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Richard Kilminster: An Appreciation

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There was a time when it seemed that Richard Kilminster, Eric Dunning and I were the only three people in British sociology who were actively promoting the work of Norbert Elias and recognising the importance of his ideas. It probably was never quite literally true, but it felt that way. Times are very different now, when Elias is widely recognised internationally as a major intellectual figure. Richard and I both fell into Elias's orbit about the same time, in the early 1970s. I was surprised, after Richard's death, to learn that although he was a couple of years older than me, he had embarked on his undergraduate degree at Essex in 1967, the year that I became an Assistant Lecturer at Exeter. But nothing much happened in my academic career before I met Elias, so our starting points were roughly the same in practice.

Our backgrounds were different. I had been appointed with nothing more relevant than a degree in economics – *not* sociology – whereas Richard had a proper grounding in sociology (and literature) at Essex, followed by the life-changing experience of an MA at Leicester, where Elias was still teaching. I had only discovered Elias through the accident of being asked to translate *Was ist Soziologie?*, whereas Richard came to a full understanding of Elias's theory of knowledge years before I came to appreciate it. That meant that Richard later worked with Elias himself on the essays on utopias, whereas I always had a niggling feeling that Elias doubted my grasp of his thinking: he was probably right, because my interests were at first more in the cultural and political history aspects of his work. Richard and I, looking back, both suspected that for a time Elias practised what he had learned in his studies of life at Versailles in the age of Louis XIV: he was setting us up as rival courtiers. He did not, however, prevent us becoming close friends.

I mention all this partly because, after Richard's death, Artur Bogner wrote to me that Richard's 'pronounced "1968" habitus … made him appear much more informal, less lofty and elitist (in other words more egalitarian)' than most of Elias's followers on the continent. I agree, though I think it is probably mainly a facet of British manners. It made me reflect, however, that while I hope I am friendly enough, I never myself entirely bought into the '1968 habitus'. It showed in several ways. I recall that after I had indulged in one of my rants against American popular culture, Richard responded that 'It's the only show in town' – whereas I regard the USA as a cultural

Chernobyl. And I remember Richard saying, when he retired, that he never intended to wear 'old men's clothes'. I thought to myself 'Oh dear, *I* have always worn old men's clothes'. Elias saw such things as interesting symptoms of changing social habitus. I remember looking, with Norbert, at a photograph of German students in the 1920s. I said, 'They all look middle-aged'; to which Norbert responded that young men back then aspired to look older than their years, not younger. Richard always seemed to remain more in touch with 'the yoof' – perhaps courtesy of his children Maddie and Lewis.

Richard had hidden depths. Before he went to university he had worked for six years in local government, in the area of legal affairs. In consequence he could not only touch-type in the proper fashion, but he also had that now rare skill of being able to write shorthand. He loved driving and after retirement he passed the stringent examination of the Institute of Advanced Motorists. As a student, he had vacation jobs including working on a road gang and driving a dumper truck.

One of Richard's most distinctive characteristics, something that distinguished him from most sociologists, was how remarkably unpolitical he was. As for me, I have always been 'political' (since about the age of six!), although I have tried to keep my politics and my sociology in separate boxes. For Richard, the last words of his first book are relevant: 'The Leninists have only imposed change on the world; the point however is to understand it'.[1] All the same, I could persuade Richard to join me in spitting blood over such matters as the stupidity of Brexit.

In the outstanding Department of Sociology at Essex, which was then emerging as a dominant force in British sociology, Richard encountered among many others the superstar philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the far less well-known but ultimately more congenial and inspiring Hermínio Martins. After Essex, Richard went to the University of Leicester for his MA. There, of course, he encountered Norbert Elias for the first time, a turning point in Richard's academic life. I have always been a bit envious of Richard for having actually been taught by Elias, which I never was. And over the following years he spent far more time talking to, and corresponding with, Norbert than I ever did.

I can't remember exactly when I first met Richard in person. But not long after I met Norbert Elias in 1972, I remember Norbert mentioning that he had another young sympathiser in Leeds, by the name of Kilminster. We soon got to know each other. 'We few, we happy few' – except that in some respects it was not always an entirely happy experience. In the 1970s, everyone seemed to have allegiance to one theory or

[1] Richard Kilminster, *Praxis and Method: A Sociological Dialogue with Lukács, Gramsci and the early Frankfurt School* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 269.

another, and the resulting 'war of the schools' almost destroyed British sociology: some departments became so bitterly divided that they were closed down. Afterwards, perhaps as a means of survival, a sort of flaccid eclecticism set in, and it became deeply unfashionable to have much of an allegiance to anything. Sociology has fragmented into countless little empirical fields, which tend not to talk much to each other. Meanwhile sociological theory – or 'social theory' to use the current objectionable term – has since become a rather self-contained specialism in its own right, usually with the habit of genuflecting towards philosophers.

