

## Elias and Bourdieu\*

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### Abstract

The primary goal of this article is to uncover the deep-seated conceptual affinities between Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias. The second goal is to demonstrate that, in part because of their diverging sensitivities, when taken together the two authors' highly compatible approaches yield a vision more fertile than either of their sociological perspectives considered separately. Tracing the intellectual roots of the two authors' three core concepts – habitus, field/figuration, and power/capital – we show how they selectively appropriated from their predecessors. We then outline how each of the two authors used their overlapping triadic approaches to interrogate a range of empirical phenomena. Attempting to make the authors' unexploited complementarity more tangible, we reflect on a simultaneously Elias- and Bourdieu-inspired approach to the body-centred world of sport. The conclusion argues that looking back at Elias and Bourdieu's theoretical contributions together can revitalize our conceptualizing and investigating of human societies in the future.

### Keywords

complementarity, field/figuration, habitus, power/capital, processual, relational, subterranean affinities

The deeper one penetrates the universes of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, the clearer it becomes: the similarities between their visions of society are striking. While the two sociologists always showed great sympathy for one another,<sup>1</sup> there are no indications that they were fully aware of how fundamental the subterranean intellectual affinities were.<sup>2</sup> And even though many social scientists combine a high regard for some of Elias's works with great admiration for several works by Bourdieu, thereby showing an instinctive sense

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of the affinities between these authors, until now it seems that no one has noticed the degree to which Bourdieu and Elias are intellectual siblings. The contributions of each have been highlighted in convincing work – in the case of Elias, for example, by Goudsblom (1987), and, in the case of Bourdieu, by the likes of Wacquant (2006). Even in such careful and judicious accounts, however, important connections between the two authors have remained either hidden or implicit. Engaging in some degree of excavation, this article brings to light why Bourdieu and Elias can be viewed as contributors to a single theoretical approach. The most important finding here is that both relied heavily on the same triad of core concepts, and both deployed those concepts in a relentlessly relational and processual fashion. Our first goal, therefore, is to uncover these deep-seated conceptual affinities.

Our second goal is to demonstrate that, when taken together, the two authors' perspectives yield a vision more far-reaching and powerful than either considered separately. More concretely, we hope to show that researchers drawing simultaneously upon Elias and Bourdieu can systematically overcome decades of misguided dichotomies in social thought, dichotomies such as those between individual and society, subject and object, the internal and the external, reason and emotion, the soul and the flesh.

One can easily imagine why the deep-seated affinities and compatibilities between Elias and Bourdieu might have been overlooked.<sup>3</sup> To begin with, Elias's seminal works were written in German in the years leading up to the Second World War. Bourdieu started producing his most important contributions in French roughly a quarter-century after the war. Their at times poorly (and belatedly) translated works appear quite different from one another and seem to refer to very different networks of conceptual resources, or to what Elias later in life would term 'means of speaking and thinking' (1978 [1970]: 111–113). More importantly, Elias was associated primarily with the study of grand historical developments spanning several centuries. Bourdieu is most famous for his work on socio-cultural reproduction during the 1970s. Elias felt that our stocks of sociological knowledge are still too primitive to be of much practical use in political matters (compare Elias, 1956, 1987b). Although a staunch defender of a genuinely reflexive sociological field, Bourdieu did engage openly in political debates during various episodes of his life.<sup>4</sup> No wonder, then, that most (if not all) of the profound similarities between these authors continue to escape so many standard textbook accounts (for example, Ritzer and Goodman, 2004) and remain implicit even in more thorough and discerning studies (Kilminster, 2007; Shusterman, 1999; van Krieken, 1998).

Yet, the affinities between the two social thinkers should come as no surprise. To a significant extent, Elias and Bourdieu were exposed to the same intellectual currents during their formative years. They studied the works of Marx and Weber, felt the influence of philosophers such as Husserl, Cassirer, and Heidegger, and – perhaps most crucially – evinced a deep understanding of Durkheimian thought. In their biographies, one can also detect similarities. Both men felt in certain periods of their lives the sting of being outsiders. Both showed a tremendous energy in fighting their way into the castles of academic excellence. Both experienced, body and soul, how processes of inclusion and exclusion can restrict one's freedom of movement in various social fields. And, when the time came to collect the highest rewards the academic community has to offer, both discovered that such accolades do not alleviate the pain of scars for which there is no healing process. These parallels along biographical, social, and intellectual dimensions all help to explain the affinities between the two men.

What immediately follows is an introduction to the three core concepts re-crafted and deployed by both authors: habitus, field, and power. While this is not the place to investigate the formation of these concepts in a systematic fashion, we think it is useful to begin with a brief discussion tracing their intellectual roots. In the main body of this article, we examine how each of our two authors deployed his three main conceptual devices to interrogate a range of empirical phenomena. We do not offer here a thorough exposition of these authors' theories or an exhaustive overview of their empirical engagements. We do, however, direct attention to various convergences that until now have been left largely out of account, showing how themes developed by Bourdieu and Elias are actually expressions of one common way of depicting the social world. After drawing attention to this common perspective, we move to a direct example of both the two authors' complementarity and their important differences of emphasis. Specifically, we reflect on their respective approaches to the rather anti-intellectual and body-centred world of sport. We conclude by discussing how the basically harmonious outlook demonstrated in this article might have a bearing on relational and processual theorizing in the future.

### Identifying (the roots of) the triad<sup>5</sup>

... the pretension to be what one is not [leads to] insecurity of taste and conduct, 'vulgarity'. ... The attempt does not succeed. ... the attempt to achieve the poise of the upper class leads in most cases to a particular falseness and incongruity of behavior which nevertheless conceals a genuine distress, a despair to escape the pressure from above and the sense of inferiority.

(Elias, 1994 [1939]: 508)

Despite some confusion on this topic, which will be cleared up below, it remains the case that Elias was working extensively with habitus long before Bourdieu had ever heard of the term. The idea was crucial to both thinkers. Throughout most of their major writings, both used the term 'habitus' or some similar notion – such as 'second nature' (or, in Bourdieu's case, a 'feel for the game') – frequently and in prominent fashion (for example, Bourdieu, 1990a [1980]: 66 and 2000 [1997]: 211; Elias, 1994 [1939]: 447 and 1983 [1969]: 241).

As terms like 'second nature' make plain, Elias and Bourdieu sought to emphasize the importance of taken-for-granted ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting on the part of (more or less) competent actors immersed in their everyday practices. Both focused on practical action and knowledge because they understood that, in real time and space, human conduct tends to be orchestrated from 'within' by dispositions functioning primarily beneath the level of discursive consciousness. Understanding habitus as a system of acquired dispositions allowed them to act upon their belief that, at bottom, our responses and practices are based on prediscursive familiarity with the social worlds we inhabit. It helped both authors systematically to address how incorporated dispositions can be triggered – and to some degree reconstituted (especially early in life) – by networks of unfolding solicitations and sanctions.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of habitus allowed both Elias and Bourdieu to escape the subject–object dichotomy and to get beyond the myth of the self-contained knowing subject. It enabled

them to explore the social constitution as well as the largely unconscious here-and-now functioning of 'self-steering apparatus(es)', to use one of Elias's (1994 [1939]: 456) alternative terms for habitus, of agents absorbed into, and to varying degrees remade by, influences emanating from the 'outside' world. Crucially, both authors saw that the responses generated from 'within' by the habitus tend not to be the responses of thinking (let alone calculating) subjects standing apart from explicitly conceptualized objects. Both rejected the view that real-time actions of living agents require the mediation of self-contained and explicit mental representations. For Elias as well as for Bourdieu, the practical appraisals of the habitus-in-action tended to be those of the 'open' or 'exposed' person who has gradually come to feel so at home in (or at least prediscursively absorbed by) an objective situation that time- and energy-consuming explicit mental representations might only get in the way.

