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**Unthinking the Closed Personality:
Norbert Elias, Group Analysis and Unconscious Processes in a Research Group¹**

Leitmotifs:

“The theory of civilization can be distinguished from most of the sociological theories which preceded it among other things by the fact that it attempts to develop the conceptual symbols of the social sciences in a manner which allows the representation of man himself and not merely of something abstracted from man. It is essentially a theory of man, of man in the plural, mark you, and not in the singular.”²

“ The development of group therapy is a good example of the way in which a highly promising psychotherapeutic technique suffers under the burden of a powerful professional theoretical tradition which is still essentially based solely upon the biologicistic-medical conception of man as a self-contained, internally operating organism .”³

“Intellectually all are agreed that in sociological studies the observer forms an integral part of the situation or field, but persons vary greatly in their sensitivity to the application of this principle in their own case.”⁴

I. Knowledge and the Unconscious: A bipolar civilizational tension field.

Unthinking the closed personality – a life-time theme of Norbert Elias, the theorist of civilization. It is not, however, a person but life in modern civilization itself which lends weight and significance to this theme of the sense of loneliness and isolation. It can, nonetheless, be grasped by taking the person as an example. Unthinking the closed personality, the homo clausus, the affective armour plating of civilization, is a battle on two fronts: it is a battle against an intellectual *idea* of which only a small part is on the surface of consciousness, like an iceberg, namely the idea that people first and most truly exist as individuals and only afterwards come together to form groups of the most various kinds and levels of integration from the family to confederations of states and all humanity. This battle was taken up by Elias not least in his sociology of knowledge. And it is a battle against the

¹ This article is dedicated to my two favourite groups: my encounter group in the Seminar for Group Analysis Zürich (SGAZ) led by Hymie Wyse, and my family, Michaela, Kevin, Laura-Isabell and Clara Marie, in encounters with whom I also discover many things about myself. I also owe thanks to Michael Schröter and Sally Willis, and especially to my wife Michaela Artmann-Waldhoff, with whom I spent some fine days in London preparing this article and who was of great assistance in the exciting research at the Wellcome Foundation and, together with Michael Fischer, in the Elias-Archive in Marbach. And I owe thanks to Karl Oeter, from whom I learned among other things a great deal about Bion.

² Elias, N., Einführung in die Zivilisationstheorie: Notizen zu einer Vorlesung, DLA Marbach A: Elias Misc-D XX=Vorl-Ziv 1

³ Elias, N., Soziologie und Psychiatrie, in: Wehler, H-U., (Hg.), Soziologie und Psychoanalyse, Stuttgart 1972, pp. 11-41, at p. 33

⁴ Elias, N./Foulkes, S.H., Study of Communication in a Group by a Group, in: Foulkes, S.H., Therapeutic Group Analysis, London 1964, pp. 269-278, at p. 278.

feeling of being locked up inside oneself. Psychoanalysis, and even more so its application to groups in group analysis, can be of service in this part of the battle.

Thinking is not enough. In his poetry Elias reveals his awareness of the *unthought* depths. In his lyrics he depicts the battle over his scientific books as a struggle proceeding from „not-yet-life“ to life.⁵

At first, however, Elias' approach to psychoanalysis and group analysis was emphatically *thought out* and scientific, even when he submitted himself to experiencing it personally. In what follows a number of hitherto unknown documents will be discussed which reveal Elias in the triangle between psychoanalysis, group analysis and research, but above all in a bipolar tension field which he describes in numerous variations and which can be characterized as moving between an intellectually distanced, scientifically disciplined procedure appealing to the conscious ego on the one hand, and a more strongly emotionally involved technique such as free group association which takes the unconscious into account on the other.

As a theorist of civilization Elias outlined a layer or dimension of this multi-layered tension field existing between „knowledge“, „the unconscious“ and research upon them in the 1930's as follows:

“The idea that the human „psyche“ consists of different zones functioning independently of each other and capable of being considered independently has become deeply rooted in human consciousness over a long period. It is common, in thinking about the more differentiated personality structure, to sever one of its functional levels from the others as if this were really the “essential” factor in the way men steer themselves in their encounter with their human fellows and with non-human nature. Thus the humanities and the sociology of knowledge stress above all the aspect of knowledge and thought. Thoughts and ideas appear in these studies as it were as that which is the most important and potent aspect of the way men steer themselves. And the unconscious impulses, the whole field of drives and affect structures, remains more or less in the dark. (...) A real understanding, even of the changes of ideas and forms of cognition, can be gained only if one takes into account too the changes of human interdependencies in conjunction with the structure of conduct and, in fact, the whole fabric of men's personality at a given stage of social development.

The inverse accentuation, with a corresponding limitation, is to be found often enough in psycho-analytical research today. It frequently tends, in considering human beings, to extract something “unconscious“, conceived as an “id“ without history as the most important thing in the whole psychological structure.”⁶

Now these splits in the reflection by men on men which Elias criticizes can be better understood sociogenetically and psychogenetically with the help of his own outline of a theory of civilization:

“Decisive for a person as he appears before us is neither the ‘id’ alone nor the ‘ego’ or ‘super-ego’ alone, but always *the relationship between* these various sets of psychological functions, partly conflicting and partly co-operating in the way an individual steers himself.. It is they, *these relationships within man* between the drives and affects controlled and the built-in controlling agencies, whose structure changes in the course of a civilizing process, in accordance with the changing structure of the *relationships between individual human beings*

⁵ Elias, N., (1988), *Los der Menschen: Gedichte/Nachdichtungen*, Frankfurt/M., p.. 67

⁶ Elias, N., *Power and Civility: The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, New York 1982, pp.284-285.

, in society at large. In the course of this process, to put it briefly and all too simply, ‘consciousness’ becomes less permeable by drives and drives become less permeable by ‘consciousness’”⁷ (Italics of the original German text reintroduced here.)

When, in the process of rationalization as the basis of the process of scientization and as one of the strands of the process of civilization, consciousness becomes less permeable by drives and the drives less permeable by consciousness the increase in this type of consciousness and knowledge paradoxically brings about at the same time a growing unconsciousness and precisely that more clear-cut separation of feeling and thinking, of affects and the control of affects, which Elias attempts to overcome in his form of scientific thought by means of a synthesis of the approaches of the sociology of knowledge and psychoanalysis.

It is clear at this point that Elias attempts to correct, and indeed to civilize the process of civilization which he diagnoses in „The Civilizing Process“ – whose developmental stage could be characterized sociogenetically as that of disciplinization⁸ - in the form and in the microcosm of his diagnostic work in such a way that overcoming these splits and the automatisms of affect controls could open up psychogenetic room for manoeuvre for less violent forms of self-control of feelings, actions and thoughts, including scientific perception.

Such a second stage in the civilization of civilizatory mechanisms is referred to by Elias himself in his later theory of informalization as the development of highly controlled standards of behaviour aiming at a “*controlled decontrolling of emotional controls*” at a later stage of civilization, which can be described as reflexive.⁹ His later sketches towards a theory of sublimation run along the same lines.¹⁰ And in the involvement-detachment model developed in the context of his sociology of knowledge and science Elias proceeds over the decades from an emphasis on detachment and self-detachment as the most promising scientific behavioural model to a more even balance of involvement and detachment, and then to the concept of *secondary involvement*.¹¹ Here too, in the development of his thinking techniques, he takes up a particular civilizational trend in society - the controlled decontrolling of emotional controls - and advances it as a model through the medium of his production of knowledge.

Michael Schröter has thematized the psychological driving forces on which this intellectual development is based. *Involvement* and *Detachment* represent two different, often conflicting tendencies in Elias’ theory formation and a further dimension of the polar tension field outlined above. According to this approach, what lies behind his preoccupation with violence, authority and the mechanisms of compulsion is, psychogenetically speaking, the father motif of his thinking. This side of him is also revealed in the original version of his *theory of science*, which sailed under the flag of detachment and discipline. The wind in the sails comes from elsewhere:

„He consciously emphasized the endeavours to achieve a synthesis or a controlled to and fro between theory and empirical knowledge (...); over and beyond this he carefully cultivated the preconscious, imaginative associative aspect of his thinking”¹²

⁷ Ibid. p. 286.

⁸ See Waldhoff, H.-P. (1995), *Fremde und Zivilisierung*, pp. 318-324, 377-380

⁹ Vgl. Wouters, C., (1999), *Informalisierung*, Opladen/Wiesbaden

¹⁰ Elias, N., (1991), *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius*, Cambridge 1993..

¹¹ Elias, N. (1987), *Involvement and Detachment*, Oxford/New York, Introduction, pp. VII-LXIX

¹² Schröter, M. (1997), *Erfahrungen mit Norbert Elias*, Frankfurt/Main, p. 191

This *scientific praxis* and his struggle against the *homo clausus*, his thinking against the closed personality, his “endeavours to dissolve I and you in a we”¹³, his avoidance of humanly empty abstractions, his emphasis on human figurations, inter-connections and inter-dependencies, and, finally on what is processual and flowing – all of this accordingly reflects psychogenetically the mother-motif of his thinking.¹⁴

This motif is also typified by psychoanalysis, underlined by the choice of a female analyst for his own analysis, and by group analysis, which represents and underpins all his endeavours to achieve a radical *theory of man in the plural*.

These father and mother motifs present a further level of the bipolar tension field whose elucidation is at issue here. They play a part in the technique of perception, thinking and representation and in the perceived structure of what is represented.

How do the strands of reflection on the thinking of man about himself deriving from psychoanalysis and the sociology of knowledge intertwine in the case of the thinker Elias? Wolfgang Engler writes about *the reflexive project of the sociology of knowledge*, taking Elias’ human science as his example:

“When reality fails to sustain thought guided by considerations of humanity, and hope cannot placate that thought, then thinking arrives at itself. It steers its utopian energies towards change in the *manner* of thinking and anticipates the future without setting a foot outside the present.”(62).

But what holds such a model formation together in its innermost reaches? Perhaps it is the civilization of the manner of thinking itself. This at least is the question we will deal with here. And if the emphasis is placed on the process of civilization, this involves not least the manner in which the objects of reflection are dealt with and, above all, the degree of systematic destructiveness involved in the reflective treatment of objects as replicas and anticipations of actual dealings.

In *Poetry and Truth* Goethe reports:

„I remember that as a child I picked flowers to pieces in order to see how the petals were attached to the cup, or plucked birds in order to observe how the feathers were inserted into the wings. Children are not to be blamed for this, as even natural scientists believe they learn more from separating and splitting than from uniting and linking, more from killing than from breathing life into things”¹⁵

From a contemporary point of view one could also read Goethe’s comparison of the procedures of scientists and children as an indication of immature or even regressive and aggressive object relationships as the dominant unconscious behavioural model of science at a certain stage of development..

At the same time, at the level of the reflective and inquisitive experimental action, this corresponds to what Freud grasped conceptually as the silent mode of action of the death instinct.

Georges Devereux has presented innumerable cases which demonstrate that precisely this destructive tendency predominates in what he calls behavioural science and what Elias calls human sciences. Elias’ fundamental approach via generalization, or better synthesis, operates decisively against this at the bipolar level of tension between linkage and separation.. He is

¹³ Ibid. p. 224

¹⁴ For numerous pieces of evidence in favour of this explanatory model and for an unabbreviated account see Schröter 1992

¹⁵ Goethe, J.W., (1984), *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Berlin und Weimar, p. 116

not interested in an *attack on attachments* (Bion). But: How much active autonomy can the researcher Elias with his pursuit of generalization allow the group analysts under study in the case of the *Congress-Group* discussed below?

How much aggression warding off by synthesis wanders unconsciously into the defence, into the technique of synthesis, itself?

II. A Theory of Man in the Plural: Elias' Sociology und Foulkes' Group Analysis

After the First World War and under the impression of the enormous human destructivity unleashed by state societies which characterized themselves as civilized Sigmund Freud wrote on the evolution of culture or the civilizing process: "We owe to that process the best of what we have become, as well as a good part of what we suffer from"¹⁶.

Whereas Freud attempts here to integrate his experience of the First World War into the development of his psychoanalytic theory, Norbert Elias, who was born in 1897 and was himself traumatised as a German soldier in this war, forms his theory mainly under the impression of German National Socialism, which he experienced and described as the *collapse of civilization*.

As the core of what he characterizes by the concept of „civilization“, Elias discovers beneath all the ideological camouflage the development of the structure of human affects and their control in the direction of a more even regulation. Later, with express reference to Sigmund Freud and, less expectedly, Anna Freud, he writes of "*an individual self-regulation of momentary drive- and affect-conditioned behavioural impulses or their diversion from primary to secondary goals and in some situations to sublimatory transformation*."¹⁷ – all of this closely interconnected and in interaction with the way in which men have to live and with the given social structure of their co-existence.

Although the two volumes on the „civilizing process“ („The History of Manners“ and „Power and Civility“) concentrate practically in their entirety on the reconstruction of a process, Elias permits himself towards the end to sketch briefly some possible futures, and in the final sentences he even outlines so to speak a civilizatory utopia. Only when the personal needs of men and the demands of social existence are attuned to each other will it be possible to say with more justice that we are civilized.

At this point it becomes clear once again what motivated Elias from the 1930's to become one of the first to join the ranks of those who attempted to integrate psychoanalytic knowledge and sociological knowledge and to develop an approach of his own. At the focal point of the past and the future of civilization or decivilization, and hence of civilization theory, he sees a certain interlocking of individual and social behavioural constraints and behavioural room for manoeuvre.

For the founder of group analysis, Foulkes, a civilizatory utopia also has an important role to play. In the materials he collected towards the end of his life for a major theoretical work which was unfinished at his death we find the following excerpt:

¹⁶ Freud, S., „Why War?“, in: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, London 1974. Vol. 22, p. 214.