In the 1970s, Elias was little known in academic circles beyond Leicester and little regarded by the British academic establishment. So even at that early stage, our little group were often regarded as at least mildly eccentric by mainstream sociology. It *was* eccentric then to express our growing belief that Elias was a sociological thinker of major and *enduring* significance. I emphasise *enduring*, because since the 1970s sociological theory has flitted from one briefly fashionable theorist to another, chasing a series of fads and fashions that continues to this day.

Our sense of isolation was soon diminished when we gradually became aware that Elias was already becoming an academic celebrity – or at least enjoying a *succès d'estime* – in the Netherlands and Germany, thanks to the advocacy of especially Johan Goudsblom, Hermann Korte and Peter Gleichmann. The first big coming together in Britain of the growing international circle came in January 1980, when Eric and I organised a meeting in Balliol College, Oxford, of the Theory Group of the British Sociological Association. Normally such gatherings attracted maybe a score of participants. We were overwhelmed by floods of people not just from Britain, but from the Netherlands and Germany and further afield – Finland, I remember, even Australia. Tony Giddens arrived unannounced from Cambridge and totally disrupted my carefully arranged programme for the first morning, by indulging in an impromptu debate with Norbert.

As I remember it, Richard was central to the Balliol conference, because many of the discussions revolved around Elias's theory of knowledge and the sciences. At the time, I knew relatively little about that, but it was Richard's particular interest.

One should never underestimate the significance of close personal friendships in academic life, and after that conference Richard and I had much closer and more frequent contact with our new 'continental' friends than we did with British colleagues beyond our own universities. I'm thinking especially of such old friends as Johan Goudsblom, Cas Wouters, Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, Abram de Swaan, Nico Wilterdink, Christien Brinkgreve, Pieter Spierenburg, Hermann Korte, Artur Bogner and Reinhard Blomert. For example, Richard and Cas and I all wrote articles with each other. In an email, Richard spoke of 'all these creative years of the

figurational network'. 'We have done great things', he said, meaning not each of us individually but rather the network of friends together.

Richard and I had a crucial conversation while walking over to get a cup of Balliol's undrinkable coffee. Richard had only a hazy recollection of the conversation, and I don't remember every word of it. But the gist of it was that we recognised that many in the large audience simply could not understand Elias because they could not place where Elias was coming from intellectually. Many of the questions put to Elias by the audience had already centred on how he related to various earlier sociologists and *especially* to assorted philosophers. One has to remember that this was less than two years after the first volume – and only the first volume – of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* had finally appeared in English translation. And his other publications were then not very numerous. We understood the audience's difficulty: *we* had been through the same process and perhaps were still doing so. The previous year Richard had published his first book, *Praxis and Method*, subtitled '*A sociological dialogue with Lukács, Gramsci and the early Frankfurt School*'.[2] In it, Richard demonstrated his mastery of heavy philosophy-permeated theory, but Elias was only mentioned directly in one footnote. Close reading, however, reveals that Elias was a strong submarine presence in Richard's thinking. Why submarine? I think both of us were ourselves still striving to locate and digest Elias. As Richard was later to write, Elias seemed to be a 'prophet who came from nowhere with a completely worked out theoretical framework ready for us to take up'. He remembered that the postgraduates in Leicester joked that 'the only possible explanation for Norbert's precocious originality was that he must be a spaceman, or at least had his brain rewired by aliens. In the absence of extensive evidence to the contrary, this was as plausible a hypothesis as any.'[3]

We agreed that someone needed to undertake the task of explaining Elias to the general sociological public. As I remember it, I agreed I should try to write a book expounding Elias's work in general. Richard was to follow his own inclination and explore the deeper 'philosophical' foundations of Elias's thinking. I put 'philosophical' in quotation marks, because the whole point of Elias's line of thought was that sociology needed to emancipate itself from the hegemony of the philosophers. Ultimately, in the title of his 2007 book, Richard was to refer to it as 'post-philosophical sociology'.