Aspects of this kind of thinking are reminiscent of any number of philosophical streams, such as American pragmatism (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan, in press). Above all, however, we find evidence here of massive influence from someone who, along with Elias, was studying with Husserl in Freiburg during the 1920s: Martin Heidegger.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Bourdieu, who was much more forthcoming about his intellectual inheritance than Elias, there is no mystery about the fundamental influence of Heidegger and of the 'philosopher of the flesh': Merleau-Ponty.<sup>8</sup> Thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty not only broke with Cartesian thinking about self-contained agents existing somehow outside social structures, but they did this in terms anticipating the sociological language that Elias and Bourdieu would later come to speak fluently. Armed with sociologically grounded versions of what – in these predecessors – had been phenomenological and ontological concepts, Elias and Bourdieu got past the problematic division of 'inner' (and somehow static) selves, on the one hand, and bounded flows of moods, meanings, and mechanisms operating in various social contexts, on the other.

Of course, much of the thinking that we might associate with beings-in-the-social-world preceded even Heidegger. In his treatise on *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, published originally in 1895, Durkheim warned against the tendency to reduce '*les faits sociaux*' to the level of individual consciousness. The realm of the social, he argued, has a dynamic all of its own *vis-à-vis* that of psychological facts. The social dimension constitutes '*une réalité sui generis*'. Durkheim was outspoken in claiming that '[s]ociety is not a mere sum of individuals. Rather, the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics' (1966 [1895]: 103).<sup>9</sup> In his later masterpiece, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]), he maintained not only that society was the driving force behind religion but also that, through their (effervescent) religious practices, people actually worshipped society. Look into the heart of the individual, he contended, and you will find the social. In part because Elias and Bourdieu knew their Durkheim so well, they saw the need for reasonably identifiable social worlds characterized by their own internal logics. Both grasped, as Mead had also done before them, that 'human nature' is social through and through. Nevertheless, 'society' was, for both our students of Durkheim, far too blunt an instrument.

Enter Max Weber, the theorist of life orders. Whether they opted for field or figuration, Elias and Bourdieu were empirically and theoretically at their best when they put Weber's concept of life orders to work by meticulously examining specific bundles of shifting social relations among interdependent people, positions, and institutions within a broader society. As our discussions below will document, particular social microcosms (court

society, the field of cultural production, the world of sport) embedded in larger social universes (for example, France) served as our authors' most useful units of analysis.

Using Weber's (as well as Durkheim's) notions of relatively autonomous social contexts, Elias and Bourdieu systematically investigated how specific social configurations, conceptualized both on micro and on macro levels, serve as the sources of second natures and as the dynamic contexts in which habitus (plural) function. Both stressed that the social forces generated in relatively autonomous relational contexts tend to be more compelling than the second natures of even the most powerful individuals constituting them. They also demonstrated, however, that it ultimately makes no sense to analyse in isolation either figurational dynamics or the functioning and formation of habitus.

Introducing the dialectic of second natures and social structures, we have already hinted at the two authors' concepts of power, or, as Bourdieu called it, capital. (Their shared inclination to focus on objective distributions of power brings to mind, of course, the materialist sociology of Karl Marx.) Elias and Bourdieu understood that individuals and groups accumulate different amounts and types of (non-economic) power resources; both stressed that these power resources always emerge out of, function within, and restructure unfolding social configurations. Albeit in diverging contexts, both documented how second natures well suited to specific settings often serve as indispensable assets. No matter what terms they used (power ratios, species of capital), it was impossible for either author to conceptualize social structural dynamics (or the formation and workings of habitus) outside objective distributions of power resources.

## The triad as deployed by Bourdieu

Such notions as habitus, field, and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96)

Bourdieu's analytic approach is based on a triad of interdependent core concepts. As he (like Elias) never tired of reminding us, this theoretical system arose gradually out of ongoing 'confrontations' with diverse empirical realities. These confrontations began in the late 1950s and early 1960s both in Algeria (during the war of independence) and in his native Béarn (during a period when proto-urbanization was forcing even the more intelligent, handsome, and landed men of his rural village into celibacy). Then, after the early 1960s, Bourdieu (with Passeron) shifted to other questions, such as why the children of secondary school teachers tend to do better in the French educational system than the offspring of bankers. Dealing first and foremost with empirical questions related to structural change and reproduction, he felt impelled to start thinking about relations to 'legitimate' culture as themselves a vitally important source of power. Early studies of cultural capital and education would lead, of course, to Bourdieu's attack – in *Distinction* (1984 [1979]) – on Kantian notions of context-free discriminations and relations to culture. More convincingly (or at least more provocatively) than any sociological study up to that moment, his investigation in that latter work of a specific field – class relations in France during the 1970s – would link aesthetic dispositions to ongoing forms of 'naturalized' class-based oppression.

Unfortunately, some of his early works – such as *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 [1970]) – and some of his mid-career works – such as *Distinction* – are frequently misinterpreted as arguing (at least implicitly) that social reproduction works in the form of a closed loop, with objectively unequal social structural positions generating more or less ‘legitimate’ cultural skills and dispositions that, in turn, regenerate the same basic socioeconomic inequalities. The label used to characterize Bourdieu on these grounds was ‘reproduction theorist’. Truth be told, Bourdieu was a sociologist of shifting configurations of power. Bourdieusian fields are ‘spaces’ of ongoing historical contestation temporarily objectified in the form of hierarchical positions (occupied, for example, by agents or institutions).<sup>10</sup> To interrogate the sets of dispositions operating largely beneath the surface of discursive consciousness among the people making up these social fields, Bourdieu relied on his reworked notion of ‘history turned flesh’: habitus. As terms like ‘second nature’ and ‘feel for the game’ imply, habitus was basically the effect of previous conditionings associated with specific (class) positionings and understood as ‘social injunctions addressed not to the intellect but to the body’ (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 141). Because people socialized into specific classes (or, better yet, into specific regions of the larger social space) tended to be exposed to similar conditions and conditionings, this approach made it possible to bring macro-level realities (for example, the class structure of France) into analyses of micro-level dynamics (for example, taken-for-granted feelings about what is appropriate for ‘our kind’ in specific educational, residential, or economic contexts). Our ‘primary’ and ‘specific’ second natures were the embodied effects of our social trajectories through specific (positions within specific) fields. Once crystallized, these durable systems of dispositions would govern our responses to unfolding situations in the here-and-now as well as our (preconscious) orientations to the future.<sup>11</sup> Here again, the guiding principle was not that of habitus formation necessarily leading to social reproduction but, rather, that of more and less empowering habitus formation processes leading to better or worse ‘fits’ within emerging social realities.

Crucially, then, Bourdieu (1986) argued that second natures can operate as forms of capital (specifically, cultural capital in the embodied form). Yet, capital – whether in its embodied form or in any other form – can exist only within specific fields and during specific intervals. Power resources are scarce and therefore distinctive, not because of possessing any timeless or essential attributes, but because they are the temporary effects of symbolic struggles (that is, struggles over valuations of various species and amounts of capital) that took place in the past. Shifting and largely unconscious or habituated valuations can create, temporarily maintain, and destroy capitals. They can set up, preserve, and redefine the boundaries and principles of division of a Bourdieusian field.

After *Distinction*, Bourdieu deployed his triad of core concepts in investigations of empirical objects as diverse as sport, French housing markets, and shifting modes of masculine domination. He also continued to deal with culture, for example, in *The Rules of Art* (1996b [1992]) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). Upon closer examination of these important works, what is most striking is the unwaveringly relational and processual deployment of all three of his main concepts.