¹⁷ Elias, N., „Zivilisation“, in: Schäfers, B. (Hg.), Grundbegriffe der Soziologie, Opladen 1986, S. 382-386, at p. 382

„The great secret of the coming age of the world is that civilization rests not on reason but on emotion. (...) It is the control of emotion, not the absence of it, which is the mark of high civilization“.¹⁸

Between civilization and its obstruction, as it were, Elias analyses, with a life-long energy which never quite sufficed for him to reach his goal, a certain hardened deposit of earlier phases of the civilizing process : what he called the “homo clausus”, the “closed personality”.

He sees this personality type with its armour-plated affects as a main source of the suffering caused by civilization, or rather a certain type of civilization, and at the same time as a main source of perceptual armour-plating and, in particular, of a dominant thought disturbance accompanied by a mistaken strategy for the formation of concepts.

Elias once presented his counter-model to the homo clausus, the homines aperti, who are open and dependent upon one another, in diagrammatic form.¹⁹ In some respects this diagram is similar to the symbol of Foulkes’ group analysis. The sociology of Elias had a profound influence upon early group analysis theory formation. If, inversely, we enquire about the influence of group analysis on Elias’ theory formation our attention will be directed not only or merely marginally to theoretical influences; but perhaps Elias’ experience of group analysis, which will be discussed in what follows on the basis of extracts from hitherto unknown documents, can be taken as a mental stimulus whose long-term effects can work against the conception of the closed personality, which Elias considered to be a civilizatory and intellectual cul-de-sac.

In a lecture Elias says:

“The theory of civilization can be distinguished from most of the sociological theories which preceded it among other things by the fact that it attempts to develop the conceptual symbols of the social sciences in a manner which allows the representation of man himself and not merely of something abstracted from man. It is essentially a theory of man, of man in the plural, mark you, and not in the singular.”²⁰

Approaches towards integrated sociological-psychological, and especially sociological-psychoanalytic thinking were developed by Elias in the 1920’s and 1930’s during his years at Frankfurt as assistant of Karl Mannheim, but he was not alone. The Frankfurt School, which gathered around Horkheimer and Adorno, also tackled this problem, although in a different manner. In the case of Mannheim and Elias this work was complemented by the development of new approaches to the sociology of knowledge.

The head of the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute, Siegmund-Heinrich Fuchs also had a strong interest in this holistic image of man and maintained close contacts, physically and intellectually, with the intellectuals mentioned above. In his English exile, as S.H. Foulkes, he developed the most important practically and theoretically well-grounded approach to date to an integrated image of men as individuals and groups, as a *society of individuals*, as Elias would term it. Neurotic and psychotic disorders are no longer located by Foulkes in the

¹⁸ A passage excerpted by Foulkes and published in Benjamin Kidd, *The Science of Power*, London, „for use in my theoretical book“, May 1974; cf. the Archive of the Wellcome Trust, London, PP/SHF/F.5/3 (Box 30). Foulkes died before this projected book could be completed. .

¹⁹ Elias, N., (1978) *What is Sociology?*, New York, p. 15.

²⁰ Elias, N., *Einführung in die Zivilisationstheorie: Notizen zu einer Vorlesung*, DLA Marbach A: Elias Misc-D XX=Vorl-Ziv 1

individual but in social networks and, if it was indicated, they were accordingly treated in the intensified microcosm of therapeutic groups.

The radicality of Foulkes approach becomes particularly evident if we review the unpublished materials in his estate, for example those describing a planned research project on “Psychoneurosis: A Multi-Personal Syndrome”, or even more clearly in his “Notes on concept of mind as a transpersonal phenomenon” They were stimulated and deepened in their development by Elias’ radical critique of the feelings and the conception of the “homo clausus”.

In a treatment of “Sociology and Psychiatry” Elias writes:

“ The concept of valence figuration could be of service in diagnosing and researching the question as to how the personal figuration of valences of an individual fits into the structure of the figurations which he must effectively enter into with others in accordance with the dynamics and the structure of what is characterized as society.

The development of group therapy is a good example of the way in which a highly promising psychotherapeutic technique suffers under the burden of a powerful professional theoretical tradition which is still essentially based solely upon the biologicistic-medical conception of man as a self-contained, internally operating organism .”²¹

It is not difficult to recognize in this position a specifically therapeutic concretization of the utopian energy of the final passage of “The Civilizing Process” quoted above.

It is not by chance that the founder of psychoanalysis was one of the first persons to whom Elias sent a copy of his book on the civilizing process, for which Freud briefly thanked him in a postcard sent from Vienna to London shortly before his own emigration on 3. January 1938. Elias treasures this postcard for the rest of his life, but it is Foulkes who is invited to a meeting by Freud.

For some time it was even planned that Foulkes should figure as the co-author of the psychoanalytic parts of “The Civilizing Process”, and although Elias then preferred to publish alone, Foulkes wrote the first important review of the work – not without mentioning that his co-authorship would have benefited the psychoanalytic passages of the book.

The years-long reciprocal interest and also the tense relationship between Elias and Foulkes and between Elias’ theory of civilization and the psychoanalytically oriented group methods of Foulkes must be seen against this background.

In 1948 Foulkes again called on the support of Elias as a social scientist, this time for a group which was to present group analysis at the international “Congress on Mental Health” in London, and subsequently did so. This so-called “Congress-Group”, in which Elias played a leading part involving both cooperation and conflict with Foulkes, strengthened a development which had momentous institutional consequences:

On Tuesday 3. June 1952 the Group-Analytic Society was founded in 22 Upper Wimpole Street, London. The six founding members, of whom four had been in the C-Group, were: W.H.R. Iliffe, Jane Abercrombie, James Anthony, P.B. de Maré, Norbert Elias and S.H. Foulkes, and, as secretary, E.T. Marx, Foulkes later wife.

²¹ Elias, N., *Soziologie und Psychiatrie*, in: Wehler, H-U., (ed.), *Soziologie und Psychoanalyse*, Stuttgart 1972, pp. 11-41, at p. 33.

Almost all of those mentioned here subsequently played an important part in the development of group analysis over a long period of time.

Two of the members were not therapists, but enjoyed the informal special status of “scientific members”, namely Jane Abercrombie and Norbert Elias. In 1953/54 Elias then participated as a candidate in the T-Group, one of the first group-analytic training groups. Hitherto unknown records of both groups, the Congress Group and the T-Group, are now available for study. Against this background a part of Elias life and career which has been little studied to date took its course: Elias as an analysand and as a group analyst.

III. The Search for Individual and Group Analysis from the Standpoint of Detached Scientific Interest? Norbert Elias, S.H. Foulkes, Karl Mannheim and Kate Friedlander

The critical aspect of Elias’ theory of civilization, viewed as it were from the unspoken perspective of a civilizational utopia, is nowhere more precisely visible than in his group analytic work.

But what does “group analytic” mean here? In a paper read at the “first general meeting” of the Group-analytic Society on 31. January 1955 in London Foulkes undertook a definition of the position of group analysis, of which the part linking psychoanalytic and sociological knowledge is of particular interest here:

„If we ask what is Group-analysis in the wider sense, as for instance used by the sociologist, the late Karl Mannheim, the meaning is clear: the analytic study of various groups within the community. In the more specific sense, as a mode of psychotherapy and psychodynamic research, I may claim a right in its definition (...)

„Analytic“ can for all practical purposes (...) be considered synonymous with psychoanalytic, but we have always maintained the other part to be of equal importance, namely the group as social aspect. In this our work links up with the sociologists and more specifically with that of J.L. Moreno, Kurt Lewin and Norbert Elias. (...)

All of our fully qualified members at present have in fact had a very thorough experience of their own with psychoanalysis (...) In very exceptional circumstances other experiences in groups may be counted as an equivalent. This refers particularly to those full members who want to qualify as therapists and group analysts themselves, whether medical or lay, and not necessarily as strictly to those full members of whom we think as „scientific members“, who work in related fields. A good example of the latter category are Dr. Elias and Mrs. Abercrombie and her work.“

Elias is drawn closer here to group analysis than all the other sociologists whose work is referred to by Foulkes. But although he was already at this stage a participant in a training group, he still only enjoyed the special status of a scientific member. This meant that to a certain degree he played the part of an outsider, albeit an honourable outsider. Foulkes thought very highly of the role of scientific research in the development of group analysis and, vice versa, also saw group analysis as a potentially valuable research instrument, particularly for psychoanalysis, sociology, pedagogics and medicine.

For example, in some letters written to Foulkes by Karl Mannheim in 1945, we find evidence of shared research interests . On 11 June 1945 Mannheim, as the editor of “The International Library Of Sociology And Social Reconstruction” writes:

“Dear Dr. Foulkes, Dr. Kate Friedlander, who is one of the contributors to the above series, drew my attention to your recent work relating to Group-Analysis. As I am very much interested in this subject, and should like to see psycho-analysis adequately represented in the Series, I should be glad to know whether you would like to contribute a volume to it (...).”²²

These lines are instructive in more than one respect, here primarily in regard to the question of the lack of reference to the figuration analyst Elias in the small figurational network indicated here. Although he had been Mannheim’s assistant at the Frankfurt Sociological Institute and had long established himself in England, there are no letters to him, but only to Foulkes, for whom he seems to have worked as a kind of informal assistant with special responsibility for questions of theory in the early formative phase of group analysis. And Foulkes is recommended to Mannheim as an author by Kate Friedländer, under whom Elias had undergone analysis, as he much later reveals without mentioning her name, One has the impression here that Elias resembles a stranger in Simmel’s sense of the word, one who belongs and yet is at the same time distant.

Is there a connection here with the strange tension in Elias’ relationship to psychoanalytic experience, to the manner in which he sought closeness and distance at the same time? At all events, Elias always approached not only psychoanalytic group procedures but also psychoanalysis itself emphatically as a thinker. What is meant here is not his incorporation of psychoanalytic knowledge in sociology, but rather the fact that he himself underwent analysis. He spoke publicly of this in his old age, but without naming his analyst.

On the basis of circumstantial evidence, however, Michael Schröter has expressed the assumption that it could have been an analyst from the circle of Anna Freud, possibly Kate Friedlander, or Käte Friedländer as she was called before her emigration.²³ Four letters from Kate Friedlander to Norbert Elias from the years 1943-1948, which are now available to me, clearly confirm this assumption.²⁴

On 4. January 1943 Kate Friedlander writes to Elias in her own hand and in German:

“Dear Dr. Elias,

Many thanks for your letter and the cheque. For my part I would probably have proposed much more energetically that you should contact (an as yet indecipherable word), if I had not known that there will be no vacancy for some time by one of the analysts to whom I would send you with a really good conscience. But you have an idea which can perhaps be realized, namely to get a small loan (“Anleihe” in the German. Or could it be Analyse ? = a short analysis). I will speak with the people who come into consideration and find out whether it is possible on the basis of your scientific interest in analysis. But it will take some time, as I am ill at the moment and will only be able to go out again in about 14 days.

With best wishes for the New Year

Yours Kate Friedlander

And on 19. February 1943, much more briefly:

²² Wellcome Library, Archives and Manuscripts, PP/SHF/B.10

²³ See. Schröter, M., *Triebkräfte des Denkens bei Norbert Elias: Ein Versuch psychoanalytischer Theoriedeutung*, in: Schröter, M. (1997), *Erfahrungen mit Norbert Elias*, Frankfurt/Main, p. 204, footnote 24. See also Elias, N. (2005), *Autobiographisches und Interviews*, *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 17*, Frankfurt/Main, p. 261: “It was very difficult for me, as I did not have enough money. Nonetheless I was accepted by a very good orthodox Freudian (female) analyst – more along the lines of Anna Freud. I have really grown up in the orthodox tradition, at least for a part of the way.”

²⁴ DLA-Marbach, A: Elias 36,1-5.

“Dear Dr. Elias,
Many thanks for your letter. Could you perhaps come on Wednesday at 9 o’clock, so that we can discuss the matter. I don’t see any real possibility, but it is better if we talk about it personally
Yours sincerely
Kate Friedlander“

Even more instructive is the brevity of the two letters written much later, in the meantime typed and in English, which can be found in Elias’ literary estate.
On 19. August 1945:

„Dear Dr. Elias,
I could see you on Thursday, 23rd of August, at 10 o’clock. If I don’t hear from you I shall expect you.
Yours sincerely
Kate Friedlander“

And on 9. October 1948:

“Dear Dr. Elias,
I am afraid I shall not be able to work next week, as I am ill.
Could you kindly give me a ring at the end of next week to find out whether I can start again on Monday, Oct. 18th?
Yours sincerely,
Kate Friedlander”

I interpret these documents to mean that Elias asked Kate Friedlander to arrange an analysis for him, with specific reference to his scientific interest in psychoanalysis. The attempt failed or was never undertaken. At some point in time between 1943 and 1945 Friedlander then took on the analysis herself. If we follow up the relevant statements made by Elias in other sources, we can conclude that he sought an analysis not only out of scientific and theoretical interest, but also for practical reasons, which were however related to his theoretical interest, as he wished to overcome inhibitions about writing which were preventing him from continuing his own scientific work. We can also conclude that he continued this analysis until it was brought to a premature end by the death of Kate Friedlander.

Friedlander’s death meant retraumatization for Elias, particularly a repetition of the serious trauma caused by the death of his mother in a concentration camp.²⁵ All the indications suggest that this was also preceded by a war trauma resulting from Elias’ experience of the First World War.²⁶

Elias’ scientific treatment of the topics of death, violence and the control of violence was predetermined by life itself. He dedicated the two volumes of “The Civilizing Process” to the memory of his parents (especially: “Sophie Elias d. Auschwitz 1941(?)”).

But under these circumstances what is the meaning of a scientific approach to psychoanalytic and group analytic experience, which means not least the experience of the unconscious dynamics of the psyche?

²⁵ Elias, N. (2005), p. 261

²⁶ Ibid. p. 214 ff.