I myself rather leaned towards the more empirical and historical side of Elias's work. I had, it is true, read a lot of philosophy of science in the early years of my career, to little profit, but Elias rather discouraged me from reading much more. He liked to

[2] Ibid.

[3] Richard Kilminster, 'Why do you ask that question?', unpublished paper, 1996.

emphasise that sociology must be simultaneously theoretical *and* empirical, and he encouraged me in my work on food, which I was just starting at the time. Richard, however, recognised the desperate need to tackle the much more difficult task of situating Elias in the context of familiar landmarks of intellectual history. This Elias positively discouraged. I am reminded of the wonderful story that David Kettler told about the conference in New York marking the publication of the English translation of the first volume of *The Civilising Process* in 1978:

> a very attractive young black woman in one of the last rows at the very back asked whether it wasn't true that the argument he'd presented followed quite closely a major theme initiated by Durkheim and pursued by his students. Elias bounced off the [platform] and rushed three-quarters of the way down the aisle. Gesticulating, he called out in voice made a little shrill by his excitement: 'Young woman', he said, 'young woman, you must not listen to those old geezers!'[4]

Elias was 81 at the time, so clearly qualified for the title of 'old geezer' himself! And if he took that attitude towards Durkheim – whose empirical studies he often recommended – he felt much more strongly about the old geezers of the philosophical persuasion. Yet, of course, he himself *had* actually read all these old geezers!

It took some years for our books to appear. My own *Norbert Elias: Civilization and the Human Self-Image* came out in 1989, and Richard's *The Sociological Revolution* and *Norbert Elias: Post-philosophical Sociology* in 1998 and 2007 respectively.[5] By 1987 I had written two or three chapters, when Elias forbade me to go any further. He said to me, 'Stephen, while I am alive, I am the best person to explain my ideas'. I thought, 'Oh, no, you are not, Norbert!', but I didn't dare say so. Then Richard resolved the impasse by telling him that he too planned to write a book, whereupon Elias resigned himself to both of us writing about him. This story gives a tiny insight into the dynamics of the court society that had formed around King Norbert XIV in his last years.

Richard proceeded to read the old philosophical codgers from Descartes to Heidegger, but he did so in order to immunise himself against them. In 1995 he presented me with a copy of a slim little volume of just 64 pages, *Bluff your way in*

[4] *Figurations: The Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation*, 32 (2009).

[5] Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: Civilization and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), subsequent editions published under the title *Norbert Elias: An Introduction*; Richard Kilminster, *The Sociological Revolution: From the Enlightenment to the Global Age* (London: Routledge, 1998); *Norbert Elias: Post-philosophical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2007).

Philosophy.[6] Inside, he had written: 'For Stephen – this contains *all* you need to know. Pp. 53 ff. is particularly insightful.' Pages 53–6 are a chapter on 'Some Useful Techniques' for self-presentation and self-promotion as a philosopher. Some of the suggestions are:

> 1. *The Question*. It is always a good idea to couch your remarks in the form of a question, particularly if you've no idea what you are talking about, as happens 85 per cent of the time in philosophy. ...
> 2. *The Hedge*. Never commit yourself: if it's possible to hedge, and it nearly always is in philosophy, then hedge. ...
> 3. *Delivery*. It is important to make your contributions in the right tone of voice; this should be slow, measured and considered ... you will find that the most blatant drivel can be made to sound both intelligent and profound. ...
> 7. *Language*. Select a few pieces of jargon you like the sound of and flog them to death. And remember the Golden Rule: never say anything in English if you can say it in some other language (preferably German).
> 8–9. *Playing for Time / Pretence of Profundity*. It is never out of order to remark, with an air of deep seriousness, that you will have to give the matter more thought. This ... tends to make your adversary feel intellectually inferior. This ... is particularly true if the matter in question is in fact something blindingly obvious. Remember: *always* strive to complicate the essentially simple. ... 'It really is much more difficult than most people give it credit for' is a great phrase to use in a crisis.