Bourdieu’s studies of power dynamics and culture all rest on a certain understanding of social space. The latter was, for this son of a sharecropper-turned-post-office worker from south-western France, a universe of ongoing struggle. Privileging economic and cultural



capital, Bourdieu postulated atop the social space a more delimited ‘field of power’ – that is, an arena within which ‘dominant dominants’ were engaged in continual struggles with ‘dominated dominants’. Those most advantaged in these struggles were people, organizations, and fields (for example, the field of corporate law firms and the field of high finance) associated with relatively greater amounts of economic capital and relatively lesser amounts of cultural capital. Those least advantaged were people more or less like the authors and readers of this paper (social scientists, although Bourdieu also mentioned artists), organizations like the ones we belong to (universities, but also various other cultural institutions), and fields such as our own (sociology, but more broadly the field of cultural production).

The nature of the power struggle and ongoing dynamics of this field of power, as of all Bourdieusian fields, are clear from the moment this picture is sketched. Social life is inherently processual, even if the current state of affairs is mapped out two-dimensionally and even if it is pointed out that, ultimately, the ministry of culture carries less weight than the ministry of finance. The question is always who (or what) is anchored into which more or less dominant positions because of which species and amounts of capital. This, in turn, is always related to the questions of how habitually (‘naturally’) recognized valuations of various forms of capital emerge, how they are reproduced, and how they are (or might be) altered.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately we see, then, that the big picture has to do with (symbolic) struggle, ongoing oppression, (potential) resistance, and perpetual change. The next step in the study of fields of cultural production is perhaps the most theoretically inspired. Examining fields of practice within this overall dynamic structure, we find, yet again, spaces of ‘play’. Even if Bourdieu at times gave the impression that his objects of study were reified structures at rest, he in fact saw fields as sites of ongoing contestation on the part of differently positioned and empowered actors. To get a better sense of this, let us focus here on the French literary field so carefully examined in *The Rules of Art*.

Highlighting the space of possible moves presented to and (to some degree) created by Flaubert, Bourdieu theorized and documented the genesis and increasing autonomy of the French literary field in the nineteenth century. Within what eventually emerged as the modern literary field, he drew our attention to the ongoing struggle between avant-garde and established artists (that is, the people and organizations occupying the two main poles of the field, poles organized around different types of assets and capitals). For Bourdieu, there was no possibility of understanding what goes on at one or the other of these two poles in abstraction from what goes on in the rest of the relational context (understood as itself a referential totality). For example, because of their positions within the overall field as well as their unique relation to forces outside it, the established tended to favour more conservative symbolic strategies and position-takings – especially those associated with ‘bourgeois’ literature (but also, at times, those identified with ‘social art’). In the ‘economic world inverted’ that he was helping to create even as it created him, Flaubert lambasted these artists who tried to make their aesthetic intentions clear to potential audiences and congratulated those who remained inaccessible. ‘I do not know if there exists in French a more beautiful page of prose’, he declared to a lesser-known revolutionary (quoted in Bourdieu, 1996b [1992]: 79). ‘It is splendid and I am sure that the bourgeois don’t understand a word of it. So much the better.’ Members of the avant-garde – sensing the relative positions of all involved, as well as where their field as a whole stood in relation to the

broader *espace social* – gravitated towards position-takings that challenged the authority of established writers, institutions, styles, and conventions (for example, political and aesthetic detachment). Hence, we see the ongoing dynamic. As a result of becoming too commercial according to a pre-existing yardstick for judging such matters, or perhaps owing to a fall from grace precipitated by the introduction of new valuations, or possibly even because of death, the once-established would either leave the field or lose their grip on superior positions. Some members of the (more or less marginal) avant-garde would then ease into those more established positions, where the temptation to ‘sell out’ would become harder to resist. This, in turn, would open up space for still more newcomers to the avant-garde.

Flaubert offers a perfect example of how early socialization (in his case, the formation of an aristocratic primary habitus) could trigger an initial belief in the game – the faith or ‘*illusio*’ that entering the field is worth the trouble – and serve as itself a crucial power resource. Disgusted by bourgeois styles no less than by literature ‘for the people’, Flaubert was predisposed towards risks that others would never have dreamed of taking. The logic of the field he so heavily influenced (i.e. the expectations, valuations, desires, related to different positions and distributions of power) seeped into all the subjectivities of those who paid the price of admission and entered the field for an extended period. Those who became familiar with the field’s internal dynamics – those who were deeply and durably shaped by it – tended to acquire an additional specific habitus that could only result from extended exposure to such a specific set of everyday conditions and conditionings. Thus is explained the inclination towards art that is authentically and exclusively for art’s sake, even and perhaps especially when it is inaccessible to ‘the people’ or ‘the bourgeoisie’ – an inclination that appears ‘irrational’ to those caught up in the logics of other fields.

## The triad as deployed by Elias

From the interweaving of countless individual interests and intentions ... something comes into being that was planned and intended by none of these individuals, yet has emerged nevertheless from their intentions and actions .... The understanding of a formation of this kind requires a breakthrough to a still little-known level of reality: to the level of the immanent regularities of social relationships, *the field of relational dynamics*.

(Elias, 1994 [1939]: 389, italics added)

As indicated by these closing sentences of the penultimate empirical chapter of *The Civilizing Process*, Elias liked to end his arguments with a bang. Interestingly, the key term here was not *figuration* but *field*.<sup>13</sup> What did he mean by this term? The best way to show how Elias deployed it is to bring it to life.

The paradigmatic illustration of the field of relational dynamics, as Elias understood it, is found in his repeated discussions of Louis XIV. Even in the case of this person who may have believed himself to be the state (*‘L’état c’est moi’*), Elias looked not at the single entity but all around it, beneath it, and beyond it. Feelings, thoughts, and actions were always depicted in relation to shifting balances of power at the macro-level (the position of nobles *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie), at various institutional meso-levels (dynamics within



court society, bourgeois families), and in micro-level here-and-now experiences (ways of interacting during various ceremonies of the court). While the Sun King managed to remain at the centre of a tension-filled and multisided balance of power, Elias showed that even this absolute monarch was effectively pushed and pulled by figurational pressures emanating from all quarters (for example, competing factions of rising and declining dominant groups, and pressures from subdominant groups).

In both *The Court Society* and *The Civilizing Process*, Elias detailed the most important effects of the lengthening 'chains of interdependence' creating and sustaining radical levels of inequality during the Sun King's reign. One especially compelling image illustrates this point. Successful (and ascending) members of the king's court did not merely resist the impulse to draw their swords when challenged, as their forefathers had almost automatically done. In many cases, the adequately socialized members of this new kind of dominant class resisted the impulse even to raise an eyebrow. Often they took insults in their stride as they plotted possible future retaliations. Yet, given that they *were* – effectively – the networks of relations and intrigue in which they had been formed, they almost automatically grasped that temporary alliances with enemies could help them defeat an even more important enemy (or avoid being undone by a more important challenge) down the road.

In these early yet seminal works, Elias also showed that chains or 'webs' of interdependence produced such intense fantasies about the inherent superiority of the aristocracy – and such intense collective fears about downward mobility – that all the social dominants found themselves trapped in tedious postures and ceremonial displays of etiquette. On and beneath conscious levels, all involved were fundamentally influenced by the courtly social relations and repeated experiences into which they had been thrust. Crucially, even the Sun King himself was ultimately powerless to bring about adaptations in this state of affairs. Here we might cite a passage from Elias's *The Court Society*, one that Bourdieu (1996a [1989]: 129) also found important enough to quote at length:

In the last analysis this compelling struggle for ever-threatened power and prestige was the dominant factor that condemned all those involved to enact these burdensome ceremonies. No single person within the figuration was able to initiate a reform of the tradition. Every slightest attempt to reform, to change the precarious structure of tensions, inevitably entailed an upheaval, a reduction or even abolition of the rights of certain individuals and families. To jeopardize such privileges was, to the ruling class of this society, a kind of taboo. The attempt would be opposed by broad sections of the privileged who feared, perhaps not without justification, that the whole system of rule that gave them privilege would be threatened or would collapse if the slightest detail of the traditional order were altered. So everything remained as it was.

