuously enhances one's mode of thought and possibly passes it on to the next generation. Moreover, they are marked by an especially affective and hierarchical character of teacher-pupil relationship with family-like multigenerational coherence. Hence, the term scientific community, or the currently popular term network, may rather be applicable in order to avoid a conceivable hierarchy in the rather static pupil-teacher relationship of the scholastic concept. Rather it is the latency and reciprocity of knowledge that is pertinent. For schools Blomert emphasizes that they arise from «corresponding constellations of personalities», as e.g. in Heidelberg in the 1920s (1999: 330). Historic events, too, had an effect on the schools: with the expulsion and murder of critical, Jewish intellectuals, the Heidelberg tradition, for example, had been terminated.

*Conditions of the study*

Deploying a scientific biography as a source for knowledge-sociological research, the «history of work, individual biography/biographies and societal developments [should be understood as] closely interwoven» (Korte 2013: 8). Already the beginning of process theory as a work, accrued in exile without institutional connection and long tradition (Goudsblom 2011: 34), indicates particularly difficult conditions. In order to develop a knowledge-sociological method that corresponds to process-theoretical thinking, the recently modified methodology and research strategy of a reconstructive process and figurational analysis is helpful (Treibel 2008; Baur, Ernst 2011). It can be applied in such a way that process theory itself can be identified as a sub-discipline of its own with positions, rules and norms as well as values. The respective central means of orientation, control and communication of science, like discourse and debate, appreciation and reception, as well as institutionalization, should be equally considered. Finally, the balances of power in the changes to social sciences need to be pointed out (Treibel 2008). The sampling is determined, on the one hand, by the interviewees' membership in the generation during the post-war period and, on the other hand, by their central or peripheral positions in the competition-oriented, as well as family-connoted, network of European process theorists. The coding and the content-analytical, reconstructive process analysis (Ernst 2010) of the interviews have been done with MAXQDA.

It is remarkable that there are not many female sociologists in the second generation with whom Elias has collaborated during the post-war years. Helga Nowotny, who was very much impressed by the «exemplary clarity of [Elias'] thinking» (Nowotny: 667)<sup>4</sup>, never explicitly considered herself an «Elias-scholar» but rather a «lateral entrant» (Nowotny: 77-79), while the social psychologist Maria Goudsblom, who was friends with Elias, and the sociologist Elke Korte contributed rather informally to the figurational network.

Another aspect is the issue of understanding the foreign reality, which, on the one hand, is a methodological fundamental problem of social research as it is, to understand and explain the “subjectively intended meaning” of what was said. And, on the other hand, it is about taking the presence of foreign language in the interviews as a second-order interpretation frame (Tuider 2009). Inevitably, it has to remain incomplete, because the translated and newly interpreted text is being reconstructed from differing perspectives.

*Figuration analysis of a generation of intellectuals*

This segment follows Goudsblom's (1979: 194) proposal to, «when examining any social figurations [...], attempt to empathize with the empirical world of the various groups of people who constitute the figuration» and extrapolate the knowledge background of the interviewees in the context of their time. To understand the genesis of a “we-perspective” of a network of the figurational family, means to primarily clarify, with regard to the excessively used generation concept<sup>5</sup> (Bude 2000: 193), what it is that distinguishes this generation. The reconstruction of biographical memory is embedded in the institution science (Kohli 1981).

In the establishment of process theory, one group of intellectuals encounters an exile-intellectual and contributes to the gradual growth of a long-term «community of argumentation» (Blomert, Treibel 2013) that was based on trust and friendship, as well as rivalry and competition. According to Jung, the intellectual is characterized by a dilemma: searching for the subjective self-assertion in the tension field between the «socially isolating moment of thoughtful loneliness» and the «consensual thought of proximity relating to the ideal of friendship» (Jung 2012: 47). In the course of this, shared experience and contentions are mediated in a manner that the «mental egocentrism does not collide with the dictate of friendly affinity» (Jung 2012: 49). To this are added a defining key and effect experience as well as a specific expectation (Moebius 2010:56). A generational unit does not suffice to define the practices of distinction of the «generational context» (Moebius 2010: 56; Mannheim 1970: 8). In addition, the initial sparks and processes often cumulated into feelings of emotional turmoil and self-transcendence

<sup>4</sup> The references to the interviews are made, according to the MAXQDA guidelines, in paragraphs and with nominal associations. The anonymization of the interviewees has been deliberately waived.