The application of knowledge-based scientific methods could possibly lead, for example, to a more profound shaping of experience or, on the other hand, to a defence against certain experiences; or, thirdly, as Elias puts it, to “taking the long way round via detachment.”

How then, one might ask in this context, taking the researcher Elias as an example, do dealing with one’s own affects and their control and the scientific perception of the structures of human affects and their control interlock in the mind of the person who does research on them?

On the second question Mario Erdheim has made some observations on the manner in which Elias worked the massacre of cats during the rise of French absolutism, of court society, into the two volumes on the civilizing process, and, above all, on the fact that he mentions the massacre of cats but not the burning of women as witches and that he thus makes no reference to possible connections between the two and the rising court society with its dark unconscious aspects or to the unconscious in the process of civilization in general.²⁷

For the purposes of our enquiry it is interesting to note that Elias’ analyst stood close to Anna Freud’s circle and thus to the ego-psychological school of psychoanalysis. The latter is also true of Foulkes, who was in contact with both Anna Freud and Kate Friedlander and also with the sociological “group analyst” Mannheim, in whose sociology Erdheim – as in the case of Elias’ theory of civilization – sees a high degree of affinity with the ego-psychological school of psychoanalysis at that time. He relates this to an unconscious fear of the unbearable irrational aspects of the tyranny of National Socialism. The attempt to strengthen the ego against the pull of the fascination of the masses with National Socialist rule could, however, lead to a fading out or under-exposure of the *unconscious in the process of civilization*.

One could then ask what part remains for the unconscious to play in the process of theory formation, not only in what is perceived but already in the perceiver. For Elias the bearer of thought processes is not the homo clausus, but, to use the terms of Ludwig Fleck, thought collectives.

What could be more obvious than to examine the processes of collective thinking in micro-studies, as has been done already by Jane Abercrombie, who also repeatedly drew the attention of her scientific and group-analytic colleague Norbert Elias to this point.

Perhaps we can find out more, if we consider the detailed records of a scientific group process in which the analytic and therapeutic experience of the group was to be scientized and was thus present in the group itself in both form and content.

IV. “A group studies its own communication”: a published result

In his standard work *Therapeutic Group Analysis* Foulkes also published alongside numerous studies of groups a text by a group about groups: *Study of Communication in a Group by a Group*²⁸. However, the text was only given this title subsequently.²⁹ Besides Foulkes Elias

²⁷ See Erdheim, M., (1996), Unbewusstheit im Prozeß der Zivilisation, in: Rehberg, K.-S., Norbert Elias und die Menschenwissenschaften, Frankfurt/Main

²⁸ Foulkes, S.H./Elias, N., et. al. in : Foulkes, S.H., *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, London 1964.

also played a decisive part in this work. But in spite of its prominent authors, it has nonetheless remained almost unknown.

What is interesting for the development of Elias' theory and for the history of psychoanalysis is the explicitly stated psychoanalytic orientation of the group.³⁰

Of further interest is the self-reflexive approach which is hinted at in the title of the work. The following statement is momentous from a methodical point of view: "In group analysis, the total situation, including the observer, is implied"³¹ This principle is then transferred to sociological research.³² Here, at an early stage in the historical development of this scientific field ideas are touched upon which are most consistently elaborated much later in ethnopsychanalysis or in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.³³

This question corresponds to a central problem which the group communicates and which here emphasizes, above all, characteristics which might distinguish analytic or therapeutic groups from scientific groups.

"Disciplined or formal group discussion we feel is less productive or stimulating than free, shifting undirected talking. It creates an atmosphere in which problems obtain freer expression and ventilation. Individual contributions are more than interrupted monologues. (...) On the negative side the method allows a good many intriguing problematical fish to slip through the nets of formulation. For those concerned with exact formulation the less disciplined form of discussion was at first irksome."³⁴

"Even in purely scientific groups the swing between the therapeutic and the academic is apparent."³⁵

The question at issue here corresponds to the tension field between intellectually detached and emotionally involved procedures mentioned earlier or also to that between research in the sociology of knowledge and in psychoanalysis. Sociogenetically and psychogenetically it at the same time calls to mind different phases or types of the civilizing process, the one more disciplined and formal, the other more reflexive and informalized. Against this background the group-analytic and perhaps even all the psychoanalytic procedures seem to be processes of informalization. Elias, who elaborated the central position of the tension field between involvement and detachment in his scientific theory relating to the sociology of knowledge, and as a theorist spoke out in favour of detachment, reveals quite other interest in his scientific praxis at an early date. It is instructive that he excerpted the following statement made by Freud on the way he worked:

"Today several highly remarkable things have occurred to me, which I cannot yet properly understand. There can be no question of my reflecting upon them. This way of working happens in fits and starts. God alone knows the date of the next impetus"³⁶

²⁹ The original title was: Report of the Preparatory Commission dealing with communication, particularly verbal communication, with reference to group analysis (Prepared for the International Congress on Mental Health, London 1948.)

³⁰ Foulkes, S.H., *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, London 1964, p.252

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.* p.. 278.

³³ See. Heilbron, J., (1999), Reflexivity and its Consequences, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 2(3), pp. 298-306. This also obviously has momentous consequences for the authors and readers of a study of group processes. As observers of a group we also become in a certain sense indirect members of that group at a meta-level, so to speak, although at a distance in time and space..

³⁴ Foulkes, S.H./Elias, N., et. al. in : Foulkes, S.H., *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, London 1964, p. 275.

³⁵ *Ibid.*,p. 277.

Freud characterized this manner of working as one in which in a certain respect we give free rein to our unconscious. Perhaps Elias described this working process more precisely, and interestingly enough in a poem, as one of balance between *Dreams and Strivings*³⁷ or in the case of Mozart (and I think with a hidden self-reference) as a balance between the inner-psychic instances id, ego and super-ego,³⁸ or in the final version of his theory of knowledge as an equal balance between involvement and detachment, which in my opinion includes a controlled decontrolling of emotional controls in the sense of the informalization thesis.

Another variant of this bipolar tension, which accepted the ambivalence, was also a concern of the Congress Group in 1948:

“We have had to choose where, on the scale of group organization, we wished this preparatory Commission to stand. At the one extreme there was the definite feeling that personalities should not obtrude, so that we might avoid the therapeutic pole. On the other had, in order to accumulate material we could not afford to organize an agenda.”³⁹

Finally, in the formulations of the group article the major concern was “less with what we have done than with what we have to do.”⁴⁰ This can be applied in particular to the title subsequently given to the article. Although it is a group which studies groups and reports on them in the first part of its work, there are only a few slight indications that it studied its own communication to this end. But why do I think it should indeed have done so? The second part of the group’s work offers clues to the answer.

The Congress Group continued its work after the congress. Although publication was planned there are no published results of this phase of the work, but there is a series of largely literal records of the group meetings. They provide the basis for the analysis of what was actually done instead of normative statements. Again the aim was to generalize scientifically on group analytic experience. And again the question arises as to the position of this group studying groups on the scale of group organization. At first it seems to be clearly answered by its definition of itself as a research group.

It was above all Elias who in 1948 explicitly advocated the position he first formulated in published form in 1956, namely scientific generalization through detachment, formalization and the appeal to the intellectual and ego functions. But in its publication on communication from a group-analytic point of view the group had already formulated the fact that even in purely scientific groups a swing to and fro between the therapeutic and the academic poles can be observed. And from the analytic point of view what lies behind this therapeutic pole is not least the conscious treatment of the unconscious. In group practice this axis of tension comes to light as opposition between control of the discussions and free-flowing communication, the group-analytic equivalent of psychoanalytic free association, in the discussion of the C-Group on therapeutic group experience. In the form of its own discussions it manifests itself at the level of polarization between the attempt to achieve disciplined

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, Letter to Wilhelm Fliess 11.10.99. Excerpted by Elias, DLA Marbach, A: Elias Misc-D-XXIII=Freud 2. For the purposes of the present study it is worth underlining, above all, the fact that Elias made an excerpt of this passage. This quotation should be read in connection with Freud’s metaphor of Itzig, the Sunday rider.

³⁷ Elias, N., *Los der Menschen: Gedichte/Nachdichtungen*, Frankfurt/M. 1988, p. 67

³⁸ Elias, N., *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius*, Cambridge 1993.

³⁹ Foulkes, S.H./Elias, N., et. al. (1992), in : Foulkes, S.H., *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, London 1964, p. 272.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

scientific generalization of therapeutic experience and stubborn resistance to at least this form of scientization.

Further levels of tension can be observed between a more sociological and a more psychoanalytic and group-analytic perspective and between the positions of theorists and practitioners.

Often these perspectives seem to change like embedded figures, without at the same time becoming clearly visible.

The frequent references to the competing group-analytic approach of Bion prompts, furthermore, the question, as to whether a research group which is attempting to be a pure working group and consequently, in its own case, excludes the so-called therapeutic pole about which it is discussing must not reckon with a return of what it has repressed, for example in the form of the Bionian polarity between the conscious working group functions and the unconscious basic-assumption functions which disturb the character of the working group. In order to find out more about this, it is necessary to pay attention to two types of key passages. Firstly, there are those in which the split is explicitly overcome and put up for discussion, so that reference is made not only to other therapeutic groups but also self-reflexively to the group experience of one's own scientific discussion group. The quotation from Elias which serves as the title of the following case study derives from such a passage. Secondly, there are those in which this does not explicitly occur, but in which a reference not convincingly motivated by the manifest theme under discussion crops up, which in fact is directed at other, therapeutic groups but could also be valid for one's own group.

In other words: a projective reference to something external which – if it were consciously registered – could be fruitfully redirected to the internal relationships, in order to see the external situation subsequently in a clearer light.

V. „Asking anxiously for regularities“: Elias in the Maelstrom of the Congress-Group⁴¹

On **19. November 1947** Foulkes writes a letter to Elias with the hand-written remark “confidential”:

„Dear Dr. Elias, I am convening a study group in relation to the World Conference on Mental Health. The nucleus will be some group analysts who work with me, who have a lot of interesting experiences to offer. We want to ask some representatives of other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology and so on. I wonder whether you would be interested to join us? I should be particularly pleased in view of your interest in and understanding of this matter, and I think this would develop into a resumption of our co-operation in group work (...) With kind regards, Yours sincerely, SH Foulkes“

At the London World Conference Foulkes was one of the leaders of the working groups – a second group was led by Kate Friedlander – and now Elias was invited to join in this work. It can be said in advance that he accepted the invitation and that the group wrote a short undated “summary report” and an also undated longer report on its work. It is conceivable that at the time of the “International Congress on Mental Health” only the shorter text was available. We have already discussed the contents of the longer published text in the previous section.

⁴¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all the following quotations are taken from the group records of the Congress Group and the accompanying correspondence. See DLA Marbach, A: Elias 983

The date for the beginning of the working group was set for 28.11.1947 but then all trace of the documents handed down by the main participants is lost for some time, until a handwritten letter of Foulkes to Elias, dated 22.06.48, comes to light.

“Dear Dr. Elias, All of us are baffled by your sudden disappearance from our Group and hope to see you soon again. Personally I am, as you know, particularly interested to work with you. (...) It is funny, that you seemed to retire just when I tried – and successfully – to fall in with your own suggestion of more Discipline – but I hope the matter finds a less involved and simpler explanation. (...)”

Such a strong and unspoken tension in the group is recognizable that a very important member, Elias, surprisingly stays away without announcing his intention to do so. The tension seems to centre on Elias’ demand for more discipline, and Foulkes, as the leader of the group, obviously has the feeling that Elias disappeared without giving notice – something which itself cannot be characterized as disciplined – when Foulkes began to put Elias’ demand for more discipline into practice.

Here a leitmotif of both group phases becomes apparent, which is closely related to the constellation of the two main persons, as documented in articles and the records of the meetings. Foulkes’ request that Elias should return bore fruit.

From 9 October 1948 on there is a word-for-word record of the group discussions which took place after the congress in a second working phase of the Congress Group, as it continued to call itself. This allows us to gain remarkable insights into the further process.

The participants on this day in London at 3 Park Crescent are: “Dr. Anthony, Dr. Dalberg, Dr. Elias, Dr. Foulkes, Dr. James, Mr. Khan, Dr. Taylor, Dr. Yates”.

Exceptionally, the record opens with a summary of the opening statement by Elias which refers back to the preceding work phase:

„E opened with a summary of our task as he sees it in the light of previous meetings. We appear to have a great deal of clinical material but the problem is to arrange it so that it appears in some sort of order. In general psychiatrists and psychologists are dissatisfied with existing typologies, finding that their clinical material does not fit the diagnostic categories of the formal classification. As a result, there has been a wish among professional people to break down the rigid typological systems. Nevertheless, our problem here is that of all science – to approach the material from the point of view of finding some order in the mass of recorded events.

Naturally, the types of categories which we find will be later on discovered to be incomplete and inadequate. However, our task in group analysis is to find these preliminary categories. In order to establish one such fixed point for the purposes the most helpful thing it appears would be to speak about one particular point in our group work which we can identify and from which we can start. Perhaps the start of a group would be the most useful thing, or problems of integrating in a group.“

Elias takes up a quite specific position here: a group member who for a time stays away without explanation and then takes up a leading position, which can be described as that of a second group leader; someone who presents himself as a driving force advocating discipline and a scientific approach and at the same time has the habitus of the leader of the opposition against established rigid typological systems.

The first reaction comes from Dalberg and runs as follows: *“Integration is such a large subject. It would be enough if we only dealt with the start.”* Then James: *“I agree with Bion when he says that it takes 40 sessions for a group to become integrated.”* And Taylor: *“Different groups take different lengths of time (...)*

A little later Foulkes makes his second statement: *“I cannot say about the start. My problem is, for the moment, that we should talk about the first 1/2 hr.”*

In spite of the group work which preceded it, this first recorded meeting seems almost to have been regarded by the participants as a new “first meeting”. Presumably the recording and the transcriptions were themselves already precautionary measures designed to promote a disciplined scientific approach. In its search for an exemplary topic on which to concentrate the group touches upon the themes “first meeting”, “the beginning of a group”, “problems of integration in a group”. It does so in the style of a classical scientific working group with the help of “external” materials and without any group-analytic self-reference, although it must itself as a group evidently take up the problems of beginnings and integration.

