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## Figurational Social and Cultural Sciences (III)

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**Abstract:** This case study introduces and discusses ‘the *homo clausus* self-experience of contemporary people in Western European societies’ — a central conceptualization result of the so-called ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology,’ based on the insights and works of philosopher and sociologist Norbert Elias.

**Keywords:** Philip Abrams (1933-1981); George Armelagos (1936-2014); Norbert Elias (1897-1990); Peter Farb (1929-1980); Jozef Keulartz (1947); John Reader (1937); Frans Veldman (1921-1910); Cas Wouters (1943). Birth and pregnancy; Figurational sociology; Figurational social and cultural sciences; Socio-psycho-physiology of muscles and muscle systems; (Socio-Psycho-)Physiogenesis of **Homo clausus** self-experiences; Counseling, therapy and training groups.

### Introduction

In the previous article (Staring, 2023b) it was reported that the Dutch philosopher Jozef Keulartz made three critical comments on the sociology of care of figurational social and cultural scientists of the so-called ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology.’ In his book *Van bestraffing naar behandeling* (From Punishment to Treatment), Keulartz (1987) accuses the ‘supporters of civilization theory’ that their sociology of care does not have practical relevance. This is because they give primacy in their analyses to the observer perspective. But, stated Keulartz, they also have not subjected their own basic concepts to further (empirical) research.

One basic concept in the civilization theory of Norbert Elias and students from the ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology’ is the concept of *homo clausus* self-experience. In his book about the loneliness of the dying in our days in Western European societies, Elias has explained briefly which social, interpersonal ‘processes’ should be seen in connection with feelings of closedness among the dying in our time. He stated,

Both sexuality and death are biological facts that are shaped by experience and behaviour in a socially specific way, i.e., in accordance with the stage reached by the development of humanity, and of civilization as an aspect of this development. Every individual works up the common social patterns in his own way. (Elias, 1985, p. 45).

Being aware of these patterns, Elias argued, can help to recognize the sociological problems of death and dying more clearly. Elias mentioned four social patterns that presuppose, but also reinforce, each other. I discussed these four patterns in more detail in the previous article, so I will just list them here.

People live longer, which means thinking about death can be ‘suppressed’ for longer. The level of hygiene and the skills and knowledge of medical specialists have increased significantly in recent decades; these feats also play a major role in the ‘suppression’ of the thinking about death. Moreover, the Western European population experienced that acts of violence by others hardly occurred after the Second World War. These three social patterns imply for the personality structure of people in Western Europe in the present that self-constraint and self-control have increased. Therefore, today’s people are more likely to suffer from *homo clausus* self-experiences. They feel more closed and disconnected from their environment and from others than previous Western Europeans must have felt. These analyses naturally have

implications for the provision of care to people suffering from *homo clausus* self-experiences. Professional ‘death counselors’ (religious or secular; that is not important here) make their services known around the dying. The previous article showed that professional ‘pregnancy counselors’ make their services known around pregnant women. The question that must be asked here is whether these counselors get to the core of the problem of contemporary people, both in the case of dying people and in the case of pregnant women in Western Europe, and whether their terminology is adequate. As has already become clear: figurational social and cultural scientists do not ask such questions. Are they right?

Let us focus here again on pregnant women in our days in Western Europe. Almost all pregnancy counselors ask pregnant women to do something, or to do several things, to prevent problems during pregnancy and childbirth. For example, there is physical exercise during pregnancy gym and yoga, and diligent meditation during ‘spiritual’ pregnancy guidance. In haptonomic pregnancy and birth support, on the other hand, ‘non-action’ is paramount. What is the haptonomic vocabulary, and how would figurational social and cultural scientists — such as Cas Wouters — and Habermasians — such as Jozef Keulartz — interpret the pregnancy counselling of haptonomists? Here is a quote from the work of the Dutch founder of haptonomy and haptonomic pregnancy counseling courses, Frans Veldman:

As soon as the first child movements become noticeable [...], they should be anticipated by the mother by affectionately centering her feelings on her child in a focused sensitivity and literally taking it into her hands: embracing it. The apperceptual impulse emanating from this from the child quickly leads to a response, in its turn, in an anticipatory and reflective manner and gradually a communicative interaction between mother and child thus develops [...]. The mother learns from this a-being-together-with-her-child, in an emotional and functional way, and learns to guide the child during every phase of its development within her womb. (Veldman, 1983, pp. 18-19; translation J.S.).