<sup>5</sup> Bude names as examples for the methodically uncontrolledly diffusing generation concept popular-cultural fashions, political history, biography regimes or value orientation.



in the naming of oneself and the forming of legends and group myths (Moebius 2010: 51). Although Elias, as a pupil of Karl Mannheim, was not a generational theorist, his picture of a “torch relay of the generations” and the two- to three-generation-model in the context of the issues of change, immigration, integration and emancipation can be transferred onto the establishment phase of process-theoretical thinking. This specific approach, ensuing from multiple initial sparks, met with a special anti-dogmatic group of intellectual supporters and effect, when it reached the members of the generational context born between 1932 and 1953.

Thus, the labels used in the interviews, from «Elias clique and Elias circle» (Bogner: 286) via «discipleship», «church» (Rehberg: 562) to «courtly society» and «sectarian formation» (Rehberg: 562, 727 ff., 113) are to be seen as significant (external) designation (out-group) of the group examined here. As a self-description of the in-group, terms like figurational family, «academic survival unit» (Kuzmics 2013), «genius» and «heroic sociology» stand out.

This “hungry, unloaded” generation then meets the optimistic-pragmatic post-war sociologists, born between 1925 and 1930, who affected the societal-public debate as «charismatics of the outset» (Bude 2002) in a pacified society under reconstruction; but who, for some of the interviewees, provided insufficient guidance. Instead, during the formation phase of sociology between subject-specific expansion and dismantling, this generation assumed an air of ideological criticism. Many were able to quickly recognize Elias as a «representative of an unblemished grandfather-generation» (ibid.: 272), who wanted to expand his alternative draft into a Marxist class theory. This was often combined with an idealized «master-apprentice» or pupil-teacher relationship (Schröter 1997: 281; Korte 2013). Contemporary testimonies suggest that an encounter and collaboration with Elias could, on the one hand, mean that one would outgrow oneself and perform at one’s best potential. On the other hand, in particular during the process of writing and composition, one was «not [allowed to] disagree» and was occasionally used for the «self-expansion» (Schröter 1997: 28) of the, by no means unpretentious, master (Firnhaber, Löning 2003; Mennell 2006: 1). Against this background, the exemplary portraits are introduced hereafter. First and foremost, with Eric Dunning, Hermann Korte and Johan Goudsblom, the second generation of process sociologists during the “arduous outset” of the establishment, differentiated according to age and culture, will be mentioned. They are followed by the group of those who encountered Elias in the 1970s during his late career. Aachen, Bielefeld, Bochum, Amsterdam and Leicester become the most important stations.

### *Selected portraits of European Eliasians*

The exiled, asserts Said, lives in a

transient state, having neither actually arrived in the new world nor completely detached from the old, half involved and half distanced, nostalgic and sentimental, on the one side, an assimilated newcomer or secret outcast, on the other. Skilfully securing one’s own survival becomes the life maxim, with all the risks attached to becoming comfortable and rigid – a danger that should never be lost sight of. (Said 1997: 55)

This particular form of existence also accounts for Elias’s paradoxical starting position (Elias 2005, Korte 1988). He, like almost 12.000 other intellectuals and scientists, became a witness and victim of the downfall of the Weimar Republic, as his academic career was violently interrupted and discontinued during the arising Hitler fascism. The League of Nations recorded about 500.000 refugees who were forced into exile; this signifies the migration, in particular to the USA, of a whole academic culture. 392 social scientists can be found on the *List of Displace German Scholars*. The Institute for Sociology of the economic and social-scientific faculty of the newly founded reform university Frankfurt, at which Elias worked since 1930 after his Heidelberg years with Karl Mannheim, was already closed down in 1933. During this time, the first social-scientific faculty of Germany lost a third of its scientists (Wolff 1988) and its «critical substance towards the traditional lines of thought in Germany, historicism and idealism» (Krohn 1987: 21). After the end of the war, the exiled were not able to seamlessly resume their engagement at the German universities, because as remigrants they were subjected to multiple resentments and, apart from that, despite every re-education, former Nazi-abiding or suspicious scientists continued their working (Wittebur 1991:8).

