
Spontaneity and Self-consciousness

Norbert Elias

This paper has its origins in the text of a talk that Elias gave in 1957 under the title ‘The citizen of tomorrow at leisure’ (‘Quest-Leisure 40’ in the catalogue of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach). It was much shorter and was composed as an oral presentation. The much longer version printed here (‘Quest-Leisure 36’) was written some years later, in 1960–63. The typescript was first entitled ‘Leisure tomorrow’, but Elias crossed this out and wrote in the title ‘Spontaneity and self-consciousness’. He still refers to this as ‘a talk’, in spite of the fact that it would take about three-and-a-half hours to deliver as an oral presentation. As so often, in spite of repeated revisions, Elias did not bring this text to the point of deeming it ready for publication, and this should be borne in mind when reading the essay. (See Stephen Mennell’s remarks on Elias’s way of working in the Conclusion.)

As far as possible, the text has been edited according to the principles developed by Stephen Mennell, as General Editor of the Collected Works, for dealing with Elias’s writings in English (see Stephen Mennell, ‘The Collected Works: Note on Editorial Policy’, in Norbert Elias, *Supplements and Index to the Collected Works* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2014 [Collected Works, vol. 18]), pp. ix–xiv). Minor errors such as incorrect word order and Germanicisms have been silently corrected. Sometimes Elias wrote sentences of a length that is more or less unacceptable and even incomprehensible in English. Wherever possible, these have been clarified by the use of better punctuation, or by inserting extra words in square brackets. In a few cases, however, it was necessary to break them up into shorter sentences. In accordance with Elias’s expressed wish (Elias *Involvement and Detachment*, Dublin: UCD Press, 2007, p. 109n), gender-neutral terms such

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as ‘people’ have been substituted for words such as ‘man’, which—like most other writers in the period—Elias had used earlier in his career.

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A Thought Experiment in the Long-Term Imagination About Leisure¹

When your secretary asked me to give a talk on leisure and its future or some such subject at your Whitsun Conference, I thought to myself how nice it will be for once to give a talk untroubled by all the cautions and restraints, the facts and the figures, chapter and verse with which one has to hedge around one’s lectures if one speaks as a sociologist about the past and the present. As I was to speak about the future, about leisure tomorrow, I thought for a moment I should be able to throw caution to the winds and for once to give free rein to my fantasy. For I did not assume that you would expect me to slip on the mantle of a prophet, whatever my name,² and to pretend that I really knew how people were going to spend their leisure time in future. I thought you wanted me to set my imagination free and to conjure up before your minds what could only be a speculative image. Though [it is] perhaps not an entirely unfounded image of future leisure pursuits, namely a vision of a society or, in fact, of humankind as it may evolve if it moves further along the road where it is moving now—if, that is, the use of man-made mechanical power for the production of goods and services goes on advancing at an increasing rate, if productivity per head of population has become five or ten or twenty times as high as ours all over the earth, so that the capacity to consume even of the poorest will be many times as great as that of the richest people of our own era, and [the consumption] of the richest of our own time will be poverty in the eyes of our descendants. For that, bomb or no bomb, is a direction in which people are heading. And what are they going to do with their leisure time then?

¹Elias had already subdivided the typescript into sections I–III. To these sections, headings were added, and a new concluding section IV with its own heading was created.—eds.

²Elias is making a joke: In German, Elias is the name of the prophet who in English is called Elijah.—eds.

For a moment I thought that was what you had asked me to do, a kind of ‘Just-So Story’³ from the other end. And I rather liked the idea. I have always found that thought experiments—and this would be a thought experiment—if they are carried out with a kind of uncommitted curiosity, with playful detachment, are of great help in showing up the characteristic blinkers of one’s own period which limit one’s perception. Long-term imagination, provided it has integrity, can act as a powerful counter-agent against the ephemeral short-term fashions of feeling which so often taint and colour the pronouncements of people about their own time, not only of men or women in the street and their political leaders, but also of men who ought to know better, of scientific specialists, whether they are historians or psychologists, biologists or sociologists.

What indeed are people going to do with their leisure time when all the so-called undeveloped countries on this earth have developed to a standard of living several times as high as that of the most highly developed society of our time, as they are bound to do sooner or later, to a prosperity not only greater but also less vulnerable, bought at lesser expense in human energy than ours, when the fears and bitter rivalry of nations have died down for lack of fuel, now that they are all equally prosperous, when all over the earth the robots work efficiently, smoothly and quietly, and poverty, filth and human servitude have disappeared? With comparatively little occupational work as we know it today, are all people going to spend their time in a way reminiscent of that of some of the aristocratic men and women of former days? Will they, like the civil servants of the Celestial Empire,⁴ spend more of their time in the enjoyments that offer themselves nearby, in the pleasure of seeing the sunlight in the branches of a pine tree, of extending the boundaries of people’s sensibility, of cultivating the inexhaustible potentialities of our senses, of palate, nose, eyes and ears, or of the art and tradition, long lost in the western world, of making love? Will they be more relaxed and gentle, and their hobbies accordingly less hectic and nerve-racking than many of ours? If people are no longer exposed to the hard pressure which the great poverty, the degradation, the unfulfilled desires, the fierce hatreds of the greater part of humankind put on each person living, will their leisure-time pursuits still have the character which at least some of ours appear to have, of [providing] compensations for the constraints imposed upon us, not only by the kind of work we are compelled to do in order to earn our living, but by the pressures of our non-leisure life generally, of work and spare-time routines together?

Again, would men and women still find quite as much satisfaction in leisure occupations which give them a taste of physical violence, which often constitute

³Elias is alluding to Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1902), a famous collection of stories for children.—eds.

⁴That is, China.—eds.

forms of killing by proxy, as provided by films which show people hitting and killing each other, by boxing matches where two people fight until one is unable to get up, by reading spy stories or by watching motor races, if nations were no longer pitted against each other in a vicious circle of reciprocal fears and escalating violence, if they no longer took it for granted as a national duty to indoctrinate and to socialise their young in the most contradictory manner imaginable, namely for fighting and killing the national enemies of the moment and, if necessary, for dying at their hands while at the same time forbidding them most severely to use physical violence and to kill others within their own country? Without the social need for such a deeply divided and inconsistent personality structure, will the leisure hours of people still be used to the same extent for the communal enjoyment of play violence by so many people who, although socialised into hatred and enmity of outsider groups or of alien groups, are simultaneously, over long stretches of time, prevented from directly acting in accordance with these feelings by internal as well as by external controls? Without an intense competitive struggle for status, for money, for career chances, and for other chances of power permeating the socialization and the whole lives even of those whose social position never allows them effectively or successfully to compete, will leisure still be used to the same extent as a time for fighting competitive struggles playfully or perhaps even half earnestly?