Dutch sociologist Cas Wouters (as representative of the ‘Eliasiens,’ *i.e.*, figurational social and cultural scientists) would discover and recognize mystical terms in this passage. He would regard the characteristic as evidence for his theoretical objections. According to him, the quote from Veldman’s book shows veiled words for tensions between constraints and impulses of individual pregnant women. The underlying *homo clausus* self-experiences of current pregnant women will not disappear through such pregnancy counseling courses, as the solutions cannot be achieved at an individual level unless the existing interpersonal relationships of influence on, and dependence of, each other in the broader society do not change.

On the other hand, Dutch philosopher Jozef Keulartz (as representative of ‘Habermasians’) would most likely see the beginnings of communicative action unfolding in the above quote from Veldman’s work — even though one cannot yet attribute much, or no, individuality to the unborns.

Yet it is and remains a fact that the above ideal-sounding situation in Veldman’s work, that is, a silent dialogue without words between expectant mother and her unborn child(ren), can only be possible if undisturbed *tonus* adaptations of, especially, abdominal wall muscles can occur in the pregnant woman. If such specific (more or less) undisturbed *tonus* adaptations turn out to be possible, one can observe a musculature of, among other things, the abdominal wall of a pregnant woman that is elastic, but with resilience and extensibility. One can then observe a muscular system that, in the words of Veldman, “is freed from any inadequate and undirected tension and is affectively optimized in the ‘*eutonus contactus*’ that offers the child freedom and space” (1983, p. 19; translation J.S.)

Psychologisms and sociologisms, both from practitioners of the human sciences from the ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology’ — like Wouters — and from the neo-critical Habermasian school of human sciences — like Keulartz — fall short of understanding the socio-psycho-physiology of muscles and muscle systems, in this case the socio-psycho-physiology of the abdominal wall muscles of pregnant and birthing women. These scientists simply do not even recognize this. Neither in the works of figurational social and cultural researchers nor in the writings of neo-critical theorists does one discover the basis of any biological knowledge, let alone any biological skill, to accommodate ‘closed people,’ in this case pregnant women with highly charged *homo clausus* self-experiences.

Since I focus here on the sociology of care of figurational social and cultural scientists, I will discuss below the brief, albeit incorrect, description of the ‘Eliasian’ basic concept of *homo clausus* self-experience. (I will explain its relevance next.)

### The (Socio-Psycho-)Physiogenesis of *Homo Clausus* Self-Experiences

In the account of his research of civilizing processes, including *homo clausus* self-experiences of people in Western European societies, Norbert Elias (1978a, p. 257) reported,

The transformation of interpersonal external compulsion into individual internal compulsion, which now increasingly takes place, leads to a situation in which many affective impulses cannot be lived out as spontaneously as before. The autonomous individual self-controls produced in this way in social life, such as “rational thought” or the “moral conscience,” now interpose themselves more sternly than ever before between spontaneous and emotional impulses, on the one hand, and the skeletal muscles, on the other, preventing the former with greater severity from directly determining the latter (i.e., action) without the permission of these control mechanisms.

Elias wrote the account of his research (his *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*) in the 1930s. The above quote comes from the new introduction to the work from 1969. Virtually not an ounce of text had been changed by Elias since the first edition of the book in 1939; this also applies to the new introduction to the book from 1969 and its translation in English in 1978. Elias therefore stuck rather rigidly to his original texts. This is also evident from the fact that he seems to have used the same formulation in his posthumously published work on Mozart:

The acquired knowledge, which includes acquired thinking or, in the reified language of tradition, ‘reason’, or in Freudian terms, the ‘ego’, opposes the more animal energy-impulses when they try to take control of the skeletal muscles and thus of action. (Elias, 1993, p. 59).

Figurational social and cultural scientists, for some obscure reason, do not wish to tamper with Elias’ findings and texts either. The sociology of (self-)experience that Elias outlined seems like a sacred truth that should not be tampered with.