In this specific transitions from old to new life, Elias, as a social and «intellectual outsider» (Korte: 169), was able to develop unusual vantage points and particular perspectives. Certainly his power and outsider theories, which was completely against the mainstream of the then prevalent conflict-, action- and consensus theories (Goudsblom 1979), were often shaped by biographical experiences of relative powerlessness. His «life in marginality» (Said 1997: 71) merged into the formation of a scientific existence at the Department of Sociology of the University of Leicester after his return from deportation. Here he met with his early patron Ilya Neustadt, with whom he then became a backbone of the department. As the only sociologists who were cosmopolitically oriented, they laid the foundations for the, in British sociology by now renowned, Leicester sociology. However, by the mid-1970s, due to a «gruesome dispute» (Korte: 297), the formerly reciprocal, friendly relationship had turned into a unilateral dependence of the less powerful Elias (Goodwin, Hughes 2011). As a nation already equipped with a considerable islander-self-confidence about the own way of life, Elias described the English academic tradition as «superficial and compliant» because nobody should be «seriously injured» (2006b: 101). Whether in Leicester, too, the British «method of realistic yielding» prevailed, we do not know. In any case, the subject, hardly established at the universities, was struggling for recognition in the context of its increasing internationalization and institutionalization under American leadership. During the construction period, the gradually expanding English sociology was guided by language philosophy, empiricism, positivism. This was said to have downrightly tortured Theodor W. Adorno, who had fled to Oxford (Said 1997: 61). Elias, in contrast, first had to translate his German texts into English. Initially, they were widely ignored or not taken seriously at the «talking department» (Goudsblom: 131), for example by the increasingly strengthening colleagues Sydney Holloway, John Goldthorpe, Percy Cohens and Anthony Giddens (Goudsblom: 97; Dunning: 58; Goodwin, Hughes 2011). In this fragile nexus, Elias, as an outsider and oldest department member, fell «between all stools» (Gleichmann et al. 1982: 31; Goudsblom: 89 ff.). Initially, Elias was «not [yet] in a position to demand such an attitude of intellectual respect from his colleagues» (Gleichmann et al. 1982: 35).

The first encounter with the 20-year-old Eric Dunning also took place at this time. Dunning, a football-loving economics and German studies major at the former University College Leicester, met a reader who gave courses in social structure and social philosophy. Elias helped him with the search for a suitable examination subject and was thus, for Dunning, a supporting, benevolent «academic father» and «friend» (Dunning: 19), who completely changed the life of the «working class boy» (Dunning: 46 ff.):

*Ernst:* «So he was also very important to you as the first one who taught you sociology?»

*Dunning:* «Absolutely yes. But his approach to sociology, complex though it is - the fact that it synthesizes psychology, sociology and history, that really appealed to me. My brother was of course a Marxist and it gave me some ammunition to argue against my brother.» (Dunning: 17)

Dunning explained to Elias sport disciplines, like cricket and the offside rule in soccer, or carried out research about public schools. Together they planned publication and, in the context of the differentiation of sociology, became the leading scholars in the field of sociology of sport (Dunning: 35 ff., 125). It was not until the 1980s, that Elias's texts were increasingly translated and published by Dunning, Kilminster and Mennell (Featherstone 1987; Mennell: 6; Dunning: 125). Richard Kilminster, born in 1943, was at that time still a doctoral candidate of Zygmunt Bauman and was editing, in painstaking collaboration with Elias, the late work on symbol theory as well as the English collection of essays. While for Mennell, born in 1944, a rather detached relationship, that was occasionally marked by distrust, turned into admiration for his later «patron» and «mentor» (Mennell: 81), Kilminster was rather quickly sure that he had found a genius in Elias. Mennell had already entertained a two-year exchange of letters in the context of his translation of *Was ist Soziologie?* (*What is sociology?*) before meeting Elias in London for the first time in 1972. While reading the power-theoretical chapter on game models, «the penny dropped» (Mennell: 6). Since he was at that time grappling with the micro-macro-problem of economics, he found in the game models an ideal solution. During a personal meeting with Elias, the inexperienced lecturer from Exeter realized «why phenomenology was a load of rubbish» (Mennell: 8 f.):