If, after the harder centuries of toiling and fighting, the high plateau of the good life has been reached by all peoples on this earth—so that no-one need any longer live in fear of his or her neighbours or of starvation, and no one need die with much that he or she desired to have or to do unattainable for lack of means (unless it is the desire of unrequited love for which there seems to be no cure)—in this calmer and easier world, will the satisfactions of leisure still be as hectic, as simple and insensitive as many of them are today? Or will the whole conception, at present taken for granted, that life is sharply divided into non-leisure and leisure activities, undergo a change? Will not under these different conditions the distinction that we make between these two types of games we play with each other—between ‘serious business’ and ‘leisure’—lose the sharp edge that it has today? Is it possible that with greater security and prosperity, with less need to fear others and to compete with them, with less status insecurity all round, people everywhere will develop for work and for play the same ease and grace of manner, the same relaxed self-assurance of which one can find some intimations among the fortunate few, among ‘leisure classes’, patrician or aristocratic in short periods in the past? Will there be among all a sense of the sweetness of life, the *douceur de vivre* which Talleyrand,⁵ with the hindsight of the fallen, discovered in the life of court society prior to the Revolution?

⁵Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838), French statesman and diplomat prominent from the Revolution to the Restoration, is said to have remarked that ‘Qui n’a pas connu l’Ancien Régime, n’a pas connu la douceur de vivre’ (Anyone who did not know the Ancien Régime does not know the sweetness of life.)—eds.

The Pressure of Rationality on the Moralisation of Spontaneous Leisure Enjoyments

I cannot say. I cannot answer these questions. In fact I could well understand if some of you felt that these are idle questions, if you felt, by now, a little tired of the utopia which I have conjured up before you. This, you may think, is going a little too far into the future. After all, you came here to use your leisure time in order to listen to some reasonably serious talk, or so I imagine. And having listened myself to the immensely interesting talks of my fellow speakers, so full of meat, of solid and factual scientific knowledge, I feel a little ashamed of offering you, so far, nothing but the wayward flights of my fantasy, mere imaginings, and I daresay rather unpopular imaginings at that. For today many people, if they think about the future, if they listen to mere utopian predictions at all, often only want to hear confirmation of the belief that we are decaying, that everything is going from bad to worse; how the middle classes are declining, how the working classes are increasingly apathetic and frustrated, how England, how Europe as a whole, is sliding downwards and how humankind is going to destroy itself. It must be rather sad and disappointing that someone can be so out of touch with the prevailing mood in the second half of the twentieth century as to believe in the possibility—though, of course, not in the necessity—of progress. And the only excuse I have for publicly pronouncing such unlikely views is that you have given me leave to indulge my fantasy about what lies ahead, [and to] consider the use made of their leisure by people in past and present times in the light of the possibilities which may open before them in the future. These possibilities are certainly great and pleasant to contemplate. For although progress is not automatic, it is certainly possible.

In fact, the questions I have raised before with regard to the possible future transformations of leisure activities, although I do not pretend to know the answer, can help a good deal towards a better understanding of the problems of leisure today. They show for instance very clearly how useless it is to consider leisure in isolation. The current types of leisure activity and, indeed, the current concept of leisure, are bound up with the overall structure of societies at their current stage of development. Standard phrases such as ‘work and leisure’, together with the higher value attached to work in an industrial society, often make it appear self-evident that one can find the decisive key to an understanding of people’s leisure pursuits in the type of occupational work they do. If one considers, as a kind of thought experiment, the effects on leisure of possible further social development, of the possible emergence of societies with a very different structure, one is immediately confronted with the question of whether the distinguishing properties of leisure pursuits in present-day societies are not bound up with

many other of their structural characteristics apart from those of people's occupational work. The experiment indicates the possibility that what people wish to do in their leisure time, the specific type of satisfaction they seek—in fact, the functions of leisure for people and the conception of leisure they have—depend not only on occupational pressures, but on the whole of the pressures to which they are exposed from early childhood on, in accordance with the state of development, with the whole structure of their society.

At present, industrialisation processes are transforming societies in all continents at an increasing rate. We are continuing the ascent towards greater and better mastery of nature and, with it, towards greater protection against inimical natural forces not manipulated by human beings themselves. There is every prospect of a possibly greater output of goods and of greater capacity to consume them. But the ascent is not easy. The transformation creates immense tensions. The path is treacherous and slippery. One cannot doubt for a moment that it is possible for all of us to slide back, to slide down towards where we started—if there ever was a start—towards greater barbarism, greater savagery, brutishness and poverty. On the other hand, one cannot doubt that it is possible for human beings, in their difficult ascent, to reach a higher plateau of a good life that is a little easier and less conflict-ridden than ours, from which further ascent will be less difficult. There are very good reasons why it is useful to keep these possibilities in mind if one discusses the problems of leisure.

At present one is often inclined, as a matter of course, to take only a short-term view in these matters. One knows marginally that the average hours of work, in the short or long run, are likely to decrease drastically. But for people socialised for the pre-eminence of work over leisure, the prospect is too alien to have much meaning. Taking their cue solely from the specific mould in which they themselves are cast, they are inclined to ask: what on earth are people going to do with their leisure time if it keeps on increasing with advancing mechanisation?