A central point here is that the king and his court were basically held hostage by the very figurational dynamics they temporarily dominated. Elias's primary interest, however, was not in how dominant groups were dominated by their own positional advantage. His point was that potent figurational pressures (such as those related to distributions of power, 'courtly' behavioural norms, collective ways of feeling, and worldviews) predated the absolute monarch, governed the king and his court for a time, and then carried on after the Sun King and his courtiers were dead. Indeed, Elias showed how the very sociogenetic

(that is, structural) pressures the Sun King dominated would, in altered form, ultimately lead some of the king's own kind to the guillotine.

Even in this case characterized by some of the most extreme power differentials ever recorded, for Elias the question was never 'Who is in control?'; rather, the properly sociological question was how particular responses (socialization pressures, feelings, thoughts) temporarily emanate from specific figurational developments (conceptualized across more macro- and micro-domains and in terms of longer- or shorter-term processes). The key features ostensibly 'of' the individuals and groups Elias examined (for example, natural poise in elite social gatherings, refined tastes, relatively high degrees of emotional self-control) did not exist outside the social networks in which the king and his courtiers found themselves. And none of these open human beings (*homines aperti*) could possibly have remained essentially unchanged throughout their ongoing interrelations.

From this perspective, it makes no sense to think about some 'true', deep down, non-social 'self'. For Elias at least, these early studies of 'courtization' put the nail in the coffin of the eternal soul, the transcendental subject, the utility-maximizing individual with a fixed preference schedule. Using the more or less intentional and meaningful actions of the Sun King and his court as the limiting case, he argued that nearly all 'our' actions and attributes are actually produced *within* dynamic chains of interdependence in which we are temporarily caught. The focus, therefore, must remain on shifting networks of interdependent actors. Social relations and pressures operative in the kinds of figurations worthy of our sustained attention are the very stuff of the passions, worldviews, and levels of emotional self-control 'of individuals'.

Hence, the notion of figurational dynamics helped Elias to escape the grip of 'naïve egocentricity' – as well as to decontextualize substantialist categorizations more generally – and therefore to arrive at ways of speaking and thinking based on the fundamental interdependence of human beings within continually unfolding social settings just as real as the individuals constituting them.<sup>14</sup> Elias's notion of penetrating, yet fluid-like, social structures helped him to grasp how self-restraint and a predisposition towards the use of a good deal of foresight were associated with 'civilizing' pressures (as well as 'decivilizing' surges) that could fruitfully be examined over the course of many centuries.<sup>15</sup>

Elias's approach to fields of relational dynamics was based on the assumption that not even the effects of the enculturation process for which he is most famous could be decontextualized (that is, understood outside specific social configurations) and reduced to some kind of substance that is inherently advantageous or disadvantageous. As he and Scotson argued, '... every element in a configuration and all of its properties are what they are only by virtue of their position and function within a configuration' (Elias and Scotson, 1994 [1965]: 10). Sensing the utility of his approach to figurations, Elias never stopped advising sociologists to 'work out' from these shifting relational wholes 'to the elements involved in them' (1978 [1970]: 116). Aware of how difficult it would be to break with modes of substantialist thinking which had become embedded in the very languages we speak, he reiterated that it 'is a scientific superstition that in order to investigate them scientifically one must necessarily dissect processes of interweaving into their component parts' (1978 [1970]: 98). In his more polemical remarks, Elias associated substantialist thinking with *Zustandreduktion*, the reduction of what are in fact unfolding processes to

frozen states (compare Goudsblom and Mennell, 1998: 143), and he accused many of his colleagues of ‘retreating into the present’ (Elias, 1987b).

Let us now shift our focus from social configurations to habitus. Elias, like many other intellectuals in inter-bellum Germany, used this term frequently. This is often overlooked in part because ‘habitus’ was translated in the English version of *The Civilizing Process* as ‘personality structure’ or ‘personality makeup’.<sup>16</sup> There can, however, be no doubt about Elias’s reliance on his notion of habitus in all his writings, from his early masterpiece, *The Civilizing Process*, to *The Germans* – a book, written towards the end of his life, in which he attempted to deal with the deeper causes of the ‘breakdown of civilization’. As Elias wrote in the introduction to that latter work, which featured the term ‘habitus’ in its subtitle, ‘The central question is how the fortunes of a nation over the centuries became sedimented into the habitus of its individual members’ (1996 [1989]: 19). Instead of slavishly sticking to poor translations and awkward terms, we need to take a closer look at what the concept of habitus allowed Elias to accomplish.

It is true that Elias’s analyses of habitus formation often stretched back to the ‘dark ages’. And he is most famous for connecting state formation and other longer-term, macro-level processes to structural transformations in everyday social relations that exerted more or less ‘civilizing’ influences.<sup>17</sup> Yet, he was by no means interested exclusively in longer-term socialization processes. There is another – less well-known – Elias, who had a sharp eye for processes related to contemporary child-rearing techniques, adolescent socializing practices, and the extended and specialized training now required for a reasonable chance at success in ‘fields of adult activities’ (Elias, 1991 [1987]: 123; see also Elias, 1996 [1989]: 268; Elias and Dunning, 1986; Elias and Scotson, 1994 [1965]).<sup>18</sup>

Whether he was taking the long view or not, as we mentioned at the outset, Elias relied on habitus largely because it helped him to arrive at a more fundamental understanding of how internal steering mechanisms function. For the most part, second natures operate not only *in situ* but also beneath the level of consciousness. Expressing this crucial insight early in his career, Elias argued that

[c]ivilization ... is not a process within a separate sphere of ‘ideas’ or ‘thought’. It does not involve solely changes of ‘knowledge’, transformations of ‘ideologies’, in short alterations of the *content* of consciousness, but changes in the whole human makeup, within which ideas and habits of thought are only a single sector. ... [E]very investigation that considers only the consciousness of men, their ‘reason’ or ‘ideas’, while disregarding the structure of drives, the direction and form of human affects and passions, can be from the outset of only limited value.

(1994 [1939]: 485–486, italics in original)

Elias saw that, in specific cases and during certain periods, habitus development could lag behind social structural transformations. Here we might return to the gradual ‘courtization’ of the warrior class in late medieval Europe. For the first warriors undergoing transitions into new types of social spheres – contexts in which outbursts of violence (or otherwise ‘giving free play to the emotions’) put one at a distinct disadvantage – courtly manners were far from automatic. Elias argued that the ways of being required by the new situation were anything but second nature to these newly ‘civilized’ warriors. Only if one

took a longer view on courtization could one grasp that habitus formation and social structural transformations are interdependent aspects of the same underlying development.<sup>19</sup>

So even if the concept of figuration can be treated as the first among equals, in Elias's scheme, there is another interpretation that is no less compelling. Thinking in terms of a unified process encompassing both structural dynamics and habitus formation processes, it would be senseless to say that either the first or the second is the prime motor of social development. Indeed, we find Elias using habitus-in-figurations – just as Bourdieu did – to reject the very dichotomy between internal and external worlds.<sup>20</sup>

Although Bourdieu certainly elaborated on Elias's ideas about power, both authors can also be treated essentially as sociologists of *shifting configurations of power*. Elias never assumed that people would be able adequately to appraise, let alone put into words, the ways in which power relations emerge and operate within the figurations they comprise. Much like Bourdieu, he regarded a staunchly realist (objectivizing) delineation of changing power imbalances to be the primary task of the sociologist. For him, it often went without saying that social configurations are always configurations of power and that the second natures operating in them (and to varying degrees produced by them) are by definition more or less empowering. After all, shifting 'power ratios' (or ever-changing 'balances' or 'distributions' of 'power chances') were, for Elias, the very stuff of human interdependence. From his perspective, people do not just need other people (for everything from physical and emotional contact to cognitive orientations); they need others – and are naturally oriented towards others – who are *objectively* more or less powerful than themselves. There are no feelings or thoughts about group formation (for example, I or we are 'Irish') outside of power relations (for example, with 'the English'). It would be absurd, Elias believed, to consider the habitus of a person or group as somehow separate from the (longer- or shorter-term) effects of specific experiences within specifically structured configurations of power. And to thematize a person's (or a group's) habitus was always already to discuss what is at least potentially a scarce power resource.