In the foreground of the discussions stand the search for comparable experience and, even more, differences of all kinds.

The question of anxiety comes up at an early stage. Taylor says: *“Certainly it does not matter what they talk about as long as they relieve their anxiety by talking.”* Elias follows up with: *“The question is whether they speak to escape the anxiety arising from their symptoms or the anxiety arising from the group situation.”*

The problem of communication which the group had thematized for the congress in its preceding working phase comes up again implicitly in the new phase, for example when Foulkes raises the objection: *“We are all talking about different matters.”* The case is similar in another regard, when there is no response to contributions, when, so to speak, they are allowed to peter out.

If we take a closer look at the contributions of Foulkes and Elias we see, first of all, that we are dealing with the main speakers, although against the background of a group which is on the whole active. Elias first asks several times on the one hand for examples and, on the other hand, tests them in regard to the possibility of generalization. *“It seems then that patients may start in a group and speak about any sort of thing.”* This remark falls on deaf ears. (As early as July 1946 Elias had given his handwritten “NOTES ON GROUP THERAPY” the title “THE ANALYTICAL SITUATION – CONVERSATION WITHOUT OBJECT”) (DLA:A:Elias 983). Later: *“It seems clear that there are differences in the technique of the conductors.”* Foulkes: *“Well, yes, certainly.(...)”* And some contributions later again: *“The different kinds of groups that we have heard about, such as selected or unselected groups, very much influences the opening as Anthony has pointed out. The differences between neurotic or psychotic groups, selected and seen or unselected and unseen, will all determine our approach at the first time (...) It is a matter of meeting the occasion flexibly”* Yates: *“I want them to leave the first meeting feeling positive, not woolly or at sea.”* Elias: *“Foulkes is right in that we should become clear about our differences”* In the next breath, however, he continues instead with the points of agreement: *“All have anxiety to deal with and all are agreed that the first meeting should be positive when it finishes.”*

Shortly afterwards Elias attempts to take up on his opening statement again and to relate the discussion on differences to it: *“However small these differences may seem, they really are differences in the sense that I spoke of at the beginning. They are opportunities to see diversity in what appears to be homogenous material.”*

A little later Taylor and Elias introduce a further element into the debate. Elias picks up Taylor's completely casual remark: "*I also don't mind unsuitable cases*" and gives it a different and pointed turn: "*Well then, we should ask, what is a misfit?*" (...) *When is a patient incompatible with a group?* Taylor answers: "*There are two points: (1) He cannot join a group and (2) the group won't have him. He will not be able to join because of anxiety and inhibition. (...) The third case is the homo-sexual. For example: among a group of people who do not have this problem he would feel out of place.*" Elias: „*The first meeting would lead to some selection. One would confirm one's choice and correct it.*" Foulkes: „*Certainly. We take that for granted. You cannot judge how people will react individually when you get them together. (...)*"

Elias, the only member who had left the group, in a silently acted out conflict as it turns out, brings up the question as to what happens when someone is incompatible with a group. When another participant gives a very concrete answer, mentioning among other things the outsider position of homosexuals, Elias digresses, making a vague generalization, and is reprimanded, not for the first time, by Foulkes.

The final sequence of this first recorded and documented session of the "Congress Group" runs as follows:

Dalberg: "*It is important to end positively.*"

Elias: "*We still have not got it established how anxiety shows itself at the first meeting.*"

Foulkes: „*Perhaps I can answer that. It depends on the way the conductor handles the first case. Someone, for ex. summons courage and it depends on the way (for ex. tolerance) in which he handles the matter.*"

Elias: "*Perhaps not a moral judge*"

Foulkes: "*Yes. It is the unconscious aspect of it, the example given in handling the first problem which will give others confidence to raise theirs.*"

Elias: "*Talking may be just a way, for the first case that speaks, of disposing of anxiety. Tolerant handling of the first case will allay the anxiety of the other.*"

After a kind of new beginning, this scientific working group granted itself what it considered to be essential for a first therapeutic group meeting: a positive conclusion. Form and content of the discussion coincide in a first latent self-reference.

After we have gained a good first insight into the analytic group work of the foundation period, this formative phase of group analysis, we can see that, although an actual synthesis is not ultimately arrived at, some elements of guidance for the actions of group leaders at first meetings are established. Elias, who had opened the meeting, also had the last word. He did not take up the unconscious aspects, which Foulkes occasionally brought into play.

If one attempts as a reader to reconstruct this group gradually in one's mind one can already see hazily that beneath this more or less disciplined scientific working group far less conscious group layers shine through, in which, for example, rivalry (between Foulkes and Elias within the group and Foulkes and Bion in the group-analytic field) and anxieties dominate.

Foulkes' greatest rival in the theoretical and practical foundation of analytic groups, Bion, who is the first to be mentioned in this group, pointed out the constant danger to which groups or the functioning of groups were exposed, in differing degrees, by the shift into the modus of "basic assumption groups", guided mainly by primary processes.

The “Congress Group” does not engage in “conversation without an object”, as Elias described pure analytic groups. The development of free group association is correspondingly limited. But a group which speaks with scientific intent about group dynamics evidently does not, in spite of its relative detachment, remain untouched by those dynamics.

The **second recorded meeting** of the Congress-Group took place on Sunday, **24 October 1948** again in 3 Park Crescent, London.

On this day the participants are “Dr. Anthony, Dr. Dalberg, Dr. Elias, Dr. James, Dr. de Maré, Dr. Taylor, Dr. Yates” – an almost completely changed composition, remarkable, above all, for the absence of the group leader, Foulkes.

At Foulkes’ request the group first deals with an organizational question in regard to a questionnaire of the World Health Congress. Thus Foulkes is immediately present even in his absence.

Elias again opens the main part of the meeting with a very detailed statement which refers back to the written record of the previous meeting.

“I was wondering when I looked at our last discussion what the others were feeling about it. I wondered whether you thought it was too loose for our purpose – not concentrated enough – and whether you were surprised at what you had forgotten or what you had remembered about the first meetings. From my own point of view I think it was, as a first meeting, very good. It gave me a lot of material – more than you were aware of. I have made an attempt to work through it.” Goes on to say that the group’s aim is to publish something eventually and continues “I would suggest that there are two ways of doing this: (1) We can each try to write something in which we are individually very interested. This is, of course, the easiest way to do it and perhaps the way to which we may have to resort in the end. There is another way (2) which I should like us to take. That is that we gain, by means of our discussion as a group, some clarification of our own problems and then one of us can, as a result, write up a particular part, for ex. the beginning of a group. We are used to collaborate. If it can be done, it is something excellent. I have at least made an attempt to write down my own conclusions from last month’s meeting. I should like to read you some of it. It records what I gained and what were my conclusions from the last meeting, and says what I think one could begin to publish if one published an article for a symposium on ‘Problems of the First Meeting.’ If such a thing could be published, which, to my mind, would be ideal, one would say ‘This thing has been written by that and that and that member’. I have done part. I hope someone will do the next part...If we could do that with regard to certain central problems of group analysis it would be ideal. Let us try it.”

Here Elias takes up and is about to read his report. Before doing so he says: I have to excuse myself at the beginning. The things I have written down are certainly things which you all know; things which most of you take probably for granted. If one writes about them one has to try to write them down clearly. I suggest that you take pencil and paper and, as I read, write down what you think is wrong with it – whether anything is formulated in too definite a manner. Also pay attention to the mood of the thing. I have tried very much to put something, particularly, of Dr. Foulkes’s spirit into it, who always insists on the flexibility of it, while, as you know my own tendency is that things should be clear-cut“.

The record continues in indirect speech:

“He asks anyone to interrupt if they think fit and suggests that it might form the first part of an article on ‘Problems of the First Meeting’”

Elias reads his report – which deals with group tensions and how to keep them at the appropriate level, at the first meeting. (...) He then asks the group: ‘What is wrong? Where are the mistakes?’ These questions answered he suggests that they could then go on the second part: ‘what the level of tensions during the first meeting is’.”

The paper read by Elias is unfortunately not included in the transcript. In the statement quoted he energetically urges publication and goes all out to achieve this aim. The Congress Group takes place in a period in which he had published virtually nothing. As regards the writing process, he advocates an attempt at a group approach. His conception of an acceptable level of group tension cannot, however, be found in the evaluation of the group discussion.

He tells the other participants that they are not aware how much material they had given him. This could be understood as dividing up the conscious and the unconscious between himself and the others. On the other hand he repeatedly enquires about mistakes he might have made, apologizes for writing down things which they all probably take for granted and he even conjures up the flexible spirit of the absent group leader, Foulkes.

Thus Foulkes stands here in Elias’ view for the pole of flexibility, informality and fluidity and perhaps, in Elias’ later terminology, for involvement, whereas Elias stands for discipline and detachment. But Elias attempts to take on Foulkes’ part as well.

As a group leader Foulkes can be seen, on an unconscious level, as a father figure, who arouses feelings of rivalry in Elias, but who at the same time paradoxically represents in his behaviour more the motherly, group-analytic, flowing pole as opposed to the disciplined fatherly pole, which Elias laboriously attempts to stress in a spirit of cooperative conflict, thereby practising his later theory of science, especially of involvement-detachment-balances, in the form of an attempt at synthesis or generalization.

And one can argue that scientific synthesis, individually or in groups, also requires a balanced cooperation of conscious and unconscious processes, of the inner group or groups of the psychic functions of id, ego and super-ego, as was depicted by Elias for the composing process of Mozart.

Elias now encounters increasing resistance of various participants on several points, among them his comparison of individual and group analysis. He answers: “...*I wonder whether what I wrote is entirely wrong. Speaking generally, (...) I think, theoretically speaking, the whole situation is made on the average to give more relief if one is alone (...).*”

And finally to his most insistent critic: “*My difficulty is this: (...) How can one generalise?*” Turning to de Maré: “*That is behind your question? The problem which is the stumbling block? How can one make so sweeping a statement and generalise? Is that what is behind? This is a very serious question. How can one talk about problems of the first meeting generally? Do you think one can?*”

And James answers: “*I do not think it is terribly valuable to. As you said, first meetings differ so much. They are not really a group at the first meeting.*”

Elias’ skilful reduction of the variety of resistance to a common denominator, namely resistance to his attempt at generalization, is to a certain degree appropriate. Thus he also shows how one can generalize in a meaningful fashion.

But is the resistance directed only or only primarily against generalization in general or against a particular kind of generalization? Or more against the generalizer? Or even against

the general pushing the group forward, a general, what is more, who might easily be perceived by some as having usurped the leadership?

In other words: Is the resistance, even in a reasonably stable working group of professional psychologists, only at the level of the working group? Can the form of scientization proposed protect the group from the dynamics of the unconscious? Or does it (or id) return again, as long as it is not translated into spoken communication and self-reference?

After the discharge of tension depicted above and before a short break three of the participants, James, Yates and Elias, take up again the theme of tensions in regard to the first meeting of therapeutic groups (and, as it seems, with latent, but again no manifest, self-reference):

James: *“You can go half-way to meet them and get a personal relation with each of them, or you can really try to help them to understand the tension.”*

Yates: *“Therefore you have got to state the fact that there is tension”*

Elias: *“To state that you have here a situation where you have to cope with tensions.....One has to ask oneself: what is the appropriate level of tension which they can bear? I must not go too much below and I cannot go too much above it (...). I think that is one of the central problems of the first meeting.”*

It can be said in advance at this point that Elias did not finally succeed in integrating this conception of an appropriate level of tension into a general theory on therapeutic groups, mainly because Foulkes contradicted him decisively. But he saves it up for decades – and this is not untypical of his development of theory – until he ultimately places it at the heart of his own sociological small-group theory illustrated by the example of football figurations and in the form of the concept of *“groups in controlled tension”*.⁴²

As *“the main motor of group dynamics”* he sees in this context a *“complex of reciprocally dependent polarities”*⁴³ – precisely as it is elaborated in the enquiry presented here as a driving force of Elias’ theory formation.

This is an example of the way in which the personal dynamics of a researcher can, under certain circumstances, sharpen his perception of the analogous dynamics of the object of his research

Whereas in the previous course of the discussion group experience from the standpoint of the therapist was the main point of reference – and in the case of Elias so to speak secondarily the statements of the other participants in the Congress Group on their group experience – in the following sequence another point of reference is added: the comparison and the tense competition with the theory and practice of Bion, the most important group-analyst beside Foulkes, who also happened to be working in London.

Unlike the working group centred on Foulkes and Elias, Bion did not trouble himself to consider whether, how or to what degree the tension in the first or any other meeting can be reduced for the participants in the group. His complete refusal to meet any of the expectations participants might have from a group leader and instead simply to observe and describe what happens seems to have caused irritation not only in his groups, but also in the C-Group.

⁴² Elias, N./Dunning, E., Zur Dynamik von Sportgruppen, in: Elias, N./Dunning, E., Sport im Zivilisationsprozeß, Münster, pp. 105-122, at p. 111. In the development of his theory of the small group Elias explicitly names the theoretical foundations of group therapy and Foulkes in a footnote – but as having been “put aside” (ibid. S. 122, FN 1).

⁴³ Ibid p.118 ff.

And so it was probably an obvious step for Elias to refer to Bion by way of comparison: “After hearing your discussion last time and thinking it over I came to the conclusion that what Bion does is wrong as a consistent pattern. There may be a reason occasionally to do it. I had almost the feeling that to make a theory that it must be done in such a way – that seemed to me wrong”

Yates “Bion’s technique is quite, quite different. The content in his group treatment doesn’t matter much. It doesn’t matter what they talk about. (...) I think all of us agree that the content matters; that we deal with the content quite a bit.”