What is missing from Elias’ short, but so far unchanged, description of ‘closed people’ is a reference to the (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences of contemporary people in Western European societies. Between “spontaneous and emotional impulses” on the one hand and the skeletal muscles on the other hand slide *not only* automatic, individual self-controls produced in society, but also, formed in equally closer and stronger measure than ever before, automatic personal action traditions of moving, carrying and using the socio-psycho-physical self/body, ‘generated’ in society. This ultimately boils down to the following, expressed by the figurational sociologist Dara Blumenthal (2014, p. 4):

*Homo clausus* is not just a collection of social norms, but also, a matter of how the body is socially and individually experienced as an entirely separate self-same, sealed-off entity. *Homo clausus* is thus, most fundamentally, a style of dis-embodiment.

In the first volume of *The Civilizing Process*, Elias (1978a) described the “Rise of the Fork” (Goudsblom & Mennell (Eds.), 1998, p. 51), that is, the history of the ‘fork ritual,’ as well as the socio-, but also the psychogenesis of feelings of shame and of socially determined fears associated with the use of forks when eating. Elias showed that eating with fingers was first considered indecent by the nobles (Renaissance period), later also by the civil registries (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and since the early decades of the last century also by workers and farmers in Western European societies. He stated,

The suppression of eating by hand from one’s own plate has very little to do with the danger of illness, the so-called “rational” explanation. In observing our feelings toward the fork ritual, we can see with particular clarity that the first authority in our decision between “civilized” and “uncivilized” behavior at table is our feeling of distaste. The fork is nothing other than the embodiment of a specific standard of emotions and a specific level of

revulsion. Behind the change in eating techniques between the Middle Ages and modern times appears the same process that emerged in the analysis of other incarnations of this kind: a change in the structure of drives and emotions. (Elias, 1978a, pp. 126-127).

We should not forget that hygienic arguments for not eating with your fingers have actually only been put forward since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the raising of children to become civilized table companions, eating with the help of the hands, getting dirty and greasy fingers, licking the fingers (possibly ‘smeared’ with food) is loaded with commandments and prohibitions, with feelings of shame and pain, and ‘unlearned’ by fears of punishment or punitive looks of ‘civilized’ adults. The tendencies of children to use their hands to eat food from the plate are suppressed by parental coercions, and these are gradually transformed into self-compulsions, self-restraints. “All this appears to them as highly personal, something ‘inward,’ implanted in them by nature,” stated Elias (1978a, p. 128) about those who already have ‘internalized’ the pressures of parents to their ‘own’ self-constraints. For them, the pain that is evoked when someone eats without a fork but with his bare hands, for example, has become so self-evident that it is not their ‘first,’ but their ‘second’ nature which resides with them, resides ‘in’ them.

This aspect of civilizing processes in Western Europe over the last three to four centuries can be traced back in, for example, etiquette books, or in material culture: for example, the forks themselves, or paintings depicting, and movies showing, eating families.

In China, on the other hand, the trend of using certain aids when eating started much earlier. It was common in China to bring food to the mouth with chopsticks much earlier than to eat with forks in Western Europe. Furthermore, eating with chopsticks was also a form of ‘civilized eating.’ American science journalist Peter Farb and fellow countryman anthropologist George Armelagos noted in their book on the anthropology of eating that gatherers/hunters use their incisors as tweezers when eating, while people who use chopsticks or forks when eating use their incisors as scissors (see *Note 1*). They narrated that people who live as gatherers and hunters place their incisors into, for example, meat like tweezers (that is, as a clamp to grasp the meat), and then use their hands to tear, or a knife to cut, the food left outside their mouths, to loosen what is in their mouth from what is outside. They concluded,

If the front teeth are used in this manner several times a day, beginning in childhood, they soon develop in the edge-to-edge-position of pincers.

The scissorlike bite of modern humans can be attributed not to genetic or dietary changes but to the practice of cutting food into bite-sized morsels before putting it into the mouth, thereby largely bypassing the incisors. This began in Europe several centuries ago, and much earlier in China, as a result of the introduction of the fork and of chopsticks. (Farb & Armelagos, 1983, p. 61).

Basically, because people who use forks or chopsticks when eating first reduce their food into ‘bite-sized chunks,’ they make virtually no use of their front teeth while eating and will develop a scissor-like bite.