One of the clearest treatments of power resources in Elias came in his work with Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 1994 [1965]). In this book, which now includes an introduction entitled 'A Theoretical Essay on Established and Outsider Relations' (added in 1976), Elias showed how newcomers to a working-class neighbourhood in 'Winston Parva' (a pseudonym for a city in the British Midlands) were effectively forced into feeling inferior, as a group, to the more 'established' residents of the same neighbourhood. The key here was that emotionally charged group-formation processes took place despite the fact that the newer and older sets of residents had the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. True to form, Elias documented how feelings of 'group disgrace' no less than fantasies of 'group charisma' could not possibly be understood unless the overall field of relational dynamics served as the point of departure and the basic unit of analysis. Power was more explicitly thematized here than in other works because none of the usual suspects (income level, education, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation) could help one to get a grip on the basic social divisions structuring the field of relational dynamics under interrogation.

Although this theoretical introduction showed how established and outsider figurations could be analysed by reference to long-term developments, *The Established and the*

*Outsiders* itself was not based on the *longue durée*. After relating current visions and divisions to slightly longer-term developments (the newcomers had ‘only’ been living in Winston Parva for at most two or three generations), Elias and Scotson focused on the directly observable present. While the element of time remained crucial to their overall argument, their detailed analyses were based on here-and-now manifestations of the time-bound conflict. However, the conceptual approach taken in this study of unexpected power differentials was just as processual as those taken in studies based on developments over the course of several centuries. While delving into here-and-now aspects of a single community’s (dis)integration issues, Elias based his analyses on ongoing transactions in a well-defined relational context of action, rather than on static entities presumed to exist before their interactions with one another. For Elias, focusing on self-enclosed individuals, the attributes of a given social group, or some disembedded belief system was never an option. And, of course, objective differences in position and prestige, too, had to be approached relationally as well as processually.

So what was the difference that made the difference in this particular setting? Why would the ‘established’ working-class residents see themselves as a ‘group’ over and above the ‘group’ of working-class residents who had ‘only’ been living in an adjacent part of the same neighbourhood for two or three generations? Most importantly, why were the newcomers effectively forced to measure themselves with a yardstick based on ‘established’ behavioural norms? The answer is that, relative to ‘outsiders’, the ‘established’ group displayed relatively high degrees of social cohesion and integration. A higher degree of social control and a more tightly knit network allowed members of the established group to maintain myths about their intrinsic superiority as well as about the inherent, and therefore all the more shameful, inferiority of the newcomers.

Crucially, then, Elias and Scotson found that ‘outsiders’ were effectively unable to make up their own minds. They were forced by the compelling logic of the overall figuration and by virtue of the power wielded by the established residents to accept a stigmatizing view of their ‘kind’ and themselves. Yet, because of their positions *vis-à-vis* the less powerful outsiders, the established in Winston Parva were also led into collective fantasies about their own superiority and about the need to maintain a certain distance from members of the inferior group. They were led by the structure and logic of figurational dynamics to adopt ideas and practices that seem to us no less absurd than the powdered wigs of eighteenth-century France.<sup>21</sup>

*The Established and the Outsiders* contains still more theorizing about how different types of power worked in this conflicted community. For instance, Elias and Scotson explained why the mud that ‘established’ residents were successfully slinging would sooner or later stop sticking to the wall: ‘Without their power’, they wrote, ‘the claim to a higher status and a specific charisma would soon decay and sound hollow whatever the distinctiveness of their behaviour’ (1994: 155). In other words, neither utterances nor modes of behaviour (that is, visible interactions) really drove the dynamics of stigmatization. Less visible yet objective power differentials prestructured the dynamics of stigmatization and the overall pattern of community relations.

Elias’s empirical investigation of Winston Parva seems to have deeply influenced his thinking about the properties of figurations more generally. As the 1976 introduction indicates, he stressed that, whether or not extreme power inequalities were obviously

present, figurations were marked by more established (dominant) and less established (dominated) poles. Indeed, he claimed to see evidence of the selfsame ‘pattern of stigmatization used by high power groups in relation to their outsider groups ... all over the world in spite of ... cultural differences ... [and even in settings where such dynamics] may at first be a little unexpected’ (1994 [1939]: xxvi). Drawing from an array of historical examples in that introduction, he argued that different kinds of power inequalities generate basically similar types of fantasies about the innate inferiority of groups characterized by less positional power. He held that, despite what one might see at first glance, the most fundamental power inequalities are never really based on such dimensions as race, caste, or ethnicity. If one goes back far enough, one finds that underlying forms of interdependence marked by objective power imbalances are precisely what prestructures social constructions of racial, caste, or ethnic groupness and otherness. These underlying, objective power inequities are what ensure that stigmatizing attributions and classifications will be effective – in the minds of both the established and the outsiders. In setting after setting, it is ‘the very condition of their outsider position and the humiliation and oppression that go with it’ (Elias, 1994 [1939]: xxvi) that enable and reproduce myths about (biological) attributes related to so-called racial, caste, or ethnic groups.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Established and the Outsiders* we arrive at something very close to Bourdieu’s notions of social and symbolic capital. And similarities in terms of their thinking about power do not end here. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu claimed that Elias was insufficiently sensitive to the properly *symbolic* power of the state and that the older master ‘always fail[ed] to ask who benefits and suffers’ from a state’s monopoly over the use of legitimate violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 92–93). Yet, Elias’s depiction of state formation in *The Civilizing Process* was explicitly and repeatedly linked to emerging class structures, most importantly in what would eventually become France. One of the main ideas here was that, to survive during the late Middle Ages, socially dominant groups had to monopolize the legitimate use of physical violence over ever-larger populations and segments of land. Elias showed in detail that some stood to gain, while others were killed or forced to suffer as this process unfolded.

Elias and Bourdieu can, therefore, be treated as sociologists of power. And, on closer examination one finds profound similarities even in the ways they expressed their notions of (non-economic) power resources. The concept of the state monopoly over the ‘means of violence’ in the work of Elias was intended to counteract the economic determinism in Marx’s theory, the notion that the bourgeoisie monopolized the ‘means of production’. (Although Weber’s definition of the state centred on the ‘monopoly of the legitimate use of violence’, he did use the term ‘means’ in this context.) Bourdieu tried to escape from a similar kind of Marxist ‘economism’ by adding to the classical concept of economic capital other types of capital: cultural, social, and symbolic types of assets being the most noteworthy. Thinking with and against Marx, both Elias and Bourdieu based their analyses on objective power differentials yet steered away from an approach that exaggerated the pervasiveness of economic forces in social life. Furthermore, their understanding of context-specific forms of power – in Elias’s case, continua between poles analogous to those in Bourdieu’s field-based approach to power struggles – should be seen as one of their primary analytic insights, right alongside those of figuration and habitus.