I think Parsons went completely off the rails in about 1951 when he adopted all the A.G.I.L. stuff from Robert

Bales. [...] But the point is that in relation to the big issue, what's called the macro-micro problem or the individual-and-society problem, I was enough of a hard-nosed economist to see that the use that sociologists were trying to make of economics was a load of nonsense. [...] In other words, "rational choice" ultimately provides only post hoc explanations. Obviously, at the time of my accidental encounter with Elias, I was a young and inexperienced lecturer. In my lectures on sociological theory in those first few years at Exeter I was still struggling with the macro-micro problem. I thought Parsons had gone completely off the rails, and was just playing with a conceptual Meccano set. Then I read the Game Models chapter of *What is Sociology?* and everything slotted into place. (Mennell: 8 f.)

When he wanted to compose an English introduction to the life and works of Elias in the latter's lifetime, the young Eliasian, who had always been convinced that Elias was «a sociological intellect in a different league from Parsons [and, S.E.] infinitely the greater sociologist», found himself in conflict (Mennell: 14). Suggestions on the English edition of *Involvement and Detachment* (Mennell: 24 f.) had also been intentionally ignored by Elias. Nonetheless, for him, Elias remained the most convincing sociologist: «He had such a penetrating mind, whereas poor old Talcott was building castles in the air. That was clear to me as a young man almost immediately on meeting Norbert» (Mennell: 10 f.). In 1985, Mennell, supported by Elias and Goudsblom, wrote about «The Cultivation of Appetite» (1988). Kilminster had been tremendously stimulated, in particular in Leicester in the courses of this «remarkable man» (7), who, in his eyes, had genius-like traits:

I found his approach, his attitude, his work life-affirming. Whereas, the dominant paradigms of the time that I was raised in, you know "American mainstream Sociology" or "Marxism", I found them to be ultimately sterile and destructive in their implications. Whereas, Elias's (...) work offers, a vocation, offers a way forward. It's positive, it's life-affirming, there is a heroism in it. (Kilminster: 430)

Despite all the adoration and admiration expressed here, in the end the only co-authorships with the reserved Elias, and, with that, a mutual cooperation, were only reached in the cases of John L. Scotson in *The Established and the Outsiders*, (2010) and of Eric Dunning in *Quest for Excitement* (1986).

With regard to the next station in the Netherlands, one encounters another constellation of relations. One of his first Dutch colleagues, the Nietzsche follower Johan Goudsblom, for example, experienced phases from initial «ignorance» to deep commitment for the advancement of the Eliasian work (Goudsblom 2011: 32 f.). He had been introduced to Elias in Amsterdam in 1956 during the third ISA conference (ibid.: 34). For Goudsblom, who came across Elias's process book while preparing for an examination in social psychology, this was a complete change of direction on his original way to becoming a historian. It is remarkable, that the then-24-year-old describes his relationship to Elias explicitly not as a pupil-teacher relationship. For him, Elias was rather a «sparring partner» and a friend (Goudsblom: 311). Eventually, in 1968, Goudsblom invited Elias to Amsterdam where he could offer him an institutional, academic environment. With numerous publications he contributed to the spreading of process-sociological knowledge, for example *Sociology in the Balance* (1977), *Fire and Civilization* (1995), but never became a co-author.