Of course, this does not only affect the position of the teeth. To eat food in the way people in Western European societies consider ‘civilized,’ that is, with the help of forks, people also use their muscles of the face, throat region and neck in certain ways. By eating according to these methods for years, their lower jaws gradually ‘deteriorate’ and come into a certain position in relation to the upper jaws. It is the position in which the front teeth of lower and upper jaw are placed relative to each other like scissor blades. Their mandibles are, as it were, ‘fixed’ in this position via muscle tissue.

All kinds of other codes of conduct also play their role. Western Europeans are not allowed to smack when snacking and feasting, they must chew with their mouths closed. Such regulations for the ‘civilized’ consumption of food mean that their muscular system of the throat and neck area is (mainly) used in such a way that ‘natural’ use of the jaw is increasingly displaced by the ‘civilized way’ of using the jaw. The position of the jaws and occlusion of the teeth, programmed in the genes, is changed into a completely different position and occlusion because Western Europeans eat and chew in certain ways and do not use their teeth and molars as a ‘third hand,’ as gatherers and hunters do.

In other words, the ‘naturally’ occurring interplay of chewing, cervical, facial, throat and neck muscles is ‘disturbed.’ The ‘civilized use’ of these muscles, *i.e.*, this entire muscular system (because

contraction or relaxation of one muscle influences and is at the same time dependent on contraction or relaxation of other muscles belonging to this system) not only ‘fixes’ the lower jaw in a certain position relative to the upper jaw. It also affects the position of the head in space, in relation to the spine and chest, because the naturally occurring muscle tension and *tonus* balances of many muscles change. The overall muscle tension and *tonus* balance in the head and neck body area changes. The result of all this is that most people in Western European societies carry their heads at a certain angle, as it were: backwards and downwards as related to the head carriage of gatherers and hunters who use their teeth and jaws differently (see *Note 2*).

The consequences of tilting the head backwards and downwards are numerous. Because there is a general and unconscious increase in muscle tension and *tonus* of the face, throat and neck, spinal muscles cannot be used properly to distribute the body weight correctly. If the head does not balance freely on the spine but is more or less ‘anchored’ in a certain position by muscles that show a more or less general increase in muscle tension, the spinal musculature cannot be used properly. With a continuous more or less ‘disturbed’ muscle tension in the muscles between both lower jaw and temporal bone and hyoid bone; between hyoid bone and both thyroid cartilage and collarbones; in the upper intervertebral muscles and in the small muscles between the occipital bone, the atlas and the rotator; the spinal muscles cannot function optimally. As a result, the spaces between the vertebrae are not kept as optimal as possible, and therefore the intervertebral discs are not evenly loaded. From a medical point of view, this can have adverse effects on the body as a whole. It can include poor blood supply, and/or one-sided strain on the intervertebral discs and resulting pain because of nerve clamping, and so on.

A head ‘habitually’ tilted backwards and downwards has even more disadvantages. There are two organs in the head that are important for the movements of the body as a whole. These organs, together with the various forms of tactile bodies in the skin and the stretch and tension receptors in muscles and tendons, are important in the coordination of body movements. Because the vestibular organ and the eyes are located in a more or less continuously tilted head, backwards and downwards, the sensations mediated by them are assessed and processed against a standard deviating from the optimum. The head is not carried as ‘nature prescribes,’ but rather slightly tilted. In other words, both eyes and the sense of balance therefore do not measure when the head position is ‘naturally correct;’ they measure when the head is held ‘incorrectly’ (tilted backwards and downwards) from an evolutionary perspective.

As a result, light and smoothly coordinated movements of the body as a whole will not occur. For example, one does not sit down smoothly and with a ‘straight back.’ No, one tilts the head even further back and down, and forms a hollow in the lower back (the lordosis is increased) bending the neck forward, and one searches, as it were, with one’s buttocks towards the chair where one should sit. The whole movement of sitting down makes a very inelegant and clumsy impression (Staring, 1987ab).

The (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of head tilting (backwards and downwards), one of the causes of which has been discussed here in relation to the sociogenesis and psychogenesis of the ‘fork ritual’ described by Elias, is closely related to developments in posture and body movements. Nowadays posture and body movements of Western Europeans rarely meet an ideal as formulated from a medical perspective. But this also means that people in Western European societies experience themselves differently than in earlier times. People do not even realize that their movements are poorly coordinated. Because their many joints are limited in their functions due to more or less constant tense muscles around them, people feel trapped in their own bodies. They experience themselves as humans locked in their own bodies, as people who are closed off from others and the environment at the boundaries of their own bodies. On a socio-psycho-physical level they experience themselves as closed people.