There have been in the past and there may well be in the future 'leisure classes' of one type or the other, groups of people who do not work at all—no work, that is, in the sense in which the term 'work' is mainly understood today.⁶ Yet, in fact, in the past members of leisure classes were by no means always at a loss to know

⁶Elias's *Habilitationsschrift* (written 1933) at Frankfurt, now lost, had been a study of one such 'leisure class', the courtiers of *ancien régime* France; but at the time he was writing this essay, the thesis had not been published. Later in the 1960s he would expand the thesis into the book *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969), published in English as *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006 [Collected Works, vol. 2]).—eds.

what to do with themselves. The problem is: which characteristics of present-day socialisation—of the social training that people receive in our society, and of the basic personality structure that results from it—make us feel what we, socialised in accordance with the prevailing conditions and norms, would not know what to do with ourselves if the necessity to work diminished and the time available for leisure activities were to increase? Today we instil in people the basic idea that time not spent on work is wasted, that it is a person's duty to work and somewhat immoral not to work—in the sense in which we understand this term. While many people long for more freedom from work, for more leisure, the prevailing social training still perpetuates, though perhaps in an attenuated form, the association of leisure and idleness, thus easily surrounding leisure activities with an aura of guilt feeling and the prospect of less work and more leisure with a kind of moral uneasiness, as if greater freedom from the pressures of duties and routines were dangerous for people. Children want to play, not to work. But we hammer it in, openly or by stealth, that to work is good, it gets people somewhere, it ensures success (or so they say), it is socially approved and rewarded. And so, when children grow up, many of them, poor dears, go on working even in their leisure hours probably because otherwise they would feel bad. This is only one of many examples which show that the use and the nature of leisure tomorrow will not depend only on the time available for it, but on the whole situation, on the social training, and particularly on the capacity for enjoyment of leisure without guilt feelings developed by their training. It is too much to expect that people will be able to make full use of their increasing leisure time without a change in socialisation.

Thus this catalogue of problems, which the image of the future in a more civilised society suggests, leads on to a further question, closely connected with the problem of socialisation for leisure: what exactly constitutes leisure as distinct from non-leisure? The answer is less obvious than it may appear. For on the face of it what one does in one's leisure time does not always appear to be wholly different from what oneself or others do as their work. My poor students usually regard it as work if they have to listen to me; you choose it as part of your leisure activity. A friend of mine does a bit of electrical engineering in his spare time, another does carpentry and a third photography. There are gentlemen and players not only in cricket but, it appears, also in many other fields.⁷

⁷In English cricket from the early nineteenth century until 1962, a rigid distinction was maintained between amateur, unpaid cricketers (the 'Gentlemen') and professional, paid cricketers (the 'Players'). One or two matches were played each year between teams representing these two components of the English class system. 'Gentlemen' were listed with the title 'Mr', while 'Players' appeared merely under their unadorned names.—eds.

Evidently it is one of the characteristics which distinguish non-leisure and leisure activities that the former contain a high element of compulsion while the latter are more freely and momentarily chosen by each individual from a specific range of leisure activities which is socially determined. This gives leisure activities today a specific meaning and significance that it constitutes an enclave of relatively great freedom where people, within certain limits, can choose what to do according to their personal preferences and needs, within a social world dominated by compulsions, restraints and pressures of many kinds that give little scope for choices in accordance with purely personal and particularly with emotional needs and requirements. That is the picture which has to be kept in mind if one considers the possible transformation of the use of leisure time in future societies: today this relatively small area where a wider scope of choice in accordance with individual needs and satisfactions in public is socially sanctioned, this leisure area, is embedded, like a small island, in the ocean of routines that require a high degree of self-restraint, of subordination, of immediate personal needs to more impersonal ends. The latter [the ocean of routines] comprises by no means work alone. The pressures are connected with our whole manner of life; they include large chunks of what may be classified as 'the private sphere': too many letters to write, too many people to meet, too many upheavals in national and international affairs, too many problems about children, relatives, or taxes, to say nothing about the impact on the individual's life of such transformations as the rise of formerly less powerful classes and countries, about threats to people's status, national as well as personal, or the threats of war. One might say that leisure activities represent an area within societies which normally demand a great deal of foresight and farsightedness braking momentary impulses towards action, which demand perpetual prudence and circumspection with all the corresponding restraints, where one can live entirely for the moment with public approval and without danger to oneself, where one can, up to a point, throw customary caution to the wind. In that way leisure activities appear to have the function of restoring the personal equilibrium which the constant subordination of momentary urges to the relatively impersonal long-term demands of a complex society stifles and blocks. The difficulty is that in industrial societies people often become so much inured to self-restraints all round as part of their permanent make up, and the attitudes of their occupational life have taken such deep root in them that they are no longer really able to expose themselves freely to the stimulation of leisure activities. Their whole training for adult success and restraint has a high power of persistency; it has a tendency to persevere and to irradiate, in one form or another, the leisure time itself.

Among the symptoms of this inability to loosen these restraints and to restore the equilibrium is the romantic character of leisure activities, particularly in the era—the nineteenth century—in which the pressures of rationality, morality and self-constraints became markedly stronger. For romanticism is essentially a longing for the freeing from chains which one cannot loosen without losing oneself—without destroying something which one values highly in oneself. It is a longing for freedom which is unattainable because the chains have become part of oneself.⁸

Another symptom is a characteristic malformation of the form and pattern into which the vehicles and utensils of leisure, and by no means of leisure alone, are cast—their character is kitsch, as exponents of a kitsch-style: one can enjoy that for which one longs only by permission of intellect or conscience which breaks the spontaneity of impulses.⁹ Thus in nineteenth-century paintings children are frequently represented as sweet, not because they are in fact sweet but because it was felt that they ought to be sweet; and the painter communicates through his work with the public to whose feeling one can only appeal if it [the work] obeys its [the public's] conscience. The painting is in that sense sentimental; the complex of feelings that it evokes is coloured and dominated by the vision of what children ought to be, or perhaps what oneself as a child might have been or what one wished to be—in short by an ideal which in practice is unattainable. Similarly, women are permitted to be shown in sensuous poses only if it can be morally or educationally justified by a classical or biblical disguise; the attraction is admissible only when the immediacy of the feeling is tempered by their presentation in costumes of a period whose patina of age and respectability provides an intellectual antidote against the dangers of the theme and particularly of any spontaneous feelings it may evoke, which in that way offers intellectual justification before others and perhaps before one's own conscience. The peculiar attitudinising of all figures in representational art, a representation suggesting that they were standing on a stage from which only some of the very greatest—such as Rembrandt or Vermeer—could liberate themselves, and even these mainly in works not intended for sale, is symptomatic of this type of self-consciousness. In this phase children, angels, animals, whatever and wherever it is, are usually represented in self-conscious poses. Their emotional appeal is indirect; in order to be acceptable, socially as well as individually, it has to be filtered and broken by means of some intellectual and moral pretence.

⁸See Elias's extensive remarks on aristocratic romanticism in Chap. 8 of *The Court Society*.—eds.

⁹See Norbert Elias, 'The kitsch style and the age of kitsch', in *Early Writings* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2006 [Collected Works, vol. 1]), pp. 85–96.—eds.