Taylor: “I know what Elias feels because I had the same feeling: this attitude of Bion’s is almost a neurotic symptom. He wants to disappoint and frustrate the group. He doesn’t only do it with the group. I heard him last Thursday. He disappoints everybody. He wants to disappoint everybody.”

Yates: “It is quite deliberate.” (...)

Elias: “My impression is that he cannot help it”

De Maré: « I agree. »

Elias: “ To have the elasticity to choose sometimes Bion’s technique is very good. To have no other technique is wrong. (...) My present conclusion is that the best we can do – the best a conductor can have – is to be able to say that sometimes he can choose the one and sometimes the other”.

The further course of this group meeting seems to have been rather confused in regard to “content matters”. De Maré’s “ I am confused” can be taken as an illustration of this aspect; but also perhaps of the fact that latent issues always seem to find a way of popping up in different forms in the manifest materials.

The red thread running through the discussions on the surface is the attempt, undertaken above all by Elias, to arrive at scientifically generalizable statements about therapeutic groups – and a counter-tendency which again and again threatens to break this red thread whenever participants cast doubts upon the various specific generalizations, while Elias gains the impression that these doubts refer to generalizations in general.

James reacts to an attempted summarization by Elias saying: “Every group differs. You can never tell.” (...)

Anthony objects quite elegantly: “How can you generalize that every group differs from every other group?”

Elias:” That is very true. You can only judge in what respect one group differs from another if you can compare(...)”. And elsewhere: “The reason why I brought in individual analysis is this: One can see the specific characteristics of the first meeting of group therapy only if one compares it with something which isn’t group therapy”. Further: “I am stating the obvious in that the situation is different only to find out what effect that has on the people involved in the situation.”

As a reader of these records one could ask whether it is really necessary to say these and even more basic things in this circle. Is this a flight from the more difficult aspects the job of this group has, as in one of the classical basic assumptions identified by Bion? A task shift? Are we still in a working group here, or are we at least from time to time in what Bion called a basic-assumption group? Is the opposition to Elias’ attempts at synthesis an “attack on linking” (Bion) in general or only on specific ways of linking? Or is something of both in it? In spite of all these difficulties Elias keeps the flag flying as well as he can for the planned article on the first group meetings. And he is not entirely without support:

James to Elias: “What you have written is rather different from the way we are speaking – more in line with what I would think is right. You begin rather generally. I think it is a useful

kind of approach (...)” Improvements on details are suggested. Yates refers to a passage in which Elias says of the group leader that ‘*he had to vary his approach according to the constitution of the group*’. One should add: ‘*and according to his own personality*’. Elias agrees. Here, in the circle of group leaders, a more conscious self-reference enters into the debate. Yates again brings up Bion in the discussion and Elias answers: “*It would be quite wrong on our part to develop a rigid theory. One cannot impose it*” Whereas Bion is identified here with rigidity, the opposite pole is “*Foulkes’ flexibility*”. (Anthony). Again and again the group comes back to the anxieties and tensions in first group meetings. As a possible cause “*fear of the unknown*” is, for example mentioned (Taylor), which Elias approves, himself adding “*implicit rivalry*” - for which the C-Group could have provided a lot of material if the group had actually studied its own communication. It is typical of this group that its own communication as a possible level of research remains largely implicit, but nonetheless is both expressed and disguised in this latent form. Thus strong tensions are not only discussed generally but can at the same time be heard in unarticulated form in the C-Group itself, for example in the remarks of Yates (“*silly*”) and de Maré (to Elias): “*You are not convinced. I would like to know what other people think*” The tension is relieved by laughter at two points which characteristically indicate self-reference.

Elias: “*Is there such a thing as “beginner’s anxieties”?*”

James: “*“In the therapist – which we have not discussed yet!” (laughter)* and towards the end of the meeting, taking up contributions from the group:

Elias: “*Is there anything else that the conductor must not convey at the first meeting – apart from not being omnipotent?*”

Anthony: “*“I suppose that includes omniscience too!” (laughter)*”

Why does “omniscient” in an answer to Elias make everybody laugh? This is an implicit but certainly not entirely unconscious allusion in the group to its own discussions: in the form of a joke to indicate the way the group perceives Elias’ attempts to generalize, namely as a disguised, probably unconscious claim to scientific omnipotence.

After the discharge of tension, it appears, the group opens the door to Elias’ project for an article. Yates proposes that each of them should write down what he or she says in the first group meeting.

Elias: “*We could do some good – a very great good – in this article. One suddenly sits down and thinks about one’s own technique. If we could make the reader sit up and think, then we would do something very good.*”

Anthony – with a humorous allusion and a rather conciliatory dig at what was said earlier: - “*Sounds a little rigid – but we could.*”

And so they agree to prepare something for the next meeting.

The third meeting takes place on Sunday, **6 November 1948**, again in Crescent Place. The participants are Elias, Foulkes, James, de Maré and Taylor. Nothing is said about the agreement reached at the previous meeting. Elias opens the meeting instead with the proposal that they should first discuss what Foulkes wishes to discuss. The subsequent discussion, particularly in the early stages, is largely dominated by Foulkes and Elias. Foulkes responds to Elias’ attempts to adopt a comparative approach by saying: “*You compare 6 horses with two dogs...*”. Elias retorts: “*You compare 2 methods of psychotherapy...*”.

Apart from the crackling tension in the air the group did in fact find it difficult to reach an agreement on clear comparisons. Should individual or dyadic psychotherapy be compared with group therapy or psychoanalysis with group analysis? Should the first hour of a group therapy or of specific group analysis be compared with a first hour of individual analysis on the couch or with the preceding diagnostic interview? Or would it be better to compare the first hours instead of only the first hour?

This is the typical difficulty of a minimally structured group discussion with just a few basic guidelines, whether it is a patient, a working or a research group. And the Congress Group now discusses this characteristic field of tension between formalized-disciplined and informalized-open styles but without the possible resource of self-reference, without evaluating the experience it had itself just made:

Foulkes: “I can handle a group nearer - give them more definite instructions. Or I can handle it leaving it open what is allowed and what is not allowed – let the group find it’s own level, other things being equal. I prefer this. It is more difficult but more interesting. You bring out more things. (...) What would be comparable, say, to a group member getting up and putting on his coat, or lighting a cigarette? The group member has no reason from the beginning to know whether this is acceptable behaviour or not. In analysis a patient will say ,Can I smoke?’ and you have to say, as a rule, ,No, better not’.”

Elias: „You might say ,Why do you want to smoke?’“

Foulkes: “In a group I would say ‘Certainly’”(…) “ If you say ‘No, better not smoke’ they may be perfectly alright. If you leave it to the group the fact whether they smoke or not tells you a lot. A freer field, a less rigid frame of reference but you get more information.”

Not only the remarks made here are interesting in our context. Years later the example of smoking will become very interesting again as we can see from a consideration of the records of one of the first group-analytic training groups, or T-Groups, led by Foulkes and with Elias as one of the participants.

It is worth making a little anticipatory digression here, because the training groups, although they are not themselves directly therapeutic groups, are “allowed” to come closer to the therapeutic pole, as they are a preparation for the leadership of therapeutic groups. They consequently offer more room for manoeuvre in the open regressive domain than the C-Group can – or thought it could - allow itself as a research group on groups. In this case we have no word for word records but only the detailed notes of Foulkes as the leader of the meetings.⁴⁴

As early as the second meeting, the first in which Elias participated as a trainee, Foulkes reports:

“One of the things when I had to take a more personal role was when Elias raised the question of smoking, and I gave a very free account of my feelings about it, and there was a lengthy discussion, which again tended to become rather technical (...)”

Foulkes emphasizes “*the importance of rather talking what they feel instead of living it out.*” In the seventh meeting Foulkes now describes a tense episode in which he first attempts in a friendly manner to point out to one of the participants, de Maré, that he had betrayed a considerable degree of animosity towards the group leader and that this bore all the characteristics of a fundamental transference problem. He continues:

⁴⁴ Wellcome Library, Archives and Manuscripts, PP/SHF/C. 6/5/7

„The point about it all is that this matter was taken up by almost the whole group as if I had rebuffed de Maré severely (...). Now an interesting episode in this connection was that Dr Elias seemed to get more and more hostile, too. He suddenly asked ‘May I smoke?’, having matches and a cigarette in his hands. ‘Of course you may – are you asking me’ I said, ‘but you know what we were saying about it.’ ‘May he smoke, please?’, insisted Dr Doniger, on my left, even more provoking the impression that it was entirely my taboo, and that I was a terrible tyrant, that I had to be implored not to treat his poor flock too badly. After that Elias, with enormous tension and almost like acting aggression, but I think he controlled it even (Underlining added: HPW), lit his cigarette. This was the climax of hostility expressed (...).”

There is no smoke without fire. Tension and aggression and their control are key themes for Elias, in the C-Group and in his entire work. Transfer, acting out, projections, the unconscious and the preconscious are expressed mutely, which is not untypical for a traumatized person. If they are not symbolized they cannot be treated at all, or at best only implicitly, in sociological civilization theory.

Having said this we return to the earlier discussion in the C-Group which now revolves around comparative aspects of individual and group analysis.

Elias: *“What effect has this difference on the patients in the first meeting?”*

“Generally, according to our present day knowledge that a definite situation produces certain attitudes no matter what the individuals are that are in that situation. Of course, individuals make variations but it is the situation itself which produces certain attitudes. In this general way it would be interesting to know what does this situation produce – the individual analytic situation – different from the group analytic situation?”

Foulkes: *“Psycho-analytic situation produces, or is in danger to produce, putting it all in inverted commas. The whole situation is taken as distinct from life.”*

Elias: *“What effect has this?”*

Foulkes: *“Encourages regression and allows for regression (...).”*

Elias: *“(...) The chance to feel oneself in a child situation (that is what I meant when I said ,to relax’) seems to be greater in the individual situation than in the group situation (...).”*

Foulkes: *“I wouldn’t say that. Initially, as far as one can generalise, that sort of thing would tend to make it less at ease.”*

Elias here equates relaxation with the feeling of return to the situation of a child. This casts a new light on his conception of the appropriate level of tension in groups. Does he regard it as necessary in order to avoid sinking into regression?

Foulkes later goes more deeply into his last-mentioned point of comparison: *“I think the deep unconscious fear is more played on by the analytic situation than by the group situation.”*

Elias: *“I have asked round as much as I could and most people I have asked, both analysts and patients, have agreed with me that in the beginning an analysis promises, or tends to give, immediate relief. That is what I relied on when I made this statement. My inner formulations were: ‘While, in later stages, individual analysis creates, I should almost say, pain of a depth which group analysis can never reach, at the beginning it is more likely to give greater relief.’(...).”*

Foulkes can agree with this if it refers to the first four weeks, but not in regard to the first meeting. Elias does not take him up on his reference to *unconscious* fear. Afterwards the discussion gets hung up and goes around in circles, at least at the manifest and the working group level. It again turns on problems of generalization. Elias says that he does not

understand and Foulkes that he is only trying to help. The records end with the word “confused”. In between Elias polemizes against the conception of the self-regulatory group and brings up the question of the group leader. All of this refers to other groups or to groups in general. Once again, it can be read very differently, when it refers to the group engaged in the discussion.

Elias: *“I want to put on record: it can easily work out that one, so to say, in one’s mind transforms the group into some mysterious being which develops by itself – in a mysterious way. I remember that word ‘self-regulating’. I don’t deny that, to some extent, the group is self-regulating, but I would insist on the fact that the conductor is the conductor. Without the spontaneity of the group he can do nothing. At the same time he does actively observe whether this integration goes on and he helps as far as he can.”*

Foulkes: *“That is a different question.”*

Elias: *“This idea that really one can leave it all to the group...”*

Foulkes: *“I am certainly not of that opinion. I don’t think the conductor can leave it for a moment to the group, in a sense – but you can define his role more precisely or less precisely...”*

Elias: *“I do not understand. (...)”*

Elias: *“There is, of course, some activity in the group, some element of self-regulation in it. But the conductor must want to know in his own mind that he wants this group of people – who are at first moment strangers to each other – that he wants this feeling of strangeness to wear off and he wants them to develop some feeling of being a unit, and of sharing something. This doesn’t mean that they are friends. Only on the basis of this group feeling can these hostilities come into the open....The problem was’, There are these initial difficulties coming from the strangeness of being among strangers and yet being asked to confide in a doctor’. The conductor is there to help to do that. (...)”*

Taylor: *“I agree”*

Foulkes: *“It isn’t to define but sometimes he may do a wrong thing by helping to wear it off”*

Elias and Foulkes differ on the therapeutic value of feelings of strangeness in a strange way: Elias, who thinks a certain level of tension is useful, wants to help against tense feelings of strangeness, Foulkes, who tries to work consistently against tension, seems to be reluctant to help with the reduction of this specific tension, which both emigrants must know all too well.

Taylor: *“I asked the group to compare symptoms as a task. I helped them to establish a bond – something which they shared. Then I have the first unifying situation in the group. The rest I leave to them but part help them...(...)”*

This is the first contribution, after a good three quarters of the meeting have passed, to what had been or apparently had been agreed on for this session at the previous meeting.

The group then turns to the question how Bion actually holds his meetings together.