In summary, one of the ‘causes’ of backward and downward head tilting (compared to optimal head posture from an evolutionary perspective) observed in the vast majority of people in Western European societies is briefly discussed above. This head tilt is unconsciously learned by children and becomes more or less permanent later in life: it becomes, as it were, second nature to carry the head in this way. That more or less permanent head tilting has far-reaching consequences for moving, carrying and, in general, using, the self/body is virtually impossible to understand for anyone who carries his or her head tilted backwards and downwards as if given by nature. The most important physiological ‘symptoms’ associated with this more or less permanent head tilt include disturbed optical, vestibular and kinesthetic sensations, and therefore also

‘appraisals.’ Since body movements are performed on the basis of, and in continuous feedback relationships with the sensory system of the eyes, sense of balance, touch, stretch and tension receptors in muscles and tendons, inefficient movement, movement patterns, and even inefficient ways of thinking about moving and movements will occur in people who ‘suffer’ from persistent, more or less permanent head tilting. Muscle tension balances of muscle systems, and of individual muscles and their antagonists, as well as the skin *turgor*, in those who show such bodily inefficiency, show abnormalities that can cause pathologies and generate physiologically mediated feelings of closedness.

Elias and other figurational social and cultural scientists have not yet conducted (empirical) research into the (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences of people in the present (and in the past) in Western Europe. It is for this reason that the basic concept of *homo clausus* self-experience has such a limited scope with Elias as with all other researchers of the ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology.’ And that is also why this basic concept has such minimal (practical) relevance and has become in fact such a ‘sterile’ concept. The sociology of self-experiences needs an anthropology of those same experiences.

### **Another Form of Self-Experiences among Pregnant Women**

It seems that the situation outlined by Veldman in his haptonomic pregnancy guidance can only occur when *tonus* adaptations of the abdominal wall muscles of pregnant women can occur. Here we encounter a problem. After all, which contemporary, Western European, pregnant woman has such optimal ‘sensory sensations’ that she will come to such *tonus* adaptations — on her own? Why is it that almost all pregnant women in Western European societies in our time suffer from inadequate and untargeted muscle tension in the abdominal wall musculature? Eliasians and Habermasians do not know the answer to this question. But Veldman *et al.* are also unable to pinpoint the exact cause for this. In their practice and in their writings, they do not get to the heart of the matter. In this sense the terminology of Eliasians, Habermasians and haptonomic therapists seems to be inadequate to analyze certain problems. Expectant mothers in Western European societies, just like almost everyone else (including figurational social and cultural scientists and neo-critical Habermasians) are not able to produce adequate and targeted adaptations in, for example, the abdominal wall muscle *tonus*, on their own, under/in all circumstances.

A number of courses related to pregnancy and childbirth, such as specially designed gymnastics and yoga, claim to ‘strengthen’ the abdominal wall musculature, which, in fact, may produce ‘symptom-affirming’ results because these courses are not designed to understand muscle tone adaptations. The permanent, unconsciously learned, head tilting backwards and downwards is not understood or even ‘treated’ in therapies or training that focus on ‘strengthening,’ for example, abdominal wall muscles in pregnant women. The consequences of ‘disruptions’ of abdominal, pelvic and head, neck and back muscle tension balances can be far-reaching for pregnant women. On the one hand, they will experience themselves more and more, as time goes on of pregnancy, as physically closed people. On a physical level, they experience themselves increasingly as ‘closed humans’ as the pregnancy progresses.

These physical experiences of closedness occur alongside, and inter-acting with socio-psychological *homo clausus* self-experiences that present-day pregnant women gain in Western European societies (meaning for their daily practice that they may feel increasingly alienated from their environment and from others). Their pregnant uterus can even be experienced as a ‘hard football’ in the last two months of pregnancy. Such disturbed muscle tone can ‘make it’ extremely difficult to establish any communication or dialogue (of any kind) with the unborn child(ren). And then pregnant women’s needs for such contact cannot be met by themselves — nor by anyone else. Such disappointing experiences can result in reinforcement of the pregnant women’s *homo clausus* self-experiences. These self-experiences then are increasingly alienating pregnant women from their future babies. In essence, contemporary pregnant women in Western European societies may not experience their unborn child(ren) as an integral part of them, changing over time, and they do not feel (enough) able to communicate with them through any means whatsoever.