Before his reception in Germany, Elias, furthered by Johan Goudsblom, found special attention in particular in the Netherlands. His way of thinking caused a paradigm change in the local sociology which had only become academic in 1921 and, after the Second World War, had been involved in the dominating trends of structuralism, positivism, empiricism and survey research. At the same time, a certain pluralism had been maintained in the Netherlands (Goudsblom 1990; Van Doren 1965: 29), while in Germany the fronts had hardened in the positivism dispute around Karl Popper and Theodor W. Adorno. In 1976, the Figural Sociology Research Group at the sociological institute of the University of Amsterdam was founded. It was renamed Process-Sociological Research Group in 1990. Meeting every two months, a continuous, professional and informal communication had come into being and, as a consequence thereof, a broad recognition culture:

Since Elias's writings provided the common perspective of the Figural Sociology Research Group, the images and self-images of the group were directly connected with the vicissitudes of the reception of Elias's work in the Netherlands. (Goudsblom 1990: 17)

Together with his German colleagues, Korte and Gleichmann, Goudsblom edited the essay collection *Human*



*Figurations* (1977), which was published in celebration of Elias's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, as well as the materials volumes of 1982 and 1984.

Another protagonist is Cas Wouters, who, in turn, found in Elias an «intellectual grandfather» (Wouters: 1058) and friend, who also advised him on personal issues. Between the two an unusual, cordial and reciprocal relationship evolved, as well as a close professional collaboration. Wouters not only translated *The Established and the Outsiders* into Dutch. Together with Elias, he also developed the thesis of informalization in civilization theory, in order to capture the loosened manners since the 1960s. Elias even composed the preface for Van Stols and Wouters' empirical-theoretical study *Vrouwen in tweestrijd* (1983) which he praised as «factual, thorough» work of a «solid» research (1987: 9).

And in the grandfather there is the age difference [...] and, also the warmth of the relationship. Mostly the warmth of the relationship and the intellectual does not mean that it is only intellectual because there was a warm relationship in the first place but I also think he was an intellectual grandfather because my intellectual father has been Joop. (Wouters: 1060 f.)

Despite all warm-heartedness, this relationship, as well, was not free of conflict. Wouters had been respected comparatively quickly as a colleague, but he, too, had to (successfully) ward off Elias's attempts to not only formulate Wouters's idea of informalization but also to dictate during Wouters's typing (Wouters 688; 2007). In turn, Elias's approach to the parent-child relationship or the changed dealing with death had been influenced by Wouters (Wouters: 563 ff., 626 ff.).

Against this inspiring backdrop, and with some grounds for confidence that the «baton of knowledge» would be passed on to the next generation, Elias founded the foundation of the same name in Amsterdam in January 1983. Goudsblom takes stock:

Our aim was certainly not to create a particular parochial branch of sociology named «figurational sociology». (Goudsblom 1990: 15)

Nevertheless, process sociology in the Netherlands had and has the image of a distinctive approach. This now leads to one of the next key figures in Germany, Hermann Korte. After the sociology of the Weimar period had been rejected as already outdated in the 1950s, and Parson's structural functionalism as well as pure empiricism had been favoured (Korte 2005: 16 ff.; Goudsblom 1982: 41), Elias's guest residencies in Munich, Aachen, Bochum, Berlin, Konstanz, Bielefeld and Frankfurt caused the resumption of the critical sociology of the pre-war period. Bit by bit, great theoretical drafts and comparisons were again debated. The need to account for the past instead of suppressing it was enormous during the «golden era» of the burgeoning economic miracle. In the light of the positivism dispute, this opened additional doors for Elias. Sociology, in the context of educational expansion and reform of higher education, was at that time still subjected to substantial enlargement. With the guest professorship at the small institute for sociology in Münster, the cultural- and socio-anthropologically oriented Dieter Claessens, and his Kant- and Marx-oriented student assistant Hermann Korte, as the «strongest advocates» (Korte 2005: 43) ensured that, «after bitter years of exile, Elias for the first time [returned] to a German university» (Korte 2013: 51). At this time, the «staunch Parsonian» (Korte: 29) Heinz Hartmann, Helmut Schelsky and Dieter Claessens taught at the Westphalian provincial town. It was the latter for whom Korte, after his training as a social worker and sociologist, worked as a research fellow. The lectures by Elias, says Korte, «we gladly attended and I know a great number of fellow students from that time who all remember Elias's lectures. [...] The man was erudite, he was a good orator, he did not deceive his students» (Korte: 31 ff.). He was a «part of the campus» (Korte: 39 ff.).