As this discussion of power *vis-à-vis* habitus and field has documented, in Elias's hands these three main concepts merged into one extremely fruitful point of view. Therefore, just as with Bourdieu, when considering Elias's work we ought rather to speak of a triune than of a triadic approach to the study of social life.

## Sport: Twists and turns towards a hand-in-hand approach

Elias and Bourdieu were the only major sociologists of the twentieth century to take sport seriously. This is not the place to go into any great detail regarding this matter, but even a brief sketch of their overlapping approaches to the topic – combined with some summary reflections on what an Elias- and Bourdieu-inspired approach to sport might look like – can offer examples of uncanny and far-reaching complementarity.

In his 'Essay on Sport and Violence', Elias's theoretical sensitivities led him to investigate the "sportization" of pastimes' in England as a particularly noteworthy example of a 'civilizing spurt' (Elias and Dunning, 1986: 22).<sup>23</sup> Starting in times when life and leisure seemed especially nasty and brutish – and then citing examples of the increasing pacification of the dominant classes in England during the eighteenth century (Whigs and Tories engaging in nonviolent political contests, peaceful transfers of power, and the institutionalization of opposition as part and parcel of a functioning government) – Elias concluded that the "parliamentarization" of the landed classes of England had its counterpart in the sportization of its pastimes' (Elias and Dunning, 1986: 34). Fear and violence were once again central to Elias's simultaneously macro-, meso-, and micro-level analysis. And yet again, Elias's structuralist as well as constructivist approach highlighted the emerging positions and generative tastes of the dominant class (that is, the established strata symbolically powerful enough to serve as a model for the more or less marginalized masses of outsiders). Here we see, again, in a nutshell, his triadic approach to sociological inquiry and his openness to longer-term historical perspectives.

Explicitly citing Elias's essay, Bourdieu stated that Elias was 'more sensitive than I am to continuity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 93). To some degree, he was convinced by Elias's arguments about broad structural transformations and corresponding shifts in habitus formation going back to the late Middle Ages. At the same time, he warned that longer-term analyses – such as those of Elias on sport – 'carry the danger of masking' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 93) crucial historical breaks. Bourdieu seemed to think that longer-term analyses carry the risk of hiding as much as they reveal. He pointed out, for example, that from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, terms like athlete (or artist, dancer, and so on) took on ever-changing meanings. Because new fields (sport, literature) emerged and were fundamentally transformed – the world of sport became increasingly commercial and autonomous, and 'California sports' were introduced – such terms could be extremely misleading when used in more far-reaching historical analyses. He therefore questioned the validity of Elias's longer-term perspective on trends in leisure activities and sport. 'There is nothing in common', he argued, 'between ritual games such as medieval *soule* and American football' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 93).

This was not Bourdieu, however, at his most convincing. His own analyses in *Masculine Domination* (2001 [1998]) spanned both sides of the Mediterranean and reached back to

antiquity. It is certainly true that longer-term perspectives can blind even the greatest of researchers to important aspects of the developments they address. For example, by treating them like any other institutional restraints, Elias seems to have downplayed the potentially 'civilizing' effects of the church (Kempers, 1992; Turner, 2003). Bourdieu's own work and comments on Elias indicate, however, that he recognized the potential utility of longer-term analyses.

Furthermore, whether one finds this line of reasoning convincing or not, what Bourdieu left out of his comments on Elias's work on sport is as revealing as what he mentioned. It is Elias's eye for longer-term processes as well as his systematic thematization of steadily increasing levels of emotional self-control (and feelings of shame with regard to physical violence) that make Elias's approach to sport potentially such a useful companion to the one devised by Bourdieu. Elias saw that, in sports as well as in many other fields, emotional-bodily self-control tends to operate as the most fundamental power resource and as a prerequisite to the sedimentation of all kinds of abilities and forms of knowledge. From this perspective, it makes perfect sense to ask how longer-term structural transformations enabled the development of increasingly regulated regimes of sport in the first place. It also makes sense to question how increasingly regulated regimes of sport might engender empowering levels of emotional stability and productive increases in self-discipline (compare Wacquant, 2004). By contrast, when Bourdieu thematized bodily regulation through rituals of sport (and other disciplining rituals), it usually led him to discussions about the generation of docility – in the dual sense of becoming disposed to learning and becoming passive and easily manipulated (compare Bourdieu, 1990b: 166–167). In terms of both the longer-term processes related to what are indeed increasingly regulated regimes of sports and the ways in which 'civilizing' pressures emanating from rituals of sport can turn into *empowering* emotional self-constraints incarnate, Bourdieu seems to have missed out on a promising opportunity to score.

At the same time, Bourdieu's application of field theory to sport is an indispensable extension of Elias's work. Bourdieu showed much greater appreciation not only for important historical cleavages (think of 'professional football' in the early and late twentieth century) but also for how more or less convertible and distinctive forms of capital related to sport can operate in broader social (and especially class-based) conflicts. Another aspect of Bourdieusian thought that deserves special attention here is his sensitivity to body-based learning, knowledge, skills, and practical action. This – largely Merleau-Pontian – vision of the situated and lived body as the fundamental source of perceptions and pre-interpretive 'strategies' is especially noteworthy because it makes advances on even Elias's vividly incarnated theorizing about habitus formation and sport.

We can now pull these thoughts together and demonstrate how a combined approach to sport is more productive than one that relies exclusively on either Elias or Bourdieu. Let us take tennis as an example. From an Elias- and Bourdieu-inspired perspective, we can see that tennis is a prime example of an originally upper (middle) class sport that requires relatively high degrees of precision and, above all, socialized self-restraint. Even the occasional smash requires a modicum of restraint. And every successful serve-and-volley requires an (almost) automatically well-tempered touch. Using the original (sexist) language of the game, we can say that the stiff stances of the 'linesmen' during serves and the rigidly synchronized movements of the 'ballboys' between points are meticulously orchestrated

and perpetually monitored. And no matter how large the crowd, there is silence before a serve even during the tensest of moments. Civility goes far beyond the fact that the players almost never fight. If a ball is hit hard and directly towards an opponent, or even if one unwittingly profits from the ball hitting the net, apologies are often offered by means of a rather subtle hand gesture. And no matter what is at stake, the ritual always closes down with handshakes over the net and with the appropriately elevated umpire symbolizing legitimate authority. ('He is on high because he needs to see!') This final nod to the ultimate authority of the elevated is often accentuated by bows to any royalty who may be looking down from one of the appropriate boxes. After the fleeting and more or less intense emotional release, the timeless moral order is restored. Even if they do occasionally smash one of their many rackets or scream at an umpire, advanced tennis players never really let it rip; and one must wonder if they would be able to do so even if they tried.