## A Structural Flaw in Figurational Social and Cultural Sciences

Why is it that Elias and figurational sociologists, anthropologists and historians cannot arrive at studying *homo clausus* self-experiences of pregnant women in Western European societies? This may be due to a position of Elias that is apparently considered dogma in the ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology:’

The development of a human person is marked by an intimate fusion of biological and social processes. Unlearned natural growth blends with learned experiential developments in such a way that it is futile to attempt to separate one from the other in what emerges from their fusion. (Elias, 1992b, p. 152).

So, Elias had not even started separating “one from the other,” and with him all the other figurational social and cultural scientists did and do not seem to be tempted to undertake an investigation into the matter. In doing so, they do not, nor will they, develop a sociology of care at the level of the daily practices of contemporary people in Western European societies that can provide solutions to those who suffer from their self-experiences of closedness. The sociology of care of students from the ‘Amsterdam School of Sociology’ indeed seems to have no practical relevance.

The above quote shows that Elias himself reified; in his civilization theory he reified the *praxis* of human life (see *Note 3*). In fact, one can say, there was also an “ethos of *homo clausus*” (Elias, 1982b, p. 100) in his own brain. Here lies the root of the inability of figurational social and cultural scientists to understand one of the core concepts of their civilization theory, namely: *homo clausus* self-experience. These scholars fail to recognize that Elias’ work contains a structural flaw (see *Note 4*). Furthermore, it appears that Keulartz’s accusation is correct that the ‘adherents of the civilization theory’ give primacy in their analyses to the observer’s perspective.

But now to the heart of the whole matter: *per dolorem ad veritatem*.

Unwanted, unplanned too, and unintentional, pregnancy in Western European societies today is a time when fetuses, unborn children, already come into contact with ‘closed humans’ — as a result of the lack of the right, adequate means to reduce the socio-psycho-physical *homo clausus* self-experiences of pregnant women. They gain their first experiences that form the basis that will shape later self-experiences as referred to by Elias *et al.* under the heading *homo clausus* self-experiences. After all, due to non-optimal muscle tension balances of the throat, neck, back, abdominal wall, and pelvic and uterine musculature of pregnant women, unborn children are, as it were, locked up in a corset of hard walls. These hard walls that surround them do not really allow them to experience communications that would be possible with adequate and targeted muscle tension balances of their mother’s muscular system.

### The *Homo Clausus in Statu Nascendi*

And how are births going in Western Europe? An optimal *tonus* regulation of the uterus, abdominal (wall), throat, neck, back, pelvis and upper leg and thigh muscles is important for smooth parturition. With disturbed muscle tension balances of these muscles, the child’s passage space will be significantly reduced, compared to the situation in which these tonal balances are at their best or most adequate. When parturition begins, ideally there should be no disturbed or inadequate muscle tension (balances) anywhere in the multitude of interacting and interdependent muscles. It was already mentioned in the previous article that almost every birth in modern times involves problems, because there are no longer any biomechanical options in the human birth canal to provide a relatively easy passage for babies with a large skull size. The child’s passage through the birth canal can only be somewhat smooth if the ‘soft tissues’ are indeed soft and elastic. From a biomechanical point of view, the bony parts of the birth canal no longer have any wiggle room. Because women giving birth in Western European societies today do not have optimal tone regulations of the above-mentioned muscles, the passage of their child during childbirth can be complicated. The soft tissues of the birth canal are not soft, but stiffened, have no/less elasticity and can also become excessively tense. Such parturitions are accompanied by pain sensations in these soft parts of the birth canal.

Vicious circles of pain —> stiffening of soft tissues of the birth canal —> even more pain —> cramping of soft tissues of the birth canal and also throat, neck, back and thigh muscles then can occur. The children have to find their way out of a hard and constricting corset to the ‘outside world,’ and the birthing mothers will feel more and more closed, even though they would dearly give their child space. This is the looming drama of modern births in the ‘Evening Land:’ with every birth a *homo clausus* gives birth of a *homo clausus in statu nascendi*.