On these terms, it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to pursue leisure activities openly and cautiously for their own sake; they cannot be explicitly and primarily pursued for the sake of the enjoyment and the personal satisfactions they give; they can only be publicly pursued for the sake of some rationally justifiable purpose. Sport has to be justified in terms of its health-giving or character-forming propensities, and music, theatre, or church activities in terms of their educational or their elevating functions. Perhaps this tendency is most pronounced in the earlier stages of an industrialisation process, but the fact itself—the fact that spontaneity of impulse and feeling is broken through rationalisation and self-consciousness—is certainly a very widespread structural characteristic of leisure enjoyments in industrialising societies of all kinds, as we know them so far. To diagnose it as such helps to see more clearly some of the central problems of the future. Will coming generations be able to stand up to their leisure enjoyments undisguised? Will they be able to free themselves from the need for romantic curbs and masks in their leisure enjoyment, and from the internal conflicts and tensions which they express, from ingrown shades of restraint that they would like to but cannot loosen, even if they want to free themselves in their leisure time? Will they find less enjoyment in the many forms of second- and third-rate attitudinising of their leisure enjoyments, in trash or kitsch—even in *Edelkitsch*,¹⁰ such as [Wagner's] *Lohengrin* or [Elgar's] *Enigma Variations*? Above all, will they be able in their leisure pursuits to reconcile spontaneity of feeling and self-consciousness?

Beyond Kitsch and Romanticism: From Stone Age Dancing to Jazz and Modern Art

Let us go for a moment from the future to the past, to stages of social development at which human beings were less self-conscious and more spontaneous in their activities. Either way, self-distanciation helps to show present leisure-time problems in perspective. Take a simple example, a description of the pattern of work and leisure in a simpler society. This is how an Australian observer described the manner in which Australian Aborigines worked on his plantation. 'Work' is for them, as one can see, an unusual occupation. To see it as such is of some use if one wants to gain distance from what has become all too familiar. McLaren¹¹ wrote:

¹⁰Literally: "noble-kitsch", i.e. more pretentious forms of kitsch.—eds.

¹¹Jack McLaren (1884–1954), Australian adventurer and writer. He ran a coconut plantation on Cape York from 1911 to 1919, assisted only by Aborigines.—eds.

As time went on, the difficulties of my task increased. It was for instance no easy matter to persuade the natives to work on succeeding days. We worked yesterday and are tired, they would say, adding pointedly that in their habitual mode of life they worked not at all, and hunted only when need of food was on them. Whereupon I would point out that in their wild life they had no tobacco, or flour, or coloured cloth, or tinned meats or tinned fish, or any of the other luxuries they coveted, and that the only way to obtain them was by working all day and every day; and it would be only after further and more elaborate argument of the kind that they would take up again the hated tools of labour.

Then they took an exceedingly long time over their meals ... They ate with remarkable slowness, consuming the food in small pieces, and masticating it most thoroughly – a practice no doubt arising from the need in their wanderings in parts where food was scarce to make the most of whatever edibles they found ...

Again their labours [felling trees] were often interrupted by the fact that it was their age-old habit never to pass by food. Should a man in the course of his cutting away the undergrowth come across the thin trailing vine of a wild yam, he would at once abandon his attack on the undergrowth in favour of following up the vine and digging up the yam, a matter which might occupy an hour or more. Should a tree when it was felled prove to have in it a wild bee's nest, the men who found it would do no more felling till the nest was cut out. Should they disturb a wallaby or other animal, all hands would immediately set out in pursuit, abandoning their axes for their spears they kept always by them, streaming off through the timber, calling directions one to another regarding flanking the quarry and heading it off, and returning not for an hour, or several hours maybe. To my remonstrances concerning these interruptions they paid but little heed, except to remark that the wasting of food was not their fashion ...

Further, those of the labourers who were married were in the habit of going off to the camp every now and then to see that all was well with their wives. These people had a most absolute distrust of their women. They believed no woman should be out of her husband's sight for long. There was always some other man who desired her, I was told, and as often as not the woman desired the man ...¹²

The problem of married life, sociologically significant as it is, does not concern us here. The description shows very vividly that the meaning of the term 'work' depends on the state of development of the society to which it refers. 'Work' itself has a different character in an industrial, in a predominantly agricultural, and in a Stone Age hunting society. In the latter [Stone Age society], one exerts oneself primarily under the pressure of one's more immediate elementary needs, above all of hunger, thirst, sex, and of all kinds of fears. Threat and fear of starvation never end. Not work but food is the supreme thing, and of course fear of the unknown thinly disguised and somewhat tempered by their myths. Left to

¹²Jack McLaren, *My Crowded Solitude*. 7th edn. (London: Duality Press/Quality Press, 1946 [1926]), pp. 40–2.

themselves, the hunters have few and simple wants. When they came into contact with another people who possessed vastly superior tools, whose capacity for producing a great diversity of goods was matched by the equally great diversity of their wants, the hunters were infected. As the description shows, they developed a craving for simple cotton goods and for tinned meat. As a result they had to do something which ran counter to their whole social tradition and training: they had to make a concentrated effort, at the demands of the white man, to work systematically and regularly for hours. They had to make an effort which required a high degree of attention, of emotional control; it required, moreover, a mainly intellectual concentration on something which had no immediate personal appeal, and no emotional significance for the actors, on the cutting of trees demanded by the white man for purposes of his own. The personal, emotional rewards lay not in the activity itself, but in a promise for the future. This kind of concentration, this type of work discipline is, as one can see, very foreign to simpler people. At present, people are inclined, as Karl Bücher observed,¹³ to regard work as something that is qualitatively given and identical in all ages and which varies only in so far as more or less of it, different quantities of work, can be concentrated into one unit of time. Accordingly, the prevailing attitude of Europeans to the 'working habits' and methods of simpler people was for a long time an attitude of open or hidden moral reprobation. Not so long ago, missionaries, travellers, and even anthropologists were apt to speak of the extreme laziness of simpler people. One can find remarks¹⁴ such as 'laziness and savagery as in animals'. 'Their greatest happiness is to be idle.'¹⁵ They have *horror laboris*. And indeed, if one associates with terms like 'labour' and 'work', the type of concentrated and impersonal work effort which predominates in the more differentiated societies, it is certainly true that it is alien to people of simpler societies, that they hate doing it, if they are compelled to, or just refuse to do it:

There was also need for constant supervision while they worked, for if I left them at any time, they would immediately sit down and smoke or go to sleep – if they didn't chase wallabies or go spying on their wives. They had an astounding facility for going to sleep at an instant's notice at any time or any place. Often in those early

¹³Karl Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, 6th edn, (Leipzig: Emmanuel Reinicke, 1924 [1899]), p. 2. [Elias was quoting from the 3rd edition of Bücher (1902)—eds.].