From our combined theoretical approach, tennis appears to be an extremely restrained sport devised by, and played in front of, established groups. As surely as strength or speed, emotional self-restraint and social distinction seem the name of the game. Questions about how longer-term sociogenetic transformations – for example, state formation, pacification, and shifting distributions of economic power – relate to the evolution of tastes and abilities in such a regulated pastime seem just as appropriate as questions about who has benefited, more recently, from enculturation processes centred on the old (and young) boys (and girls) network known in many contexts simply as 'the club'. More specifically, one might ask which types of people have been able to convert economic, cultural, and social capital (money for membership, knowledge of the 'right' sport and the 'appropriate' clubs, and connections with people who can help attain access to the club) into empowering socialization processes for their children. On the outcome side, one might also think here of the development of middle- and upper-class ways of speaking, moving, feeling, and thinking as well as the building of social capital (business networks and opportunities) for adults and eventually their offspring. How does repeatedly moving together in time, in a bounded and in many cases elite microcosm, engender carnal connections and passionate group solidarities? Might these seemingly meaningless mutual reconstitutions among people with a good first serve be central to the formation of fantasies about self-made men, natural distinction, and the inherent inferiority of those who engage in less 'refined' sports like football, wrestling, darts, and auto racing? Drawing simultaneously from Elias and from Bourdieu also helps us to focus more closely on lived bodily coping in the here-and-now. Micro-situational pressures and a practical sense of the 'space of possible moves' infiltrate the whole being of (good) tennis players. For example, if a ball flies towards you while your opponent on the other side of the net is deep in her own territory, you are drawn – especially if you are an authentically competent player – immediately to the right comportment. Were it not for its disembodied connotations, 'feelings first, second thoughts' might be a good motto for what actually happens here. The main point is that your response is initiated quickly enough because it is *not* mediated by any time-consuming explicit mental representations. Certainly, you were already on the alert because you are playing tennis; now that this ball is screaming towards you, you cannot be accused of any conscious strategizing as you react to this specific aspect of the flowing mix of injunctions. The new stance called forth by this emerging configuration of sanctions and invitations (for example, the way you bend your knees before you lurch forward or the

way you start to shift your grip on the racket) itself also influences your next feeling, movement, or 'position-taking'. Conscious thinking, if any finally occurs, should be considered the tip of the iceberg. In the heat of the moment, you almost certainly are not thinking consciously about what the lines on the court mean, why you care about winning, why you have invested time in such a sport, how you should move in the next instant, and so forth. At the very moment the ball charges towards you, your emerging responses are infused with projections based on countless previous experiences.

Zooming in allows us to see what social being in real time is actually like. It allows us to interrogate the workings, in Bourdieusian and Eliasian terms, of one's feel for an exceptionally distinctive and civilized game. That game is in you because you have been in the game. Along with others, you have been formed by the ongoing patterning we call tennis. It would be pointless to draw any sharp demarcations between internal and external, the mind and the body, reasonable projections into the likely future and emotional dispositions moulded in the past, the subjective sense of the player and the objective regularities of the game. We are in the flow now; what to play next?

## Conclusion

We have specified some underlying similarities in the theoretical perspectives of Elias and Bourdieu. These similarities – or subterranean affinities, as we have also described them – centre on these thinkers' common deployment of three important concepts: habitus, field, and power. Despite outward differences in terminology (at times due to the vagaries of translation) – such as Elias's idea of habitus being rendered as 'personality structure' or as 'makeup', his notion of field as 'figuration', or Bourdieu's concept of power as 'capital' – the two thinkers effectively converged at least on the basic meanings of these concepts. They also thought in similar terms about the interrelation of these key ideas, as we have illustrated in our final substantive section on their respective analyses of sport. More importantly still, Elias and Bourdieu shared an emphasis on relational and processual thinking. Both reacted strongly against the substantialist tendencies pervasive in sociological theorizing and research, and in place of these tendencies they elaborated an approach concerned primarily with situating their objects of study in ever-shifting and evolving webs or configurations of relations – in Harrison White's felicitous phrase, 'processes-in-relations' (1997: 60). A century and a half ago, Marx opened the way for sociologists to think in relational and processual terms by analysing capital as a dynamic system not of 'things' but of social relations. In the early twentieth century, classical sociologists such as Simmel, classical pragmatists such as Dewey and Mead, and phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty further developed this theoretical perspective. In the mid- to late twentieth century, it was arguably Elias and Bourdieu who most effectively served as the torch-bearers of this way of thinking.

It is important today that we recognize the deep commonalities and affinities in their approaches to sociological inquiry not merely as an intellectual or scholastic exercise but because it potentially serves as a stimulus to new advances in relational and processual analysis (see Emirbayer, 1997; Paulle, 2005). As we mentioned, Elias criticized long ago the tendency of sociologists (in this respect, he observed, they are like laypersons) to think in static and reified terms: that is, to engage in 'process-reduction'. This struggle against substantialism could never conclusively be won. Indeed, tendencies towards entity-based analysis are not

uncommon in sociology even today, whether in the area of stratification research, where, as Bourdieu pointed out, an ‘alliance’ reigns between quantitative methodology and ‘modernized versions of methodological individualism, that is, the theory of rational action’ (1991: 381), or in areas of qualitative inquiry where, for example, racial and ethnic categories are sometimes still conceptualized as insular, bounded groups. (Brubaker [2004] called the latter way of thinking ‘groupism’.) Elias and Bourdieu provide, with their field-theoretic, power-centred, and habitus-based approaches, a valuable corrective to such tendencies, a way of doing sociology that serves us well as we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

To be sure, the shared theoretical orientation of Elias and Bourdieu needs to be generatively extended into a wide range of substantive fields of inquiry in the social sciences if it is to retain its relevance. We have seen the contributions their ideas can make to a sociology of sport – an enterprise that, however, still does not feature many of those ideas in its market-leading textbooks and anthologies. What might an Elias- or Bourdieu-inspired approach to comparative and historical sociology look like? Elias is widely regarded as an important contributor to that field, but his deeper theoretical insights have hardly been plumbed, not to mention Bourdieu’s own ideas, especially since the latter are widely depicted as reproduction theory. What might an Elias- or Bourdieu-inspired organizational sociology look like? What impact might their ideas regarding habitus have in the present-day field of social psychology, where research agendas such as attribution theory, expectation states theory, and the like, often make it into the indexes of leading textbooks while ‘Elias’, ‘Bourdieu’, and ‘habitus’ merit nary a mention?<sup>24</sup> To date, whenever the strikingly unified and coherent systems of ideas of these two thinkers have been appropriated, it has been in piecemeal fashion, one concept at a time. How many thousands of studies have cited Bourdieu on ‘cultural capital’ without ever coming to terms with the larger framework of thought within which that concept does its work? A thorough engagement is surely necessary with the different subfields and research agendas currently dominant in sociology if the promise in Elias’s and Bourdieu’s sociologies is to be fully realized.

It is important in this regard that the academic divide between qualitative and quantitative inquiry be superseded, and, in particular, that formalized approaches be developed that ‘think relationally’ – as Bourdieu once said of correspondence analysis – and, indeed, also processually. Social network analysts on the spatial side and sequence analysts on the temporal side have sought to elaborate new ways of furthering this goal on the quantitative and mathematical end of the standard divide. Elias never really attempted to move in such a direction himself. Bourdieu, by contrast, did – and his life’s work manifested a long-term fascination with French-style data analysis in the tradition of Benzecri, a mode of analysis serving as the empirical basis of much of his analyses in *Distinction* and *The State Nobility*, among other major writings. Whether correspondence analysis as Bourdieu practised it is truly the best way to proceed is an open question, but sociology can surely benefit from other formal approaches that allow the field-, habitus- and power-oriented ideas of Elias and Bourdieu to be generalized. With his openness to formal modelling, Bourdieu certainly had the right intuition, even if the mathematical and statistical means of realizing that vision were not yet fully available in his day (and might not be still in ours).

Largely unbeknownst to one another, and in implicit fashion primarily, Elias and Bourdieu complemented each other and pointed sociological inquiry in similar directions. They take their place as crucial figures in an ever-unfolding tradition of thought that needs generatively and creatively to be renewed with each passing decade if it is to remain living

and vital. Much as these social thinkers each selectively appropriated from his predecessors in seeking to move sociology forward, so too must we take stock of their important theoretical contributions and then do something genuinely new upon that basis. Only then will this look back at the writings of Elias and Bourdieu have positive significance for theorization and research in future sociology.