There is a serious intellectual question behind all this. Norbert Elias emerged from philosophy and into sociology with the growing intention to leave philosophy behind. In effect, he set out to transform ancient philosophical questions into sociological questions that could be investigated in a theoretical–empirical way. Yet it often appeared, when Tony Giddens was briefly 'the ventriloquist of the *Zeitgeist*' (as Hermínio Martins called him[7]), that *his* strategy was to turn empirically researchable questions into philosophical ones. Zygmunt Bauman was another 'social theorist' whose writings were peppered with references to philosophers. It is a great pity that 'social theory' has turned into an elite speciality within sociology but very much under the hegemony of philosophy. The philosophers continue to dance their ancient round dance, while empirical sociologists largely ignore 'social theory' and get on with their today-centred research. Or, almost worse, they eclectically scatter bits and pieces of 'theory' like 'hundreds and thousands' over an empirical cake that they have already baked.

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[6] Jim Hankinson, *Bluff your way in Philosophy* (London: The Bluffer's Guides, 1985).

[7] Strictly speaking, Hermínio probably meant 'ventriloquist's dummy', but 'ventriloquist' sounds more polite.

The philosophical hegemony is part of a more general problem, which Elias discussed in his essay 'Scientific establishments'.[8] Rather as in the case of the people of the 'Village' and the 'Estate', in Elias and Scotson's study *The Established and the Outsiders*,[9] power and prestige in academe tend to attach to the groups who have been there the longest. The prestige hierarchy of disciplines in universities resembles Comte's hierarchy of the sciences. All the modern disciplines have evolved out of the protoplasm that in the medieval university was just called 'philosophy'. The humanities and social sciences need to be brought more fully into Comte's picture. That includes history and philology, which jointly came out of the hermeneutic revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the social sciences – economics, anthropology, political science and then sociology, roughly in that order. The poor newcomers, sociologists, don't have much to look down on, apart perhaps from media studies. But, Elias implies, what really remains of philosophy? The history of philosophy no doubt still needs to be read as part of the history of social thought. Yet is it not just an empty husk out of which all the other disciplines grew? Not in terms of its lasting prestige, it isn't.

This, then, is some of the background to Richard's major achievement, distilled in his 1998 and 2007 books. Others have traced the emergence of sociology as a discipline relatively autonomous from philosophy, notably Johan Heilbron in his book about French sociology in the nineteenth century, *Het ontstaan van de sociologie*. Unfortunately, Polity Press, Tony Giddens's publishing house, ruined the entire message by publishing the English translation under the title *The Rise of Social Theory* – using Giddens's execrable term 'social theory' to kowtow to the philosophers again![10] Richard was much more radical and provocative in speaking defiantly of a *post-philosophical* sociology.

But, Richard recognised, in order to lay secure foundations for a post-philosophical sociology, one had to be familiar with how philosophers think. Both at the Balliol conference and in seminars such as one that Richard remembered in Leeds in 1974, Elias provoked anger – indeed made enemies – by refusing to engage in the familiar

[8] Norbert Elias, 'Scientific establishments', in *Essays I: On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences*, Richard Kilminster and Stephen Mennell, eds (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009), pp. 107–60. See also Johan Goudsblom, 'The humanities and the social sciences', in E. Zürcher and T. Langendorff, eds, *The Humanities in the Nineties: A view from the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1990), pp. 23–41.

[9] Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*, ed. Cas Wouters (Dublin, UCD Press, 2008 [Collected Works, vol. 4]), originally published in 1965.

[10] Johan Heilbron, *Het ontstaan van de sociologie* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1990), published in English as *The Rise of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

philosophical ways and insisting on always proceeding in his own defiantly *sociological* mode. One problem was that, although he had read the really old philosophical codgers in his youth and left them behind, he refused to see the point in reading and situating himself in relation to more recently influential schools of philosophy. In Richard's words, 'There were ... significant gaps in his knowledge, for example, pragmatism,[11] the Anglo-Saxon analytical school and the British Hegelians which, on principle, he would not fill'. This unorthodox attitude exposed Elias:

> to the risk of readers – apart from those close to him and therefore able to give him the benefit of the doubt – finding in his books apparent similarities with the ideas of others and, failing to grasp the synthetic character of his work, simply therefore writing him off as offering nothing new. Even worse, becoming angry that he was passing off the contributions of others as his own. In the context of conventional academic life, his not discussing other writers was regarded by many simply as a weakness. I heard these misgivings again and again.[12]

In his own work, Richard has 'sought to show how far sociologists have acquiesced in philosophers' distinctions, categories and other stipulations.'