¹⁴*ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁵The original wording of Bücher is different from Elias's paraphrase. It reads (Bücher, pp. 3–4): 'Ist unüberwindliche Faulheit der Menschen ältestes Erbteil, wie konnte sie dann überhaupt sich über die Daseinsstufe des fruchtesammelnden und wurzelgrabenden Tieres emporheben?'—eds.

days did I return from a brief absence to find the whole of the labourers stretched out like black shadows on the ground. I tried to upbraid them. It was of no use ... There were, in fact, no means by which I could persuade them into sudden acceptance of a daily routine of toil.¹⁶

Yet the same people were capable of enormous exertions; they could bear prolonged physical strains which would appal Europeans; and, in their own way, they could work hard, for instance when making a tool or building a boat or decorating themselves. They worked in their own manner if their activity corresponded to their social training and, as a result, was meaningful for them. But their social training does not require a transformation of the same magnitude, a sublimation of elementary organic or infantile needs of the same order as ours. Among the main differences between the type of work that prevails in more differentiated and that prevailing in simpler, less differentiated societies is a difference in pattern: work of the former type [in more differentiated societies] proceeds steadily, evenly, and methodically for relatively long periods, that of the latter [less differentiated societies] proceeds far more irregularly, by means of relatively short, though often very intense, spurts and bursts of energy that recede and after a pause are perhaps taken up again. Bücher (1924: 31ff.) was probably the first to draw attention to the fact that—in contrast to the steady, even, and persistent effort required by our type of work—[work in] simpler societies often has a rhythmical character that may be underlined by rhythmical man-made noises, by sing-songs, by the beating of drums, or the clapping of hands.

In the more developed industrial societies, human beings are trained for a fairly continuous and partly automatic control of changing moods, for suppression or delay of elementary cyclical or rhythmic impulses probably springing from the vegetative or autonomic levels of our nervous system, in favour of more cerebral, aim-directed, and in that sense unilinear activities. The more spontaneous, repetitive rhythmic activities of simpler people often appear to people trained in our manner as unbearably monotonous. Yet they are probably not unrelated to the even more spontaneous, repetitive and rhythmic movements which small children appear to find pleasurable or soothing in all societies, including our own. Some leisure activities, too, even in industrial societies have a strongly rhythmic and repetitive pattern, though often of a more complicated and sophisticated kind.

In very simple societies, the differentiation between on the one hand activities dominated by aims that may lie in the future and have little immediate emotional appeal (activities dominant in what we call work, measurable in terms of

¹⁶McLaren, *Crowded Solitude*, p. 43.

time), and on the other hand pleasurable patterns, rhythmical movements and other activities enjoyable here and now, in so far as it exists at all, is still in a rather early state. The severe taboos and restraints with which the rhythm of the sex act is hedged in societies such as ours and the frustrations they entail may give rise to the assumption that sexual needs are the spring and fountain head from which all other rhythmically patterned human activities, such as dancing or music, are derived. But it is probable that this type of conceptualisation reflects the preponderant role that sex plays in people's imagination in societies where its restraints and controls became deeply internalised and are particularly comprehensive and severe. Seen in perspective it seems more likely that elementary repetitive rhythmical movement is all-pervasive as a manner of soothing or pleasure play, and that the sex act is only one, particularly powerful manifestation of this general propensity.

But however that may be, in order to understand the leisure requirements of human beings, it is useful to distinguish this propensity for elementary rhythmical activities which show a high degree of spontaneity and demand relatively little conscious direction, from purposeful activities orientated towards the future which have less scope for spontaneity and which demand the subordination of one's immediate feelings, and probably one's pleasure, to requirements dictated from without and which require specific concentration and attention not only in the moment, but above all on what lies ahead. The relationship between these two polar types of movements or activities can vary greatly. In simpler societies they are not as sharply divided as they are with us. In our case the habits of intellectual alertness, of attention, and concentration on what is here and now, with the focus on its possible consequences in the future, are deeply ingrained. These learned cerebral patterns of control do not lose their hold over the activities of human beings even in leisure pursuits such as dancing or the making of music. In the best of cases the free flow of the more spontaneous cyclical and rhythmical activities and the more deliberate, more conscious cerebral action tendencies become reconciled; they balance or fuse. In many others they struggle with each other for dominance; they remain divided and conflicted. Although the enjoyment of rhythms and patterns made either by oneself or by others is generally given less scope in complex societies than in simpler societies, and although it is only one type of leisure enjoyment among others, it can serve as a paradigm: with us the two types of activities are highly differentiated and polarised; they are, in sociological as in psychological terms, complementary opposites. They are also different in structure. With them, they are different only in degree. Of course, the degree of differentiation and polarisation can vary greatly even among simpler societies; for concealed behind this seemingly unitary classification are many different stages of social development.

A contrasting example from one of the less differentiated simpler societies may illustrate the point. It shows possibilities of living that entail relatively little and certainly no sharp differentiation between work and leisure. Applied to them in the context of their lives these concepts cannot have the same meaning that they have in the context of ours. It also shows very vividly that this mode of living entails a higher degree of momentariness, a lesser concern with long-term ends, with foresight, with tomorrow—in what we might call work as well as in what we might call leisure. Already Bücher was trying to express in his own way the greater ability of simpler people to abandon themselves to momentary feelings and movements, for instance to feeling the rhythm of a communal dance, less modified by cerebral controls. He wrote:

The dancer need only make a real effort if he has to set his muscles into motion. As the dance goes on, each movement evokes without great effort of will another movement and the speed of movements mounts automatically with a mounting excitement of the dancer.¹⁷

This is an example of a self-escalating rhythmic movement of a dancing group towards a climactic excitement. It shows how ubiquitous the quest for excitement is in human societies.¹⁸ It is also a reminder of the fact that the escalation of rhythmic movements towards a climax is not understood either as a mere substitute or a mere derivation of the sexual act, but rather as another, perhaps less central, less imperative and specific manifestation of a generalised human propensity for enjoying spontaneous rhythmic movements, which is crowned by, though not derived from, the more specific sexual act. It is a highly malleable and varied propensity. It may rise to a single climactic frenzy of excitement. It may rise and fall in a series of smaller waves or may remain monotonously more or less on the same level.