Korte's process-theoretical research covered, inter alia, sociological theory, history of sociology, sociology of city and space, industrial and migration sociology as well as biographical research. Similarly to Mennell and Kilminster, he, too, received strong intellectual suggestions from Elias, which went beyond the, then likewise popular, Marxist approach:

In terms of science, it certainly provided me with the opportunity, at the end of the 1970s, of finding a more far-reaching approach than the Marxist approaches in sociology: with the three elements [...]: with regard to humans,

with regard to processes [and] to comparisons (Korte: 595).

As a «privileged companion of a great thinker and friendly elderly gentleman» (Korte: 595), Korte observed that Elias's way of thinking noticeably transitioned from an evolutionary approach to a differentiated and acknowledged process theory. Despite the conflicts, which could be noted in this case as well and were based on Korte's intention to write an Elias biography, he eventually not only became a good friend of the «venerated teacher» (Korte: 241). Moreover, he also Korte became an advisor, disseminator and mediator. With the material volumes on the theory of civilization (Gleichmann et al. 1979, 1982), a «strong push» (Treibel 2008:13) of a broad reception of Elias took place after the initial impulse, which continues until today.

The professional competitive struggles of the sociological “schools” in the 1970s, inter alia described by Siegbert Rehberg, should also not be forgotten. Unfortunately, the Hanoverian colleague Gleichmann, who died in 2006, could not be questioned about this. That Rehberg, unlike the others already introduced, is not counted as a member of the “in-group” makes his view particularly interesting. As a result of Rehberg's intermediation, Elias had been offered a professorship at the University of Aachen in 1977. However, he, like Mennell before in London, made the faux pas of addressing Elias as a former Mannheim assistant:

«It could not have gotten any worse. He actually ossified. It was clearly visible that it shocked him.» (Rehberg: 55-63)

Rehberg initially «did not understand the full scope» of this incident. It was not until years later, when «I kept noticing repeatedly that Karl Mannheim was a traumatic context, in his life in exile» (Rehberg: 63) that the mistake became obvious. For Rehberg, in his position at the fringe of the Elias circle and «without being an Eliasian», a «sociological fusible core and energy torque in the midst» (Rehberg: 1003) was formed by Elias. In particular the impact from the exile was significant in the work and life story of Elias:

Elias has brought me to this, for example, that the constellation of the German development of sociology in the horizon of the return to Germany, and through the exile for German sociology, is so important. Not as a compensation, but also as an instruction on the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [...] This was simply a kind of intuitive consequence of the encounter. That is why I would say that this [...], without any school situation, has shaped me. At the same time, I have always seen this from the outside, have always seen the competition [amongst the Elias followers, S.E.]. (Rehberg: 1017)

From 1978 onwards, Elias found new self-confidence at the renowned *Centre for Interdisciplinary Research* (ZIF) of the reform-university Bielefeld (Firnhaber, Löning 2003: 89). He worked hard, virtually next door to Niklas Luhmann, to «expand the alternative concept to Marxist class theory» which had been begun in the process book (Schröter 1997: 197). In order to experience him, like, for example, at the Bielefeld ZIF conference on the *Theory of Social Processes* in June 1984, many of his colleagues and students arrived in Bielefeld from Germany and abroad; amongst them, inter alia, Helga Nowotny, Annette Treibel, Stephen Mennell, Cas Wouters, Johan Goudsblom, Hermann Korte and Richard Kilminster (Feyerabend, Gembardt 1985).