Elias assumes: *“It may be by the enormous common tension which he creates. He may also create a common hostility towards himself which may also integrate.”*

To this ascribed or actual strategy Foulkes objects: *“I believe that group therapy, even group analysis, rests more on supporting features (...) This supporting element comes in the group not so much deliberately from the conductor...”* And he adds: *“I want to avoid this idea that group analysis in principle is less ready to deal with basic problems than analysis.”*

Elias seems to regard this as a further criticism of himself and deplores the renewed failure to arrive at a generalization. *“I am a bit unhappy about the outlook. Again and again it comes to a point where it seems that one can almost say everything about everything – and I know that cannot be true. (...)”*

James: *"I felt that too. The form in which you present the paper and in which we criticize is fallacious. We certainly did not criticize but the discussion went on as a criticism. (...)"*

Foulkes: *"We have agreed very definitely on certain statements."*

Elias: *"I feel at the moment a little bit confused rather than enlightened."*

The confusion can stand as a headword for the rest of the discussion in this session, although James did bring up a clear self-reference regarding the group. Two statements on content stand out, and they occur almost erratically, without clear reference to the ongoing discussion.

Foulkes: *"Looking back on a first session: -*

(1) everybody participated and was interested

(2) how has the group understood what they are here for. Have they understood, ideally, what is expected of them and what they come here for?

(3) Have they understood, ideally, that they can exchange remarks, that they are a group, that they are not remaining each an individual connected with me

(4) Are they quite happy? Supposing there was a big tension are they happier?

(5) Can they be serious, and also can they laugh?"

Criteria for a good start to a group then. But how far are they valid for the Congress Group?

There are two more small asides:

Elias: *"How can you expect them to have understood what they are coming for" (...)*

De Maré: *"That frustrating element of the group is terribly important. That prolonged frustration for an individual in a group is very important."*

And now Elias makes a concluding remark in which he brings the question of the self-reference of the group back into the group by articulating the discussion about the beginning of other therapeutic groups as an experience of the C-Group itself. He also expresses his frustration at being at the end of the session where he had hoped they would be at the beginning.

Again and again the group process seems to spring back to its beginnings, or one is at least aware of a seemingly almost regressive undertow working against the intended development. Must the group, as if under an unconscious spell, tarry forever in an eternal first meeting in order to win insights into the generalizable aspects of a group of this kind?

Elias: *"This brings us to the problem which I hoped we would discuss to-day. One of the experiences of the group itself was by comparing the different ways in which each member of the group starts a group. I think each has realised more fully than before how many different ways of starting a group there are. If we could convey something of this in an article. The normal thing is that everyone sticks to a particular method which corresponds best to his particular personality. By getting to know of other methods one can at least loosen a little bit the structure of one's own tendencies in starting a group. We would say what possibilities of starting a group there are – starting, say, at the Bion pole and going through various shades to the opposite of Bion, we could perhaps get various methods of starting."*

Foulkes: *"I don't know whether Bion knows himself what his method is."*

The records end in indirect speech: “Taylor says that Bion reported a therapeutic group in „Human Relations“ and described what he did in a group but never said anything of his relation to the group. He gives no lead to the group and leaves them confused.⁴⁵ It is 7 p.m. and time to stop.“

On Sunday, **21 November**, the Congress Group meets for the **fourth time**. The participants are Anthony, Elias, Foulkes, Darborg, James, de Maré, Taylor and Yates.

Elias opens the session with the themes *discipline* and *time*. If something written is to be produced more discipline, regularity, investment and better utilization of time and continuous participation seem indispensable to him. “*We must discipline ourselves to do certain work as a group.*” Various possibilities are discussed. James would like to know the feelings of all the others in regard to what had been achieved so far and what improvements each of them could propose. De Maré finds this pointless, as long as all of them have not received a copy of the report. The following decision is taken. Elias: “*These reports must be considered as confidential. Nothing should be shown to outsiders as our considered opinions.*” Presumably the records of the group meetings are meant here. It now turns out that evidently only Elias and Foulkes had access to them. This casts a new light on some of the opposition, for example on the part of de Maré. The existence of “domination knowledge” now becomes mentionable and visible. Tacit power differentials in groups in general are subsequently thematized: that almost all of the participants in the Congress Group set great store by wearing the white doctor’s coat as group leaders; that they sit on special group leaders’ chairs. Can all of this only be spoken about after analogous questions have been thematized in the group itself?

It is also now made explicit who will be in charge of the work on the desired article. Elias: “*(...) Perhaps Foulkes and I will sort out something from these discussions and make a draft...but in addition it would be a very good thing if we could write something individually. Is that something very difficult do you think?*”

Yates: “*Yes.*”

Elias and Foulkes now offer all who wish to make a written contribution substantial individual support. Elias emphasizes that each of them must find a topic which suits him. James: “*I think we have tried lots of different alternatives and not found a direction. If we actually discussed something which has been written (...)*”. One can imagine Elias’ feelings in answering: “*That is what I have done...*” But then James retorts: “*We have not had the typescript to make written comments on it.*” Taylor demands more factual material. Elias counters: “*What seemed to me lacking was a clear framework into which to order this material – and a method of ordering it.*”

Elias again refers to his comparative method: “*If there would be a group in this world of people who had blue colour vision. They could not possibly know they had blue colour vision.*”

⁴⁵ See Bion, W.R., *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*, London 1961, p. 29: “Early in 1948 the Professional Committee of the Tavistock Clinic asked me to take therapeutic groups, employing my own technique. Now, I had no means of knowing what the committee meant by this, but it was evident that in their view I had ‘taken’ therapeutic groups before. I had, it is true, had experience of trying to persuade groups composed of patients to make the study of their tensions a group task. (...) It was disconcerting to find that the committee seemed to believe that patients could be cured in such groups as these. It made me think at the outset that their expectations of what happened in groups of which I was a member were very different from mine. Indeed the only cure of which I could speak with certainty was related to a comparatively minor symptom of my own – a belief that groups might take kindly to my efforts.”

This is the beginning of the article to which Taylor refers here and which had just been published at the time of the recorded group discussions.

You can only know it if you come together with people who have different colours. That is why I think we had to compare group psychoanalytic treatment with individual psychoanalytic treatment(...).

Elias sees it as his task in the C-Group to present its material at a higher level of synthesis.

But the “material” is stubborn. “It” plays dumb.

Elias: *“Just to describe a few things that we do – that is not enough.”*

James: *“It would not be just a few things.”*

Elias: *“All things are not enough. It is not a question of adding one thing to another...”*

James: *“Let’s use our experience here. (...)”*

As in an embedded figure the different points of view cannot be brought together to give one picture. In “all things are not enough” Elias’ plea for synthesis is all too evident. The description of details, even if it is comprehensive, is not enough. If one wishes to be scientific, one must reach a higher level of summary comparison

Latently, however, the other members of the group seem to hear the overtones of an omnipotent, overtaxing (scientific) super-ego aiming at “omniscience”, against which those invited to supply material rebel, as they suspect a degrading division of labour between the suppliers of raw materials and the refiners of the product.

James’ demand at this point “to use our experience here” means in the manifest context, as his subsequent elucidation reveals, quite simply what should be taken for granted, namely that everyone should bring in his experience from outside. To shift the emphasis, it would make much better sense in the permanent battles, in the „frozen clinch“ between disciplinization as the precondition for an attempt at synthesis on the one hand and refusal and resistance on the other to read the situation as follows: Why don’t we use the group experience we are making here and now for theory formation? But this reading remains latent.

Elias now makes a central procedural proposal:

“There is one general way of procedure which I would recommend to the group, namely, at the moment, not so much to say ‘I do this and this’ and ‘I do that and that’ but to look upon it, as it were, from outside and to say: ‘One of the possibilities to conduct a first meeting is this (...)’ You might say that they are innumerable. But you will find that they lie on a scale between two extremes (...) (turning to Taylor): You give very definite instructions. That is one extreme (...) On the other hand we have the attitude of the conductor who is frustrating from the first moment – who says very little...as it seems Bion does sometimes. Here we have a framework. – 2 variables: the kind of group one has and the personality of the Conductor⁴⁶.”

This methodical proposal to regard experiences in which one is strongly involved as if from outside was first published by Elias in an elaborated form eight years later, in 1956, under the title “Problems of Involvement and Detachment”⁴⁷ and then further differentiated over the decades until the final version was presented as the conception of involvement-detachment-balances.

In what follows several participants seem to be better prepared in regard to the contents of the discussion or they react more communicatively to Elias’ endeavours. Nonetheless, the tension remains in the air, although it is not, or is scarcely articulated as such. The group work brings

⁴⁶ Incidentally, the „conductor“ is actually written with a capital “C” here, which is unusual in English, and his importance is thus emphasized. This leads us to the question as to who transcribed the records of the meetings. This cannot be determined from the existing documents. But it seems highly likely that it was Foulkes’ secretary at the time, and later wife and widow, Elizabeth Foulkes, formerly Elizabeth Marx. .

⁴⁷ Elias, N. (1956), Problems of Involvement and Detachment , in: British Journal of Sociology 8, N° 3.

further knowledge about group work to light. Key information often surfaces wherever the transfer of knowledge, especially of know-how, of implicit knowledge, is related to the group process. But this almost always remains, in Hegelian terms, “in itself” and not also “for itself” and is hardly ever consciously perceived by the group as self-reference.

Elias: “*You would tell them individually something beforehand about the group? What would you say?*”

Foulkes: “*You cannot generalise*” (...)

Elias: “*Dont you say certain things which you usually say – more or less repeat?*”

Foulkes: “*Each occasion is too singular.*”

Elias: “*You are sitting before the group for the first time*”

Foulkes: “*Better to assume I don’t know much about them. I would start from the end. I want, ideally, a certain move to take place.*”

Elias: “*What would you do?*”

Foulkes: “*I am trying to give an accurate answer. A little time would pass.....I would find out to what situation I am talking*”

Elias: “*You sit there and you have to say something*”

James: “*Why does he have to say something?*”

Foulkes: “*At this stage the group can expect one to say something*”

Elias: “*On most occasions you would say something. What would you say?*”

Foulkes: “*Can I turn that and say ,what would I want to convey?*”

Elias: “*No. One possibility - Not standardized.*”

In the following 5th session Elias draws the conclusion: “*By conveying you must inevitably make a more immediate appeal to the emotional side of the patients.*” In retrospect this casts a new light on this debate. We can now describe it in the additional light of the later developments in Elias’ sociology of knowledge and science as concerning more the gradual shift towards the balance of involvement and detachment and less the alternative between “saying” or “conveying”.

But this last mentioned question does not seem to come to the heart of the matter.

Descriptions of a different kind come up:

Darborg: “*(...) Each may express his or her own opinion on what is said so that we see it like a crystal. (...)*”

Anthony: “*(...) “I usually seize upon a key word and wait for that and from that the group starts growing”*”

Foulkes: “*What is it that one wants to convey: - that it is understood why one is there?...to go further, the remarks of one concern another.(...) I welcome exchange. I stop myself (...) I make it understood either by words or by conveying that it is welcome; that they can say anything they like at any time...I support the understanding of **free exchange undisciplined**, as it were.” (boldtype HPW)*

Could it be said that the question about the use of disciplined words, disciplined scientific language, is answered with searching, free-floating, “undisciplined“ positions?

Participation in the research group described here fluctuates greatly, although on this day nobody contradicts Yates’ statement about therapeutic groups: “*regular attendance is essential*” One of the group leaders, Elias, had suddenly disappeared from the group in the preliminary phase of the C-Group. The other, Foulkes, will do the same, and not for the first time, after the session described here. Is it possible to describe this aspect of the group with Bion as a special form of the basic assumption group, as a group which, in its considerable dynamics, is thrown back upon the unconscious basic assumption that what is at issue is fight

or flight instead of research? Are we perhaps confronted, even at the higher integrative level of general scientific development, with forms of knowledge and with the “scientific establishments”⁴⁸ which convey them, in which what matters is in fact predominantly the struggle with the object of research, or is it rather the fear and flight from it?⁴⁹ Is it a matter of methodical rigidity inadequately designed to contain fear? Are scientific object-relations denied here? Especially in situations in which one could unexpectedly discover oneself in the mirror of the research object?

Remarkably enough, it is precisely in this sequence that James reports, apparently without any immediate reason, on a patient diagnosed as paranoid, that is to say on an expert in feelings of flight and fight.

“He has been raising this issue: why have I got a special chair, why do I wear a white coat and why do I come in last?”

Anthony: *“You have got a white coat?”*

Taylor: *“That is one of the things. To wear a white coat – that is very important.”*

It turns out that all of them with the exception of Anthony have a special chair; and that even paranoia can have its productive aspects, for example in bringing power relations into the debate, if it is well integrated into the group.

In the time remaining for the group questions of silence, speaking, and speakers in groups, among others, are discussed. After a break in the talks, which was evidently longer as it is specifically mentioned in the records, Elias asks: *“What about the silence?”* - with reference to groups in general.

James: *“I would minimize the silence by looking round in a friendly way (...)”*

Anthony: *“(...) It has been my good fortune always to have a ‘speaker’ who very seldom lets me down. (...)”*

Taylor: *“There is never a group without a ‘speaker’” (...)*

Yates: *“When he drops out then it is dreadful. Then they really begin to do some work.”*

Whether the possible application of this British humour to the C-Group itself was intended cannot be clearly determined. Here even the leader, Foulkes, will leave the group, or will withdraw behind the scenes. The speaker, Elias, remains – more active than ever. Is the group then spared the horrors of doing some work itself?

The interesting thread running through the concluding phase of the discussion – the time remains strictly limited to two hours – can be depicted by means of a short series of scattered quotes:

Elias asks (and one could direct an analogous question at him and every researcher too): *“(...) what personality structure in the Conductor would be more inclined to this or that type of technique?” (...)* He believes: *“Everyone has a favourite approach”*

James contradicts him: *“The kind of method I am interested in now is exactly the opposite from what my personality structure would have let me to do 5 years ago. I have learnt from Foulkes – the exact opposite of my personality. I should have thought you would all have expected me to give a lecture.”* The records note: *“general amusement.”*

Elias concedes that personality structure *and* training play a part.