## Notes

1. Indeed in 1991, the author of *State Nobility* expressed his indebtedness to the elder master at a memorial service in Amsterdam honouring the originality of Elias's contributions. An expanded version of this tribute would later be published under the title 'Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field' (Bourdieu, 1994).
2. We thank the Elias Foundation, and in particular Stephen Mennell, for allowing us access to Elias's and Bourdieu's personal correspondence.
3. Among others, Quilley and Loyal (2005: 812) and Heinich (1997) have also taken serious looks at the (dis)similarities between Elias and Bourdieu.
4. Another noteworthy difference between Elias and Bourdieu is that the former thematized (control over) ecological processes. This inspired Johan Goudsblom's *Fire and Civilization* (1992) as well as his later work on the 'expanding anthroposphere' (de Vries and Goudsblom, 2002; see also Quilley, 2004).
5. The term 'triad' might readily be associated with the most relational of all classical sociologists: Simmel. Among those acquainted with Elias's work, this term will also conjure up the 'triad of basic controls' in *What is Sociology?* (1978 [1970]: 156–157). All earlier usages of the term are unrelated, however, to the way we are using 'triad' here.
6. Elias and Bourdieu foreshadowed the current interest in the lived body, the emotional brain, and neuroplasticity. This is not the place, however, to bring in how developments in neurobiology and cognitive science – for example, those popularized by Damasio (2003: 55–56) – have effectively reinforced the (at times) overlapping arguments made by these two scholars long before the breakthroughs enabled by new generations of brain scans.
7. While Heidegger's role in Nazi Germany may make many Elias followers uneasy, and while Elias was notoriously uncomfortable about admitting where he got even his most profound ideas, Kilminster is dead on when he notes that 'the attack on Cartesian rationalism, Kantianism, and conventional historiography in the work of Heidegger ... was highly significant for Elias's development' (2007: 19). Furthermore, as Kilminster notes,

Having been on friendly terms ... with [the likes of Hannah] Arendt (a pupil of Heidegger) ... Elias must have had direct experience (and even insider knowledge) of the two dominant philosophical currents of the time in Freiburg – phenomenology and fundamental ontology.

(2007: 20)

8. In Wacquant's dense yet tidy formulation, Bourdieu

builds in particular on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of the intrinsic *corporeality of the preobjective contact between subject and world* in order to restore the body as the source of practical intentionality, as the fount of intersubjective meaning grounded in the preobjective level of experience.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 20, italics in original)

9. Or, as Durkhiem originally phrased it: '... la société n'est pas une simple somme d'individus, mais le système formé par leur association représente une réalité spécifique qui a ses caractères propres' (1895: 127).



10. A field, for Bourdieu, can be defined as

... a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97)

11. Wacquant calls our attention to how Bourdieu described habitus as

... a *structuring mechanism* that operates from within agents, though it is neither strictly individual, nor in itself fully determinative of conduct ... . As the result of the internalization of external structures, habitus reacts to the solicitations of the field in a roughly coherent and systematic manner.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18, italics in original)

12. This notion that the social space should be conceptualized primarily as a site of ongoing struggle becomes utterly clear in Bourdieu's various writings on the state. There he shows how the left hand of the state is associated primarily with the dominated dominants (academia and the arts, agencies pushing for better education and health care, and social workers), while the right hand of the state is associated primarily with the dominant dominants (the military and the monetary, agencies pushing for fiscal discipline at least for the poor, and the police). These weaker and stronger 'hands' correspond respectively to the upper-left quadrant (lower economic capital and greater cultural capital) and the upper-right quadrant (greater economic and lower cultural capital) of social space, as Bourdieu's diagrams often made clear.

13. In the original version, the final words were 'ins Feld der Beziehungsdynamik' (1997 [1939]: 230).

14. As Elias put it, in one of his many memorable passages from *The Civilizing Process*:

Such interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called the figuration, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people. Since people are more or less dependent on each other first by nature and then through social learning, through education, socialization, and socially generated reciprocal needs, they exist, one might venture to say, only as pluralities, only in figurations.

(1994 [1939]: 213–214)

15. We wish to reiterate that this approach to social structures did not generate insights into processes associated with '(de)civilization' alone. Elias exhibited the same type of thinking when, for example, he discussed the schoolchild who is assumed to possess 'creative intelligence' and to be a 'very special individual "natural talent"'. The very way of being that is singled out here, he argued,

... is only possible at all within a particular structure of power balances; its precondition is a quite specific social structure. And it depends further on access which the individual has, within a society so structured, to the kind of schooling [experiences] ... which alone permit ... capacity for independent individual thought to develop.

(1994 [1939]: 482)

16. Compare original text (Elias, 1997 [1939] I: 76, 78, 82, 351; II: 49, 326, 330–331, 344).

17. In the following passage, Elias summed up his findings on *The Civilizing Process*:

In general ... societies without a stable monopoly of force are always societies in which the division of functions is relatively slight and the chains of action binding individuals together are comparatively short. ... The moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect – all of these are aspects of the same transformation of conduct which necessarily takes place with the monopolization of physical violence, and the lengthening of chains of social action and interdependence. It is a ‘civilizing’ change of behaviour.

(1994 [1939]: 448)

18. In essays originally penned in the 1940s and 1950s, although they were published much later, Elias (1991 [1987]: 115–116 and 122–123) developed ideas quite similar to Bourdieu’s notions of ‘specialized’ or ‘secondary’ habitus (for example, the pugilistic habitus that Wacquant [2004] acquired in a boxing gym as an adult).
19. From this vantage point, as Elias wrote, one cannot

... clearly recognize the connections between – whatever it is – ‘society’ and ‘culture’, ‘state’ and ‘individual’, ‘external’ and ‘internal’ steering mechanisms, unless ones conceptualizes them as something in movement, as aspects of social processes that are themselves processes, indeed as functionally interdependent processes involving varying degrees of harmony and conflict.

(1996 [1989]: 336)

20. It would be incorrect, however, to deduce from this that Elias was out to destroy ‘the agent’ or, as the expression goes, that he left too little ‘room for agency’. Elias stressed time and again that individuals acquire ‘dispositions’ of their own. Exploring this idea before the Second World War, he pointed out:

Of course, the dispositions which slowly evolve in the new-born child are never simply a copy of what is done to him by others. They are entirely his. They are his response to the way in which his drives and emotions, which are by nature oriented towards other people, are responded to and satisfied by the others.

(in Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998: 73)

To this, Elias added elsewhere:

However certain it may be that each person is a complete entity in himself, it is no less certain that the whole structure of his self-control, both conscious and unconscious, is a product of interweaving formed in a continuous interplay of relationships to other people.

(in Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998: 73)

21. Here again, Elias exhibited a sharp eye for the short-term socialization pressures exerted on adolescents. Because of countless everyday injunctions, youth growing up ‘on the wrong side of the tracks’ could not help but experience themselves as members of a group deemed ‘inferior by “nature” to the established group’ (Elias and Scotson, 1994: 159). More specifically, greater social cohesion and control (mediated in many cases through gossip) ensured that established working-class residents could typically induce outsider youth to accept an image of themselves modelled on the ‘minority of the worst’ and an image of themselves modelled on a ‘minority of the best’.
22. Trying to express his ideas about power more clearly, Elias repeatedly returned, in his more theoretical remarks (for example, a chapter entitled ‘Game Models’ in *What is Sociology?*), to the shifting power differentials in various kinds of games. Sticking to reflections on a football

match, he asserted that ‘the concept of power has [to be] transformed from a concept of substance to a concept of relationship’: ‘At the core of changing figurations’, he wrote,

... – indeed at the very hub of the figuration process – is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to another. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration.

(1978 [1970]: 131)

23. This essay was first published (in French) in 1976, in the journal founded a year earlier by Bourdieu, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*. It was later reprinted in shorter form in Elias and Dunning’s *Quest for Excitement* (1986: 150–174).
24. Anyone wishing to verify this statement might peruse, for example, the index of Michener et al.’s fifth edition of *Social Psychology* (2004).

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