Here, Elias worked with his assistant Artur Bogner (1989) on the German edition of *Über die Zeit* (*Essay On time*). In Bogner's view, shaped by the optimistic and reform mood of the 1970s, nobody could get close to Elias, since he was the one who dealt with contemporary problems particularly well: «I think, Elias for me is one of the greatest sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it is not in the same league his followers are in» (Bogner: 298 ff.). With this, already implied inter- and intra-generational competitive relationships can be suspected. Especially as, with regard to the establishment of a scientific school, Schröter<sup>6</sup> denies Elias any «organisational vigour», although the «considerable charisma of his person» (1997: 7) did impress. Endued with a particular «pedagogical eros» (Firnhaber, Löning 2003: 117), Elias provided this specific nexus with the necessary personality and means of identification for the establishment of a scientific school of thought whose constitution was vied for by the second generation. In the end, Korte and Goudsblom concurred that Elias, admittedly keen on conflict, was «very careful

6 The fact that it was, of all people, Michael Schröter, one of the closest and last colleagues of Elias, who refused to be interviewed, may also be considered part of this conflictual connection.

in dealing with other people» (Goudsblom 421 ff.; Korte: 153) and that he fashioned personal relations almost always as «teacher-pupil relationships» (Korte 2013: 8). Nevertheless, these relationships had transformed, «very slowly» (Goudsblom: 114 f.), from teacher-pupil relationships or reciprocally inspiring colleagues into friendship, though without ever reaching an equal footing (Korte: 462).

For many of the interviewees, Elias has remained a genius, even though the “master of self-dramatization” and self-confident performer had always rejected this assertion for himself and, in his Mozart study, absolutely deconstructed the genius cult. These partly depicted professional and institutional approaches already refer to the interdisciplinary and internationally connectivity of process theory; at the same time a lack of synchronization in the effect of this specific sociology coming from the exile has to be established. Here we have to agree with Rehberg, who, already in 1982, has spoken about an «institutional balance system of a detached existence in an interrupted life» (Rehberg 1982). As a long-term perspective, this balance system of a figurational network can be described as definitely successful and efficient. Germany and the Netherlands had initially been more successful than England, which very much followed the American mainstream. After Australia, Austria, France, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Japan, Russia and Israel, theoretical knowledge will certainly also become increasingly prevalent there.

### Conclusion

The article exemplarily sketches aspects of intellectual inspirations and collaboration as well as the acquaintanceship with one of the most notable German-British sociologists. Many aspects and persons had to remain unmentioned. Elias probably best-known work *The Civilizing Process* is by now amongst the top ten of the ISA sociology bestseller list<sup>7</sup>, after seemingly having had a too prevalent «fragrance of the past» (Korte 2005: 42) following the Second World War. 90 years of age, three years before his death, Elias had, by all means, not had the feeling that «I have done my work» (Elias 1996: 93). «How to proceed hereafter is the concern of the later generations» (ibid.: 51).

The second generation, who has expressed some views here, has managed, with an anti-dogmatic, highly reflexive attitude and a committed-detached thinking, to set out on a cumbersome way in long-term processes; so that now an unagitated Elias reception is part of the basic education in sociology. This is also ascribable to the third, quasi great-grandchildren, generation of process-sociologists, who have become efficacious with further introductions to Elias in the context of «canonizing of sociology» (Treibel 2008: 24) in the 1990s. Since then a series of papers on civilization and process theory has been established under the aegis of Annette Treibel, Reinhard Blomert and Helmut Kuzmics in the Springer VS press; as well as the new Suhrkamp edition of the complete works, looked after by Treibel, Blomert and Kuzmics on behalf, inter alia, of the *Elias Foundation*, as well as the English complete edition *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, looked after, inter alia, by Stephen Mennell. A further indication for the establishment of a specific scientific community is the international *Figurational Network* with a newsletter of the same name, the internationally advertised *Norbert Elias Prize*, the journal *Human Figurations* and the *Norbert Elias Chair*. And, not least, the complete personal estate of Norbert Elias can be studied at the German Literature Archive in Marbach.

<sup>7</sup> Here a comparison with Elias's (2013) integration theory immediately suggests itself, which says that it takes three generations to render societal outsiders into established. This may also hold true for scientific innovations who, in their time, still are deemed to be discarded but later on reach the status of classics.

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