And continues, with a small self-reflexive turn: *“One of the uses of such an article would be to convey to other people the experiences which some of you have had here – to say how many possibilities there are. (...)”*

⁴⁸ See Elias, N., *Scientific Establishments*.

⁴⁹ On this point see Devereux, G., *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences*, The Hague, Paris, 1967.

James answers with what they have in common instead of the many differences: *“The thing we have in common is to try to pass the responsibility to the group.”* (...)

Anthony: *“The easier you make it for the patient the longer the integrating process. I make it easy. Therefore it takes longer.”* (...)

Elias: *“I should be very glad to see what function....Not to do the work – I can see that. But I feel it means putting the initial tension on a higher level than verbally”*

James: *“(...) The sooner they face this tension the better (...)”*

Elias: *“How soon one puts the Burden of the tension on them – that is the main point....The speed with which you put the burden on the group.”*

James: *“It is the speed with which I don’t take the burden off the group.”*

The meeting closes.

On 4 December 1948 the Congress Group meets for its fifth session. The participants are **Anthony, Dalborg, Elias, James, de Maré, Taylor and Yates**. (not Foulkes)

Elias begins by informing them that he has attempted *“to get something ready for writing”*, but needs the advice of the group on a number of points.

Then they discuss whether a Dr. Grimwood, who is writing a work on group therapy, should be allowed to participate as a guest at the next session. They agree to accept his participation for one meeting.

Elias would like to bring the discussion about the beginning of a group to an end soon. He undertakes a comprehensive summary:

“The End of the beginning: what we had in mind was not so much to have your particular beginning but to have samples of how one can possibly begin. (...) Just as one has various beginnings of a game of chess, so one can have various possible beginnings – quite objectively – of groups.

Trying to write about it, I wanted to find out what are the differences, what types there are. Perhaps one problem is (which we have not yet discussed at all) not why you do it in that particular way but what is the specific effect of one way of doing it in contra-distinction to the other way of doing it. (...)

Elias then characterizes his first idea about the main difference in the therapeutic technique as not quite right and reformulates it in the following key passage:

“At the one end of the scale is the conductor who gives very systematic advice, who clearly states, in so many words, what the patients’ attitude should be, what they should not do. At the other end, represented here by James, no explicit instructions but, at best, implicit hints by means of behaviour...let me formulate it differently: Is not the primary difference that some of you think it right to approach the ego, the intellect, of the patients – perhaps because intellectual approach limits fears (Underlining added: HPW) and, as the more usual approach, makes the transition from outside into the group easier? I don’t know. On the other hand, the approach (non intellectual or non verbal) stimulates far more the emotions...can be interpreted by the patients far more in different ways, according to their feelings. (...)

*One appeals to the ego; the other is more likely to involve emotional aspects too⁵⁰
(Underlining added: HPW).*

What would be the possible effect of this difference? (...)

The other difference, far easier to approach, is the one which Anthony expressed by using this word „gradualism“. James’ approach is at one end of the scale which, by its lack of definiteness, seems to me anything but gradual. Anthony’s approach has the deliberate aim of

⁵⁰ See above the considerations on the ego-psychological direction of psychoanalysis at the time; in this respect too Klein and Bion could be regarded as the “opposite pole”.

keeping the tension in the first meeting relatively low and of leading very gradually to the desirable tension. Here is the problem: what possible effect can that have? Also the problem, which we can discuss: do you think these methods can be as independent of the personality that each of you would, for experiment's sake, be willing or able, next time you start a group, to try something following the opposite model? Would it be possible? It may not be. (...) By conveying you must inevitably make a more immediate appeal to the emotional side of the patients?"

The group seems at first to take up this set of problems:

Taylor: "(...) *The group Conductor is part of a group in an emotional field. He can either help this emotional field to some sort of solution or he may not help. The differences are only helping more towards reassurance, or less...*"(...)

Taylor: "*I feel there are different kinds of groups. Everybody has been a member of different groups. This is a therapeutic group – which they have never experienced before in their lives. They have to be told what the difference is (...)*

Elias: "*Have they got to know?*" (...)

James: "*I say that the group should find out for itself that this group is different from other kinds of group they have been to before. I have learned this from Foulkes. If they find it out for themselves it is a more real experience. (...)*

Elias: (1) *We all seem to agree that the tension should not become too great in the first meeting. (2) Let the weight of the activity shift on to the group itself. (...)*

So far a sequence where the activity of the group as a working group seems recognizable, characterized by some continuity and development in the questions asked.

A later sequence:

Yates: "*Fundamentally we are doctors. I think it is a principle in modern medicine not to do anything without getting your patient's co-operation and explaining what is happening (...)*

James: "*It is just in the name of that principle that I would say nothing. (...) I think it is characteristic that you say 'we' or 'doctors'. I think one should speak for oneself.*" (...)

Elias: "*When I listen to your reasons I have an odd feeling. Most of the reasons are not taken from this particular group situation (...) There are extraneous reasons: because the doctor always does it; (...) The central point is: accept the possibility that there are different ways of doing it – but what is the actual effect on the patient?*"

Anthony: "*How far do people realise in these modern days that talking is therapy? They have weekly interviews and are still waiting for treatment. (...)*"

Does the question arise here in this group which it asks about other groups or groups in general as to the optimal level of tension or, perhaps, in anticipation of a concept later increasingly valued by Elias, the balance of tension?

At all events the group now talks about tension and ambivalence. And here, once again, the question of self-reference arises. Reference is made to the manner of talking in the group, to the more anonymous medical We-group identification in comparison to the group-analytic rule of self-reference of the individual speakers in group discussions, which is meant to prevent a form of speaking which includes others without asking them. Elias seems irritated by the introduction of a professional "we" identity, from which moreover he is also himself excluded, as "extraneous", as "not taken from this particular group situation."

"We want as much tension as the group can stand" says James at this point.

Soon afterwards the ambivalent tension level seems to transform the group once again into a basic-assumption group, yet again when it is dealing with the issue of generalization.

Elias: *“You try to convince me that it is too early to make any generalisations whatever but I am not convinced.”*

Taylor: *“You are right perhaps but we don’t know.”*

Elias: *“Quite.”*

A split between “we” and “you” in the group.

At this point of high tension Elias suddenly begins, at the manifest level, to speak about a member of de Maré’s group,⁵¹ a stutterer.

“It was a lively group. Overwhelmed him with questions for half an hour. He answered in fairly good humour. Afterwards one can feel that he is furious. I feel it has done him lots of good. I may be wrong. Anyhow, what type is that who can stand, at the first meeting, such an onslaught? Is it individual or can one say anything generally?”

Can we hear here an unconscious identification with someone in whose case it is conceivable that the high level of internal tension breaks up the continuity in the flow of his speech?

Elias makes an appeal which we could easily see in relation to his own situation:

“Why not make it easier for the Conductor in the first group? Let him profit by your experiences. (...) We must be a bit more courageous and try some generalisations.”

A short sequence on tension:

Elias: *“Tension is, generally speaking, the lever by means of which the therapist works. (...) Anthony stressed the consistency of the attitude of the Conductor throughout the treatment. Is it possible, during the first meeting, that he can deviate too much from the attitude he is going to take later on?”*

Anthony: *“Do you mean consistency or rigidity?”*

Elias: *“I mean what I say.”*

Content and group process, the discussion on tension and the development of tension in the group, which is speaking, interlock here. But the direct verbalization of this interlocking relationship is always only momentary.

The rest of this session seems disjointed. Fragments catch the eye:

Dalberg: *“the prima donna is dangerous for the others.” (...)*

Elias: *“Direct approach arouses resistance sometimes. Indirect approach gives the idea ,I do it alone – myself⁵² (...)”*

James: *“The only cure is personal anxiety. You cannot teach that in a book.” (...)*

Elias: *“Everyone is reluctant to increase his tension. If the Conductor is not attentive is there any tendency to decrease tension? Should he not watch that they do not get too easy?” (...)*

James: *“Anxieties of the therapist could be a whole chapter if we could speak honestly.” (...)*

Anthony to Elias: *“You don’t feel we are progressing gradually?”*

Elias: *“Yes. I do.” (...)*

Elias: *„(...) or we start with the entrance of a new member. If we feel we need to discuss integration we can do so. This is the programme for the next meeting.“*

James: *“Dr. Grimson will be here next time”*

Anthony, in a moment of self-reflection: *“He is the new member whom we integrate.”*

Anthony here employs a by now very familiar psychoanalytic and group-analytic technique. That is nothing special in itself. What is special is rather that this group, with its self-definition as a research group, obviously regards itself as a rule as something special,

⁵¹ It sounds as if he had been present as a guest.

⁵² Elias later expresses this feeling again when looking back on his own psychoanalysis. See Elias (2005), p. 261

completely untouched by the group-dynamic tensions of therapeutic groups; it is remarkable that it so seldom relates the contents of its discussions on group processes to its own group process.

Then Anthony suddenly speaks about children's groups: James offers to write something over Christmas about the anxieties of the therapist. Dalberg objects that it would be important to discuss this here in the group. Yates and Elias find that it should be done in a symposium.

De Maré: *"This question of meeting outside the group – sub-groups. I have had so many catastrophes"*

James: *"My idea is to circulate something for everyone to read."* (...)

Taylor: *"De Maré's problem is acting-out..."* (...) *If they act it out it becomes a foreign body within the group..."*

The session ends with some short exchanges on persons who are fundamentally unsuitable for group work.

The topics of "anxieties" and "children's groups" in the discussions, strengthened by the fragmentation of the discussion, could point to a renewed regression of the C-Group. It is seen as potentially leading to catastrophes if something is acted out, that is if something which happens in the group is not spoken about inside it and with reference to it, but is reported back as – may be projective - experience from other groups. Is this also happening in the C-Group – perhaps because its intellectualized understanding of itself as a research group keeps it at a distance from its own non-thinking processes? In other words, because with reference to itself it seems to regard its communication as legitimate only when it occurs at the level of the ego-functions or working group functions and consequently wards off and splits off the emotional layers and the self-thematization.

Are these the things which threaten to become a foreign body in this research group, as is generally the case in the dominant model of research?"

On the other hand the wish becomes visible to integrate the anxieties, at least as a theme, in the group discussion.

Between the penultimate and the final documented session of the C-Group its leader, Foulkes, intervenes in the discussion only one more time, indirectly and from a distance, in letter form. As a **"Postscript to the Symposium Meeting (...) on Dec.4th"** he writes on **8 December 1948** among other things:

"I do not agree at all with those who think that it is the conductor's job to keep the tension at a maximum level and make the group bear as much as they can (...). I do not even think it is the Conductor's job to keep to an optimum degree of tension. I should have thought that, as far as the conductor is concerned, he is out to diminish tensions and anxieties consistently in the first group as well as in all the others. Diminishing tensions is part of the therapeutic process itself. New tensions arise consistently from new material being brought up and from new facets of personalities being activated and coming to a clash. (...)

One must also carefully separate a tension inside the individual, in between individuals and the tensions affecting the whole of the group. (...)

It doesn't seem that this group quite follows Dr. Elias's intentions, namely to bring out objective relationships between different actions, attitudes, reactions etc., on the part of the conductor or on the part of the group, and the consequences of these relationships."

And that was it. After the group leader had stayed away from the meeting, he informs the group by letter of their results. He also registers the fact that the group is not following the intentions of the scientific co-leader he had engaged, who had taken over the leadership more

and more and then, of necessity, almost completely. He even contradicts Elias quite bluntly. The group could then be regarded as having come to an end.

In spite of these developments the group meets again on **11 December** for a **sixth session**. The participants are: **Anthony, Dalborg, Elias, James, de Maré and Taylor**.

James reads out a letter of the intended guest, who cannot come. It is noted in the records that *“Elias thinks a little time should be devoted to Foulkes’ postscript”* and then quote him literally: *“May I point out, to fix for our protocol and for Foulkes, what is the general standard of agreement among us, and Foulkes too, about tensions (...).”* (Underlining added: HPW)

And now the co-leader also informs the leader in written form, in the records, of the latter’s opinion on tensions. These are actually quite convincingly demonstrated by the form of exchange in the group itself, but seldom translated into conscious, verbal communication. Elias again attempts to explain to the group how it must proceed if it wishes to work scientifically (*“If we proceed scientifically...”*). Taylor brings up the question of the *“resistance in the group”*, but only quite generally.

Elias: *“One could distinguish clearly, theoretically, between the state of inner tension which may be heightened in one person without the heightening of the group tension.” (...)*

Elias:

“Foulkes has brought it home to us that the whole problem of tension needs further elucidation...the whole discussion is still almost at the personality level...what you say at the moment is ‘that is how I almost instinctively handle the thing; naturally according to my personal impulses that is how I am inclined to handle it’. It is absolutely natural that everyone has his preferred attitude...this is not the scientific level. That would be that, out of this natural, uncritical tendency to have this and this attitude, we would know much more about what I said before: ‘if I keep the tension high then this happens; if low, then that happens’. We have not yet advanced to that stage.”

Elias formulates more and more clearly what he sees as the task of the group – a gradual marshalling of the ideas in the group discussions can be observed here. It will seldom be possible to gain such a deep insight, no matter how fragmentarily, into a real, unprotected and unvarnished research process. A look behind the scenes of the kind Elias loved to take in his research on the civilizing process: re-discovering the once obvious. Results and processes become visible. A new type of implicit knowledge about analytical experiences of group dynamics is to be raised to an explicit scientific level and brought into a scientific stage of development. But is Elias’ question about “when-then relations” and “objective” relationships suitable as a technique of synthesis for the free and undisciplined exchange of ideas. Would one not be more likely to find this type of relationship in formalized and disciplined groups, where free floating human communication is mechanically standardized? Does this type of synthesis fit for seemingly chaotic process structures?

But from Elias’ point of view at the time the search for such regularities still seemed essential for survival.