> Norbert's contention that the advent of sociology had taken the problems previously elaborated by philosophers and transposed them on to another level could only be sustained, I discovered, by showing in detail how this had occurred. In other words, one had to read the philosophers in order to demonstrate *credibly*, beyond simple assertion, one of the basic tenets of Norbert's position.[13]

And, Richard added, succinctly that 'Norbert didn't always seem to be aware of the fact that if you don't show you are listening to others, no-one will listen to you. He went his own way.'[14]

Richard achieved all this against the background of a certain intellectual tension over decades with his Professor, Head of Department and PhD supervisor, Zygmunt

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[11] I have long thought, and I believe Richard agreed, that Elias's sociological theory of knowledge had some affinity with American pragmatism – the tradition of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and George Herbert Mead. *Very* circumstantial evidence for this affinity is that C. Wright Mills, a student of Hans Gerth who with Elias served as an Assistant to Karl Mannheim, wrote the book *Sociology and Pragmatism: the Higher Learning in America* (New York : Paine-Whitman Publishers, 1964).

[12] Kilminster, 'Why do you ask'.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Email Kilminster to Mennell, 19 February 2018.

Bauman. Before I even met Richard, I remember Elias saying to me that Bauman was 'a Marxist, but a very intelligent Marxist'. Richard always stressed that Zygmunt was in most respects a good friend, who was very learned, and taught him a lot.[15] Indeed, with Ian Varcoe, Richard edited a *Festschrift* for Zygmunt.[16] Nevertheless, as years went by and Richard became an ever firmer advocate of the ideas of Norbert Elias, intellectual disagreements with Zygmunt became more pronounced. It was not just that Bauman's writings always continued to be peppered with references to philosophers, invoked as sources of authority. It was also that Bauman took no interest in what Elias once referred to as his 'historical social psychology'.[17] Richard expressed the intellectual problem eloquently in an email to me. We were discussing some critical remarks that I had just published about how American individualism distorts American sociology.[18] Richard wrote:

> this kind of attitude towards individualism chimes in with the classical Utilitarian moral precept that individuals must be the judges of their own utility, which will manifest itself in their behaviour – the sovereign individual writ large. Marx takes this over from political economy, so conspicuously has no interest whatsoever in personalities, emotions or individual feeling states, something which shows up later in Zygmunt's ignorance of psychoanalysis and lack of sustained interest in a sociological psychology. Nowhere does he develop in any way a concept resembling 'habitus' or 'figuration' to bridge the chasm between individual and society, micro/macro, etc.[19]

I think that is quite profound. Although my own first degree was in economics, so that I have long been familiar with the principle of revealed preference, I had never made the connection between that and Marxism, psychoanalysis and habitus.

I think I should mention that, although we think of Richard as a cerebral, dedicated theorist, he has occasionally been known to venture into the interpretation of empirical events. My personal favourite is his essay on streaking – the phenomenon of young men and women displaying their nakedness, usually at sports events. This was especially common in the 1970s and 1980s. Elias remarked to Richard that the

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[15] Kilminster, *Praxis and Method.*

[16] Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe (eds), *Culture, Modernity, and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Zygmunt Bauman* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[17] Norbert Elias, *On the Process of Civilisation* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012 [Collected Works, vol. 3]), p. 449.

[18] Stephen Mennell, 'It's just me in the US', *Network: Magazine of the British Sociological Association*, Autumn 2017.

[19] Email, Kilminster to Mennell, 8 January 2018.

crucial point was probably that they *fled*, running, through the scene.[20] Richard took it from there. Perhaps typically, Richard seems not to have considered the essay important enough actually to publish it.

Richard played a key role in the publication of Norbert Elias's Collected Works in 18 volumes. When we first discussed this project, the board of the Norbert Elias Foundation immediately and without discussion decided that Richard should be asked to serve as chair of the Editorial Advisory Board. So he and I worked closely and amicably together from around 2003 until the final volume was published in 2014. Of course, we occasionally consulted the other members of the Advisory Board – Eric Dunning, Johan Heilbron and Robert van Krieken – but most of the time the two of us easily resolved any problems in phone calls, Skype sessions and once in a while face to face meetings. As I said at the opening of the conference in Leicester marking the completion of the Collected Works in 2014,