Figurational and other human scientists fail to investigate a (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences. Instead of researching the reality of birthers in Western European societies in our time, they compete for academic honor with basic or core concepts that have no essential content, no scope (other than that which they themselves have attributed to the concepts), and which certainly have no practical relevance. After all, they do not apply these concepts to people who *are* bodies, *i.e.*, living people of flesh and blood, but at most to people who they assume *have* bodies. It constitutes a true reification of the *praxis* of human life.

Elias once modeled the path people in Western European societies must follow to disconnect, as it were, from their *homo clausus* self-experiences:

The ability to break away from those kinds of experiences and from the ways of thinking based on them is a fundamental condition for any break with fossilized traditions of thought and action. But the thorough realization of this is not easy. It requires a far-reaching reorganization of one’s perception and other concepts to express it. (Elias, 1971, p. 136; translation J.S.).

In the eyes of the founder of figurational human sciences, it is apparently sufficient if people in Western European societies primarily focus on being able to maintain the necessary distance from their *homo clausus* self-experiences by reorganizing their perception and expressing themselves differently conceptually and verbally. As long as they speak and think about people and human figurations in a non-reifying way, then things actually seem to turn out well with their *homo clausus* self-experiences. As long as they use different and more realistic ways of thinking, concepts and expressions when studying and discussing people, human societies and other human figurations and human problems, then they will gradually lose their own experience of being closed. It seems as if Elias promised that their *homo clausus* self-experiences will disappear like snow in the sun.

But in the foregoing, it has been explained that the *homo clausus* self-experience problem primarily concerns its socio-psycho-physical nature and origin, and not its socio-psychological nature and origin — as Elias *et al.* have been telling us for years. The “perception” Elias spoke of in the above quote is a metaphor. He was not referring to sensory perception at all, but to a kind of perception from his figurational sociological eye. He did not mean that one should strive to perfect one’s sense perception. No, he merely propagated a figurational sociological perspective. These and other metaphors used by Elias and students of the ‘Amsterdam school of Sociology’ in their theories are expressions of an inability of those who use them to trace the true origin of *homo clausus* self-experience problems. American sociologist Philip Abrams (1982, pp. 239-240) criticized Elias’s recruiting attitude in the following way:

What attracts his [= Elias’s; J.S.] attention is not the task of accounting for personal action (in the singular) within this or that figuration, but rather the task of revealing the integration of personal action (in the plural) and social relationships (or structure) in the historical movement from one figuration to another.

Indeed, Elias dealt with matters of very long duration, and with constantly changing figurations; and in doing so he ran the risk of every sociologist or historian: he lost sight of individual people. After all, completely undiscussed in his work, and in that of other students in figurational social and cultural sciences, remains the (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences of individual people in Western European societies. People’s ‘biological equipment’ quickly disappears from view here. This also includes habit formation at a (socio-psycho-)physical level, as well as the development of routinized actions, *i.e.*, the development of personal action traditions of individual people. And with it disappeared the (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis of *homo clausus* self-experiences from the field of research. This became painfully clear in the preceding sections. What Elias meant by action traditions does not correspond to ‘action traditions’ of moving, carrying and using (and therefore experiencing) their self/body by individual people. Whatever



Elias may have meant by “fossilized traditions of thought and action,” and whatever he may have meant by the phrase “It requires a far-reaching reorganization of one’s perception and other concepts to express it,” it will be insufficient to give just expression to the *praxis* of human life, and especially to be able to influence it.

For the record, let us return to the main work of Elias. In the second volume of *The Civilizing Process*, he summarized his ‘sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations’ under the heading ‘Towards a Theory of Civilizing Processes.’ In this final chapter of his two-volume study, Elias (1982, p. 235) once again raised his central position:

The peculiar stability of the apparatus of mental self-restraint which emerges as a decisive trait built into the habits of every “civilized” human being, stands in the closest relationship to the monopolization of physical force and the growing stability of the central organs of society. Only with the formation of this kind of relatively stable monopolies do societies acquire those characteristics as a result of which the individuals forming them get attuned, from infancy, to a highly regulated and differentiated pattern of self-restraint; only in conjunction with these monopolies does this kind of self-restraint require a higher degree of automaticity, does it become, as it were, “second nature”.