Another description by McLaren gives a vivid impression of this propensity of simpler people for a spontaneous abandonment to the pleasures of a long rhythmic movement:

¹⁷*ibid.*, p. 19. This passage was translated by Norbert Elias. However, the quotation from Bücher's book does not reflect Bücher's own opinion—as Elias implies—but that of Guglielmo Ferrero (in 'Les formes primitives du travail', *Revue Scientifique*, 4e série, Tome 5, 14 mars 1896, pp. 331–5). Bücher was only critically discussing what Ferrero had outlined before.—eds.

¹⁸Here, Elias is probably for the first time using the phrase 'quest for excitement' that later appeared in his and Dunning's sociology of sports.—eds.

... often the work of the plantation would be held up for days, for once they began their dancing there was no telling when they would cease; intoxicated by rhythm and tune, they went on and on till utterly exhausted. Also, anything made an excuse for an outbreak of dancing – a birth, a death, the capture of a kangaroo. And often there was no excuse at all. In the cool of the dusk the tribe would be about the camp, the women tending the cooking fires and gossiping, the men lying on their sides in the sand, smoking or sleeping, the children splashing in the shallows of the beach – when suddenly, as though something had stung him, a man would begin singing in a high falsetto which had in it a curiously challenging note; and for a space of maybe half a minute he would sing; then he would rise slowly, dreamily, with his eyes an empty stare, and alternately beat his hands against his sides and raise them wide apart above his head; and in a succession of rounded notes the falsetto would go down, down, down, half an octave at a time, to a living, throbbing drone. Then another would vent the curiously challenging note, then another and another, each making the play with his hands as he rose; and soon the women would abandon their cooking and join in, and the children come running from the beach; and presently the men would whiten their faces and their bodies with clay and adorn their heads with feathers of coloured birds and the women hang about their breasts strings of orchid flowers and with white ashes make phallic markings on their groins; and then, to the accompaniment of the Old Men beating one piece of flat wood sharply against another, the dancing would begin – a mad glad dancing highly sexual and sensual, full of rhythmic leaps and swayings, with all the while a roaring four-note song which brought echoes from the jungle and went out across the sea like sound of devils screaming.

And I, watching and listening, would think despondently of work not done and curse heartily the man who began the uproar and wish fervently I knew some way of stopping them ...

But to attempt stopping their dancing was to take a risk I did not dare to take, for with their eyes rolling extravagantly, their faces working grotesquely, and about their mouth the wetness of foam, they were as madmen – indeed, perhaps they were truly madmen for a time – who in their frenzy might have thought nothing of driving a spear through my heart. Anything was possible from savages so worked up as these were when dancing ...¹⁹

Like other human activities this kind of working and this kind of leisure are socially fashioned; they are, like our kind, symptomatic of a specific type of social training that starts at the moment of birth. In this case, one can see what we would distinguish as work and as leisure flow into each other without a clear demarcation line. Both are undertaken to a greater extent on the spur of the moment. Both are equally charged with feelings. In our case the manner of providing the necessities of life—in its work aspects as [much as], for instance, in its shopping aspects—has become highly routinised and impersonal. They have

¹⁹McLaren, *Crowded Solitude*, pp. 56–8.

become attuned to the necessities of a very high division of labour which makes great masses of people dependent on each other, and which could not function as it does if each individual were to a very high degree guided in his or her actions by the feelings of the moment. In relatively very simple and undifferentiated societies, there is less need for its members to restrain their feelings even if they try to provide for themselves the necessities of life. Whether they hunt for food or dance, 'aimlessly' as one might say, their emotions are strongly at work. That is one of the reasons why with them work and leisure do not yet fall apart. In our case only leisure activities provide opportunities for experiencing publicly emotions which on occasions can be fairly strong.²⁰ Their overt expressions are carefully banished from non-leisure activities whether they have the character of work or not. This is one of the aspects of the complementary polarisation between leisure and non-leisure activities in the more developed societies of our time that has been socialised. As the institutionalised restraints on any spontaneous and momentary expression of strong feelings increased in the non-leisure areas of society, the function of leisure as an area where a measure of emotional spontaneity—of abandonment to momentary feelings unconcerned with the future—was possible in public became accentuated.

There is no room here for indicating the stages of this accentuation. It was no easy process, because however satisfying leisure activities may have been in the earlier stages of industrialisation processes, one can observe a fairly widespread tendency in societies in that phase of their development towards increasing emotional restraint even in leisure activities which could count on public approval—a tendency to frown upon the less restrained and generally more boisterous amusements of their pre-industrial period as lacking in decency and respectability, as morally suspect. In the development of European and particularly Anglo-Saxon countries, such tendencies are usually classified as Puritan. However, a glance at industrialising countries elsewhere in the world, Russia and China or India for example, seems to indicate that Puritan spurts in that direction, far from being the cause of a general accentuation of emotional restraints, are rather one of the symptoms of a general spurt in that direction characteristic of a tightening of interdependencies, particularly of urban interdependencies within the framework of the state connected with growing commercialisation and industrialisation. The increasing emphasis on orderliness, discipline and relatively impersonal 'good behaviour' in all routinised non-leisure activities, which one can observe in

²⁰This appears not to be the final version of the sentence, but Elias's handwritten amendments to it are indecipherable.—eds.

societies at that stage of development in many parts of the world, spills over, as it were, into the leisure activities of people. What is now felt as disorderliness—any show of boisterousness, of excitement that might be dangerous to life and limb, of overt abandonment to one's emotions, quite normal in the leisure amusements of pre-industrial societies—tends to be increasingly regarded in such phases as vulgar, as uncivilised, as not worthy of the dignity of one's own nation. Whatever the specific ideological justification, in that phase the indulgence in leisure amusements which involve loud excited movements, strong pleasurable emotions—and up to a point pleasure and enjoyment themselves—become suspect. There is an abundance of evidence for this curb on the less restrained, more boisterous folk amusements during the early industrial period of many European countries. One cannot quite understand the situation in which we find ourselves today with regard to our leisure occupations and our concept of these occupations without referring to the accentuation of restraints even with regard to leisure amusements in the phase that preceded ours. Today the pendulum is swinging mildly in the other direction. One might get an exaggerated view of the loosening of restraints and the emphasis on it in a good many scientific and literary products of our period if one does not see it in relation to the phase of increasing restraints which preceded it.