James: *“(...) You have to stage-manage to see it is a successful communication”*

Elias: *“I always feel how much is still just groping in the dark... “... “If one could analyse instinct (quite a wrong word) it really means accumulated experience.....(...)”*

De Maré: *“I think there is a difference here which we have not got down to, which depends upon a definition of tension...e.g. you can go to a film where there is terrific tension but you find it bearable... in an unsatisfactory group there is great tension and it isn’t endurable..”*

Elias: *“Let us start with the concrete problem: ‘what happens if new people enter the group?’*

I have something on my mind, which I think I should say first. I remember the scene last time. It repeats itself: I saw myself asking anxiously for regularities and you were pitying me – ‘one cannot generalise’...”

Anxious, even eager, Elias tries to ask detached questions about general regularities in the highly involved manner of the group process of which he is an essential part. An attempt to achieve ironic and self-ironic distance is also unmistakable; and nevertheless this is still the problem and not yet the solution of the fisherman surviving in the maelstrom which Elias, following Poe, depicted later in “Involvement and Detachment”, his first study in the sociology of knowledge. There too he is dealing with anxiety, with highly involved feelings in general and the way to overcome them, with the detached search for regularities as a strategy of physical survival – as a parable for learning the scientific attitude to knowledge, as a model for research. Elias summarized this much later in a radio talk as follows:

“The example I have chosen is taken from Edgar Allen Poe. He wrote a short novelle or short novelette “A Descent into the Maelstrom”. And in it he describes this dreadful natural phenomenon, which exists according to saga or in reality, I don’t know exactly, somewhere near Norway. From time to time a huge whirlpool opens up there which swallows up everything like the black hole of the astronomers. After five or six hours it closes again. But Poe now depicts how a boat with three fishermen, brothers, gets caught up in the undertow of the funnel of the whirlpool. One of the brothers falls overboard and drowns, the other two are swept along the high wall of the funnel, which narrows towards the bottom, with a lot of flotsam and jetsam. And the older brother sits there full of fear and completely paralysed. There is a fear, an anxiety, which can paralyse a person totally. The second brother, after a time in which he is also overcome by fear, shakes off his fear and begins to look around in the funnel. And as he looks around, he discovers certain regularities in the flotsam and jetsam. He discovers that round objects move down more slowly to the bottom of the funnel than square objects and smaller objects more slowly than larger objects. And this, if you like, is the way in which a researcher forms a theory, in which an overall view, a synthesis, almost regularities, can be recognized. And now he puts what he has found out into practice and encourages his brother. He himself takes one of the barrels which were intended for the fish, ties himself to the barrel and tries to persuade his brother to do the same. But his brother is shaking like a leaf and full of panic. So he cannot help him. And he jumps overboard. He had detached himself a little from the situation; he could see it without being overcome by his feelings. Tied to the barrel he jumps into the water and then sees how the boat slowly moves faster and faster into the depths, while he sinks much more slowly and finally, when the funnel closes again, comes back to the surface. This is an example of the relationship between detachment and involvement. The one is overcome by the situation, by the dangers of the situation. The other asks what the actual structure of the situation is. And because he recognizes this structure he can save himself, although this of course is not always the case.”⁵³

In more pacified social associations and groups the balance of danger shifts in the direction of psychic rescue; it is more a question of psychic survival.

This is also the case with this research group when it encounters the seemingly chaotic undertow of collective primary processes. We are dealing with an attitude which Elias at first describes with the maxims of the necessary situational and personal detachment, much later, in the interview quoted and with reference to researchers as “controlled involvement”, as the “balance between involvement and detachment”, which again calls to mind the more general

⁵³ Interview with H.-P. Waldhoff, printed in: Elias, N. (2005), p. 166-175, at p. 171 f.

civilizational sign of “controlled feelings” quoted above from Foulkes’ unpublished materials – in distinction to the disappearance of expressed emotions.

The shrewd description of his situation in the group suddenly occurs to Elias. He stops himself just as he is about to speak about the entry of new members into the group, and advances instead this analysis of the group process, of this group’s process. Against the background of what has been written so far this could be translated to mean that since he had joined the Congress Group, he felt himself drawn into the maelstrom of the group by the undertow of the Bionian basic assumption group which was so alien to his concept and to the general concept of research groups.

In this group and maybe in his person anxiety again and again wins the upper hand, like a repetition compulsion. In a notable split ting off process the group refuses to grant Elias, or itself in the person of Elias, or only grants on occasional moments, the recognition of regularities necessary for psychic survival in the group, for its physical survival as a group, and, above all, its survival in an outcome, the planned article. From his point of view the group throws him back again and again into the whirlpool. There he searches for the regularities, which will rescue him or all of them.

But as in a game of cat and mouse he is almost always caught just before a synthesis materializes. This is what he experiences as the snare of the pre-scientific approach. And this is the reason for the desperate intensity of his endeavours to rescue himself onto the level of scientific synthesis above the whirlpool of emotions, especially the really or seemingly destructive ones.

Does this represent the emotional experiential background which, in his efforts to explain the historical civilizatory breakthrough towards the scientific approach – to his distress realized so far only in the natural sciences - , he blends with his experience of reading Poe’s novelle in order to form the later involvement-detachment-theorem of his sociology of knowledge and his account of the genesis of science?

As later in Devereux, the question here arises of the relationship between *anxiety and method*.

Elias: “(...) I am (...) convinced that there must be regularities, only we have not yet found the right method of getting hold of them....Whenever I go into the history of science I find exactly the same rhythm.....What regularities there are one can only find out gradually...If we could pool our experience, look out for regularities, we could find them. It is not a whim. It is an aim of every scientific group. I don’t know whether you agree with me but I am sure that at a future time one will, for instance, be able to distinguish far more clearly certain types of groups...(...)

Here, in addition, the group structure of the development or the hindrance, of knowledge elaborated by Fleck and Kuhn becomes visible, if only in the microcosm of a small group. But as part of this collective process one of the group members, Elias, often takes over the role of a lonely fighter, a scientific homo clausus. How far can he see his own contribution to this game? How far can Foulkes and the others see theirs?

But of course unconscious processes, especially collective ones, are again and again, in the words of Salman Rushdie and recalling Freud’s famous Rome metaphor, “*a city visible but unseen*”. Consequently group-analysis can be understood as a process of rediscovering the obvious.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ As my group-analytic teacher Hymie Wyse tries to convey to his groups

Elias takes up again the theme of new members entering the group. Dalberg compares the role of the group leader in this context with that of parents preparing children for the arrival of a new sibling. James finds that the newly arrived person is generally a foreign body, but at first does not trigger off any real tension. One ignores him, speaks past him.

Dalberg: (...) *He must say something to be one of the group but if he monopolises the first meeting he will be almost expelled*

Elias: *„How do they do it?“*

Taylor: *„If we knew.“ (Laughter)*

Elias mentions that he had attended many groups as a visitor and had felt very little animosity. Groups do not react to visitors as strongly as to members, Dalberg says to Elias – who is a group member and not a visitor here.

In the context of aggression Elias mentions a member of de Maré's group, who took over the role of leader. And later on:

Elias: *“Those who are well integrated appear to have been members for longer”*

Here Elias tests a thesis which he would work out later in his book “The Established and the Outsiders” After a discussion the thesis is modified by Taylor in the direction of an emphasis on “appear”

Taylor: *„Suppose A, B, and C were the core. D is introduced and fits in very well. It will be said that D has been there from the very beginning and that B, who has always been an outsider, came later“*

Anthony refers for his part to children's groups in which such structures can be recognized with particular clarity and says later, after being asked by Elias about the “*new-comer who becomes the rival*”: *“I have had two boys capable of taking over the group leadership. Very difficult because the group had split up. (...)”*

Can we understand the repeated recourse to the example of children as an indication of regression in the group discussion? This may well be true, but the productive potential of regression would at the same time also have become visible, as on repeated occasions before: If the rivalry between two reputed therapists or academics remains unspoken, the recourse to young boys fighting openly can be a half-step along the road to verbalization, which, according to Foulkes, is the royal path towards the elimination of symptoms in and through groups.

Elias also takes a lively interest in the phenomenon of the “*Co-incident of phantasies*” or the “*unconscious understanding*” („provisionally called ,telepathy““) as a subsidiary problem. He refers here for the first time to the unconscious.

Elias: *“These things happen in every-day life. Group treatment gives us more concrete observations”*

In a discussion as to whether, in the case of dominant group members (which is not identical with leadership), what matters is social status or personality Elias intervenes with the remark: *“Social mask and personality are not different. They fuse into one unit.”*

Later there is a note in the records: “Hitler and Göring and the ‘Nürnberg diary’ are discussed.”

The theme of homosexuality comes up and Elias makes the remark: *“I am not sure how often homosexuality is openly discussed”*

This is, as has been said, the last surviving record of the Congress Group. Towards the end, however, Elias calls upon the members to bring as much concrete material as possible with

them to the next meeting on the topic of what he characterizes as *“the status battle of the new-comer with the others”*. He therefore does not assume that this is the last session. But this request follows directly upon the following statement:

Dalborg: *“How to dissolve a group is just as important as how to start one”*

And so the group dissolves just when the dissolution of groups comes up as a topic, or vice versa.

At the very end James says: *“(…) When the group gets disturbed they begin to wonder whether it is really worth coming. (…)”* and de Maré adds: *“Seems to bring them to reconsider the whole thing. The usual complaint is that they don’t want to go over the same story again. I don’t know why they say that because they never do.”*

In spite of all the “repetition compulsion” the C-Group did not do so either.

Elias asks what the group as a whole means for the patient.

Then they talk about the dissolution of groups and Elias speaks of the status battle of the “new-comers” with the others. Taylor makes the point: *“That really belongs to the integration”*

Elias: *“But you only get at it from the angle of the new-comer.”*

And so Elias has the final word in stressing that what counts is the perspective of the outsider as a sociological condition for knowledge which supplements the psychological condition of detachment – but in reality they are both psychosocial.

Two later works take up different aspects of this issue again, “The Established and the Outsiders” and “Involvement and Detachment”, in each case with the knowledge-constitutive interest in emphasizing the second part, outsiders and detachment

In the problems posed here, psychoanalytic and group-analytic experiences as well as the overall development of experiences in scientific research leave their mark alongside general biographical processes.

In the case of his long working process about involvement and detachment Elias later gave up the overemphasis on detachment in favour of the conception of a balance between involvement and detachment. In this way, towards the end of his life, he succeeded in balancing out and integrating the multi-layered bipolar tension field depicted at the beginning of this text.

Opening the way to this form of controlled de-controlling of emotional controls allows also for the controlled opening of the homo clausus, the closed personality, in the direction of the homini aperti, the open, interdependent personalities. It is a flexibilisation of figurations in and in between people.

In contrast, the other scientific founding member of the Group-Analytic Society, Jane Abercrombie developed a genuine group approach not only in content but also in form, in order to correct distorted perception in scientific thought collectives. She ascertains that our experience is determined by so-called schemata which are organized in accordance with our earlier experiences. These schemata are developed according to Abercrombie at a very early stage in contact with the mother. They are non-verbal and unconscious and they also pre-structure the formation of scientific experience. She summarized the results of her research in “The Anatomy of Judgement”⁵⁵; and she exchanged works and observations with Elias; but that is another story.

In the group-analytic movement Elias gradually slid into the position of a personal outsider, who, however, at first thanks above all to Foulkes, remained an important although by no

⁵⁵ Abercrombie, M.L.J., (1961) *The Anatomy of Judgement: an investigation into the process of perception and reasoning*, London.

means exhaustively tapped source of theoretical reference. In the course of his later life the former founding member proceeded along a sometimes bumpy path to the status of an honorary member of the Group-Analytic Society.

Thus the relationship between Elias and group analysis became for both sides important as well as detached: Elias maintained his presence as a basic theoretician in group analysis⁵⁶, but it remained for him an individualized experience seen predominantly from the perspective of an observer. Shortly before his death he emphasizes the fruitfulness of his group-analytic experience for his scientific seminars and lectures; he had been sensitised for the reactions of his audience and for the psychological significance of short silences.⁵⁷

Foulkes attached so much significance to the Congress Group analysed here that he later included the text presented by it to the 1948 World Health Congress on the basis of its first phase of work in one of his central books. This text applies group-analytic experience to science and especially to sociological research as a group process.

“Intellectually all are agreed that in sociological studies the observer forms an integral part of the situation or field, but persons vary greatly in their sensitivity to the application of this principle in their own case. This factor in itself is a significant bar to good communication.”⁵⁸

Thus Elias’ position as an observer is integrated and this leitmotif also fits in with the second work phase of the C-Group, which is documented here. It is, above all, of interest, however, that Foulkes gave the text a new title, long after the recorded second work phase of the group had ended, a programmatic title, which shows, as result of a learning process, “what we should do”; namely, courageously study our own communication as a group as the best empirical material we possess. We can read this as a programmatic appeal to move the unconsciously always highly influential aspect of self-reference in groups from the unconscious to the conscious level, from the wild and projective *mise en scène* to a civilized setting in words, to symbolization.

In this light, the application of self-reference and self-reflexiveness precisely to research groups appears to be a matter of course, although it is still branded as exotic in the practice of theory formation in “normal science”, as it is standardized by the scientific establishments.

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⁵⁶ It is not surprising that he becomes central again in a “radical group-analytic theory”. See Dalal, F., Macht, Scham und Zugehörigkeit: Eine radikale gruppenanalytische Theorie, in: M. Hayne/Dieter Kunzke (ed.), *Moderne Gruppenanalyse*, Gießen, 2004

⁵⁷ Letter to Dennis Brown, Amsterdam, 29. November 1989, DLA Marbach: A: Elias 1535

⁵⁸ Elias, N./Foulkes, S.H., et.al., *Study of Communication in a Group by a Group*, in: Foulkes, S.H., *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, London 1964, pp. 269-278, at p. 278.

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