> Richard's name appears as an editor on the title pages of no fewer than seven of the volumes. Richard and I are particularly proud of the three volumes of Elias's essays that we jointly edited.[21] It is not just that many of the essays had appeared in quite obscure places and were difficult to obtain, but that bringing them all together revealed a corpus of writing that is of the greatest importance. The essays on the sociology of knowledge and the sciences in volume 14 [for which Richard was mainly responsible] are in themselves of a significance that no professional social scientist should overlook, while the range of topics covered in volumes 15 and 16 is quite breathtaking.[22]

Richard could take special pride in the new edition of Elias's last book, *The Symbol Theory*.[23] Elias had put the original in Richard's hands, but then rather tied them behind his back. For the new edition, Richard talked to Elias's last assistants to find out how the text had tortuously emerged – a rather grim story,[24] and he tracked down the Word file of Elias's *completed* Introduction to the book – after Elias's death he had

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[20] Cross-reference to Richard Kilminster, 'Streaking: the naked truth', in this issue of Human Figurations.

[21] Norbert Elias, *Essays I: On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009 [Collected Works, vol. 14]); *Essays II: On Civilising Processes, State Formation and National Identity* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008 [Collected Works, vol. 15]); *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009 [Collected Works, vol. 16]).

[22] Stephen Mennell, 'Remarks on the completion of the Collected Works of Norbert Elias', at the conference 'From the Past to the Present and towards Possible Futures', University of Leicester, 20–22 June 2014. See http://www.stephenmennell.eu/docs/pdf/SJM%20opening%20remarks.pdf

[23] Norbert Elias, *The Symbol Theory* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2011 [Collected Works, vol. 13]).

[24] See Richard's Note on the text, ibid., pp. xi–xxvi.

originally been given an unfinished version.[25] Besides that, Elias had forbidden Richard to insert any titles or subtitles into his text, which made the book a pretty indigestible read; we decided to defy Elias's wishes, and Richard ingeniously identified the main themes among the jumble of ideas in each section.

Many of our colleagues have seen our work on the Collected Works as a labour of love, with the emphasis on 'labour'. Yet such was the exhilaration of the intense and prolonged exposure we shared to the entire corpus of Elias's writings that Richard and I agreed that we suffered withdrawal symptoms for years afterwards.

One indicator of Richard's prestige and influence as a teacher was that orders for volumes of the Collected Works sometimes came from customers who mentioned that they had been students of Richard's in Leeds. The number and distinction of Richard's students, undergraduate and postgraduate, is impressive. The list includes Tim Bickerstaff, Ian Burkitt, Peter Emmerson, John Lever, Cath Morgan, Ryan Powell, Alan Scott, Phil Sutton, Stephen Vertigans, Terry Wassall and Paul Watt. These protégé/es of Richard's constitute an intellectual legacy in their own right.

For many years it rankled with Richard's friends that such an outstanding scholar was never given the title of professor at Leeds, especially as universities now spray it around quite freely. Although Zygmunt Bauman, I think, appreciated Richard's worth despite their running intellectual disagreement, sociology in Britain was not going in a congenial direction. John Goldthorpe has drawn a distinction between 'the sociology of the research institutes' and 'the sociology of the university departments'.[26] Richard did not at all fit into the hard-bitten, statistically orientated and present-centred sociology of the research institutes. Nor did he entirely fit into the sociology of the university departments, which on the one hand descended into what has been called 'victimology' (also present-centred), and on the other into the philosophoidal 'theory' against which he inveighed. Richard, however, just didn't play the academic game, as the rules have developed over recent decades: he did not set out to fulfil the required quotas of frequent journal articles, which have come to resemble the quotas for tractor production in the USSR.

That never seemed to discourage Richard. He shared my complaints about the intellectual wasteland in which too many sociologists have pitched their tents. Yet to the end he saw sociology as a moral calling. It can be seen in his magnificent last book, *Post-philosophical Sociology: Eliasian Perspectives on the Sociology of Knowledge*,

[25] The completed version was found on a 3½ inch 'floppy disk', things that Elias's assistants had only just started using at the end of his life; such disks are themselves now historical artefacts that few people's computers can still read.
[26] John H. Goldthorpe, *On Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

published only two years ago.[27] Richard's freshness, as well as his learning, comes through even on the contents page. His introductory chapter is entitled 'The greatness of sociology'. Read the book! In short, like Elias, Richard 'went his own way'.

We send our sympathy to Richard's widow, Anthea, and their children Maddie and Lewis. Theirs is a great loss, and so is ours.

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[27] *Post-philosophical Sociology: Eliasian Perspectives on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2024).