As the result of the counter move, attempts at greater emotional spontaneity can be observed in quite a number of our leisure occupations. However, compared with the emotional spontaneity of which simpler people are capable in their leisure activities, ours bears the stamp of a high degree of reflection and self-consciousness. One can observe in our time—not only in many of our leisure activities, in art, in films, in literature and music, but also in the attempts at a more specific understanding of our situation—broadly speaking two opposite trends in people's attitudes towards the relationship between spontaneity and self-consciousness. One type of attitude, the romantic attitude, results from the longing for spontaneity or, as it is sometimes called, for 'freedom'—freedom of self, freedom of feeling or whatever form it may take—knowing that it is unattainable; the hold which the 'intellect', 'conscience', 'morality', 'self-consciousness', or whatever one may call it, has gained over it, the restraint of feeling as part of the individual person has become too strong. The other tendency is an attempt at fusing spontaneity and self-consciousness and at savouring the antinomic properties of both in the alloy.

Let me give you an example: it is taken from the autobiography of a jazz musician, Artie Shaw.²¹ In this context it is all the more illuminating as it shows the return to strongly rhythmic and, up to a point, repetitive pattern of movements, to a kind of dancing enjoyment not unlike that which one can observe in the dances and music of simpler people from which it is in fact derived; but the liberation of a type of emotional spontaneity and the enjoyment, the satisfaction which it provides, is here achieved and maintained with a high degree of self-consciousness.

I began to understand the curious musical category called Jazz. For these were the men who were setting the pattern, who were evolving a musical pattern from which the rest of the jazz musicians in the country were taking their lead and in turn passing it on, infusing with this particular flavour the entire body of popular music in America, and later on, the whole world.

I remember one night – or morning, rather, for it started around 4 a.m. – when a bunch of us, who had decided to have ourselves a little session, wound up in some dance hall where they were holding one of the Marathon Dance contests that were always taking place in those days. Different musicians floated in and out, sat in for a while, played a few choruses, and then got up to let some other guy blow. There was a piano player named Jess Stacey, and another named Joe Sullivan. There was one trombone player, Floyd O'Brien, who had one of the most peculiar, lazy deliberately mistaken-sounding styles I had ever heard. He would almost, but not quite, crack a note into little pieces, and each time you thought he was about to fall apart he'd recover and make something out of what started out to sound like a fluff – till after a while you began to get the idea that this guy not only wasn't making any mistakes at all, but had complete control over his horn. He would come so damn close to mistakes that you couldn't see how he was going to get away with it; but he always recovered somehow – and this trick of almost, but never quite, making the mistake, and each time recovering so that the things he played went off in altogether unexpected and sometimes quite humorous directions, was what made his style so peculiar to start with – although it's impossible to give the flavour of it in language.

Also on this same session was the clarinet player I mentioned a moment ago – Frank Teschmaker. I sat next to him and watched him while he played. We were all slightly drunk on bad bootleg gin, but it didn't seem to affect his playing any. He too had this odd style of playing, but in an altogether different way from O'Brien's. Even while he'd be reaching out for something in his deliberately fumbling way, some phrase you couldn't quite see the beginning or end of (or, for that matter, the reason for in the first place), there was an assurance about everything that he did that

²¹Artie Shaw (1910–2004), American clarinetist, composer and bandleader. Elias was quoting from a later edition of Shaw's book, published by Collier Books in 1963. That edition, however, was not available, so references are given to the 1952 first edition of Shaw's book.—eds.

made you see that he himself knew where he was going all the time; and by the time he got there you began to see it yourself, for in its own grotesque way it made a kind of musical sense, but something extremely personal and intimate to himself, something so subtle that it could never possibly have had great communicative meaning to anyone but another musician and even then only to a jazz musician who happened to be pretty damn hep to what was going on.

The bizarre thing about that particular session was that while all this subtle and intricate musical stuff was going on, while we were all playing and passing bottles of gin around from one to another, out there on the dance floor were all those pooped-out, broken down Marathon Dance contestants; and no matter what we played, no matter whether the tempo was draggy or bright, there they shuffled like the walking dead, hanging, grimly, wearily, on to each other, leaning together like tired trees in a hurricane, clutching one another for dear life, like punch-drunk fighters in a nerveless clinch at the end of the last long round of a tough fight – and that was what it was like all the time we were there, right up until we finally quit around 7 a.m. and packed our horns and left the joint with these living corpses still clinging desperately to each other, shuffling wearily two by two around the dance floor in the damndest caricature of dancing I have ever seen in a lifetime of watching plenty of caricatures of that particular form of activity.²²

Even as an imaginary adventure one cannot explore the question of future developments in leisure without probing into the possibility that some elementary human needs, some elementary pleasure-giving activities recur, however transformed in the leisure occupations of people. Some of the examples I have chosen as illustrations for my talk suggest at least a provisional answer to such questions. The pleasures of dancing, the satisfactions of more or less repetitive rhythmic movements of people in groups appear to be felt by human beings everywhere whatever the nature of the society in which they live.²³ As a social activity dancing seems to satisfy some very elementary needs of human beings although the actual forms of dancing can vary enormously.

There is no time here to go in greater detail into the specific life cycle of dances which one can observe at least in European societies. Many dances start as relatively unrestrained and highly emotive dance forms of lower social strata. They are taken up by higher social strata where they become more restrained,

²²Artie Shaw, *The Trouble with Cinderella: An Outline of Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952), pp. 198–9.