Indeed, Elias had shown in earlier chapters of his book that from the sixteenth century onwards there had been an acceleration in pacification processes in Western European states. Strong monopoly organizations of physical force, of physical violence (and related tax collection) arose, while smaller offensive and defensive units were eventually absorbed into larger and increasingly extensive offensive and defensive units. Within such pacified states and societies, individual people positioned themselves in relation to ‘barracked’ violence:

Through the formation of monopolies of force, the threat which one man represents for another is subject to stricter control and becomes more calculable. Physical violence is confined to barracks; and from this store-house it breaks out only in extreme cases, in times of war or social upheaval, into individual life. As the monopoly of certain specialist groups it is normally excluded from the life of others; and these specialists, the whole monopoly organization of force, now stands guard only in the margin of social life as a control on individual conduct. (Elias, 1982a, p. 238).

Increasingly, people in these pacified states and societies did not have to take into account unpredictable and unforeseen acts of physical violence by other people or groups of people. But people who were part of such specific figurations where the exercise of force became more and more centralized and monopolized were at the same time directed and became oriented toward greater self-control:

Through the interdependence of larger groups of people and the exclusion of physical violence from them, a social apparatus is established in which the constraints between people are lastingly transformed into self-constraints. These self-constraints, a function of the perpetual hindsight and foresight instilled in the individual from childhood in accordance with his integration in extensive chains of action, have partly the form of conscious self-control and partly that of automatic habit. (Elias, 1982a, pp. 242-243).

Note that Elias referred only to socio-psychological habits and outlined the course of their development. For example, he stated that people in such pacified communities acquired better means of orientation and control over the world around them. But here too Elias showed no understanding for all kinds of socio-psycho-physical processes involved. Elias reduced the *praxis* of the lives of people concerned to social and socio-psychological developments.

The image people have of themselves, their self-experience in other words, is not, as it often appears today, an item independent of the main body of knowledge, standing apart from their experience of the world at large. It forms an integral part of people’s socio-symbolic universe and changes together with it. People’s self-image has its place within the trajectory of knowledge leading from the hypothetical condition of absolute ignorance about the connections of happenings tempered by fantasy images of such connections, in the direction

towards the lessening of this ignorance and the growth of the reality-congruence of their symbols. (Elias, 1992b, p. 71).

This may make a lot of sense from Elias' perspective, but from the perspective outlined in earlier sections above, this all sounds rather poor. After all, the image that people have of themselves, "their self-experience in other words," we saw it already, is also dependent on its (socio-psycho-)physiogenesis.

Elias did not talk about the 'absolute' beginning of people's self-image and self-experience in his works. This statement applies to individual people, but this comment also applies to what Elias called "the hypothetical condition of absolute ignorance about the connections of happenings" in (to put it poetically) primeval humans. The latter is understandable, because until recently there was very little to say about them. Relevant research data was almost completely lacking, and the ideas, representations and theories about primeval humans reflected a lot of wishful thinking and therefore showed an enormous amount of "fantasy images."

Since the early 1970s, however, paleoanthropology has been clearing out the china cupboard in which long cherished but completely outdated theories were stored. That this clean-up has become possible is largely due to the efforts of those who led the search for the so-called 'Missing Links.' Their searches enjoy great public interest, but also intense scientific debate in a number of journals such as *Science*, *Nature*, and *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*.

The next part of this series of articles will discuss some of Elias's ideas that he put forward in his book *Involvement and Detachment*, especially his ideas about 'detour via detachment' (Elias, 1987).

## Notes

1. Compare Farb & Armelagos, 1983, pp. 60-62.
2. Compare Brace, 1962, 1977; Dart, 1946, 1950, 1968abc, 1969; Mew, 1982, 2004; Staring, 1987ab, 2005, pp. 289-294.
3. Compare also Elias, 1992a, pp. 82-147.
4. Compare also Blumenthal, 2014; Goudsblom & Mennell (Eds.), 1998; Goudsblom & Wilterdink (Eds.), 2000; Heilbron & Wilterdink (Eds.), 2023; Kilminster, 2007; Li, 1999; Mennell, 1989, 2007; Salumets (Ed.), 2001; Shilling, 1993, 2004; Wouters, 2007, 2008.

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