²³Many years later, this thought was developed by the great American world historian William H. McNeill in his book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). McNeill participated in a conference organised by Elias in Bielefeld in 1984, on very long-term human history, though there is no suggestion that he knew of this aspect of Elias's ideas.—eds.

more formalised, more elegant in manner and less open to the upsurge of emotional spontaneity in movements. For a time they remain still full of vigour thus providing a good deal of emotional refreshment. But in the course of time they tend to become more formalised, more routinised. They are drained more and more of any effective spontaneity. Movements tend to become smoother and less vigorous. Their ability to provide strong immediate pleasure through the participation in the common movements of bodies and limbs of a whole group of people follows the exciting and unifying rhythm of the instruments. And so, in time, they give way to other forms of dancing which, coming from below, from relatively less restraint, still possess the emotional vigour which they have lost. Thus the cycle, the rise and decline of dances begins again. From the *gaillarde* of the Middle Ages to the English country dances which, taken up by polite society in France, became the more courteous, more civilised *contredanses*, from the waltz of the poorer Viennese quarters which spread—to some extent helped by the Congress of Vienna—throughout Europe where, though it apparently still shocked Queen Victoria, in the course of time it became tamed, respectable and elegant. [From] the once wildly vulgar Foxtrot, the sensuous Tango, and now the whole family of dances of the jazz type, again and again, the emotional vigour is renewed through the rise of dances from below. The patterns of rise and decline, of civilising what appears at first as the vulgarity of the lower-class movements and then of routinising and formalising them increasingly until they lose what appears to be their function for people—the specific emotional refreshment which rhythmic movements in groups appeared to provide—are not always the same; they vary with the structures of societies, and particularly with the nature and relationship of lower and upper classes. As these are different in industrial societies from what they were in pre-industrial societies, one need not expect that the life cycle of the jazz family of dances will be quite the same as that of pre-industrial or early and still less urbanised industrial dances. In actual fact, waves of rise and decline in jazz music with a constant drift towards formalisation, routinisation, and sophistry, broken again and again by the injection of some new vigour from somewhere, occur constantly under our very ears. Again and again the old hands look back from the height of their success, when a particular idiom has become established and stale, to the time when it was still young, when playing in a band could still be an exciting game of spontaneous inventions and not a set pattern which one knew by heart.

There can be little doubt that in terms of the music as well as in terms of the bodily movements, the manner of jazz dancing represented a very profound breaking through the shell of a tradition that had become hardened and excluded spontaneity and inventiveness except perhaps on the very top level of a few

highly individualised composers. The vast majority of people had to fit their feelings and their movements into a fairly rigid and inelastic uniform. Artie Shaw, looking back at the early days of jazz, still captures the whiff of the excitement of these days when everything was new. There was Willie Smith, a Negro²⁴ piano player known in Harlem as 'the Lion'.²⁵ One can almost see him. He would sit there at the piano ...

chewing a ragged cigar stub, growling and barking 'hucking' away to himself, and creating endless and ingenious and complex variations on whatever tune was being sung, until these complications and variations made it seem some minor miracle that the singer was able to keep going without losing the beat altogether, let alone the thread of the tune itself, which – for a large part of the time – served only as a springboard from which the Lion would plunge off into those deep and murky musical waters in which he swam. ...

I had to try to adapt my playing to his odd style. It wasn't easy, and at first I couldn't manage at all without a good bit of fumbling. He would sit there, occasionally turning his head and playing something at me with a kind of arrogant look that turned the musical phrase he had just played into a challenge, as if you say, 'There y'are boy – let's see you get with that one,' and I would do my best to get with it, until after a while I began to get the drift, to latch on to what he was doing to the point where I could have some general predictability of where we would end up whenever we slid into one of those complicated little modulatory phrases of his which always, somehow or other, managed to slither their way back into the tonality of whatever we had started out from.

All this was an enormously stimulating experience for me. ...

From a purely harmonic standpoint, he was far ahead of most of his contemporaries; for jazz in those days, however rhythmically complicated it may have been, was fairly primitive harmonically.²⁶

²⁴The term 'Negro' is not now considered appropriate, but it was not considered offensive at the time Elias was writing. As Stephen Mennell notes in the preface to his book *The American Civilizing Process* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007: xii), 'Writing about American history today often raises questions of nomenclature in light of powerful standards of political correctness, which nevertheless change so quickly that there is a danger of the rapid onset of anachronism. Over the last few decades, there has been a whole sequence of terms considered to be the polite way of referring to the descendants of African slaves: 'Negroes', 'coloured people', 'blacks', 'African-Americans', 'people of colour'. ... I have attempted to avoid both offence and anachronism by using an older term whenever a newer term might read incongruously.' For similar reasons, here we have let Elias's use of 'Negro' stand.—eds.

²⁵William H.J.B. Smith (1897–1973).—eds.

²⁶Shaw, *Trouble with Cinderella*, p. 209.

This is one of the many images which give an idea of this particular kind of break through the hard shell of the more conventional types of music making and dancing. Artie Shaw wrote:

... whether the work is 'bob' or 'swing' or just plain 'jazz', the general underlying principle is the same. It's a bunch of guys playing music together, improvising, exchanging ideas 'digging' one another, picking up a 'riff' here and a phrase there; so I guess it's still the same no matter what the commercialised, publicised term for it may be in any particular period.²⁷

Here, music-making is a game people play with each other with a good deal of scope for individual choices within the general drift of the musical dialogue. Years later, Artie Shaw and his 'New Music Outfit' had transformed themselves into a 'high-priced, slick-surfaced, smoothly functioning, musical machine'.²⁸ In this case the formalisation and routinisation of the emotional spontaneity had, as one can see, sociologically a different character from that which it had formerly through the passage from a lower to a higher stratum.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that if one digs down to the bottom of the well where the springs flow more freely, one discovers in fact resources of human enjoyment which do not seem so very different in sections of the urbanised industrial societies from what they are in the case of Australian Aborigines. The dancing of the Aborigines for hours on end to what may appear to us as the monotonous beating of the drums, and the dancing of young urbanised and industrial people for hours on end on the crowded floor of a dance hall to the music of a band which may be more sophisticated but whose accents on rhythms are equally strong, are too similar not to suggest common human satisfactions and needs behind all the differences. At the same time the differences are striking and not a little significant. The Australians evidently can respond to the mood of the moment. One individual of the tribe may start to throw out the challenge of his mood to the others, as the trombone player of a jazz band throws out the challenge of his tune to the pianist or the singer. Then the second and a third, and more and more of the members of the tribe respond and they all can abandon themselves wholeheartedly to the emotional integration of the communal dancing. The desire, the need of the jazz dancers of the crowded dance floor and the satisfactions at which they aim are perhaps the same. The difference is that they can no longer abandon themselves wholeheartedly to the pleasures of losing

²⁷Ibid., pp. 226–7.

²⁸Ibid., p. 312.

themselves in the communal rhythm of the dancing group. They cannot allow themselves to be carried away by the beating of the drums, by the whispering and shouting and crying of the saxophone. They cannot be as wholeheartedly devoted to the pleasure here and now, because their consciousness of themselves tomorrow is too strong and perhaps because the voice of their work-trained conscience whispers in their ear: 'you are wasting your time; you are idle; you should do something useful'. And so they shuffle warily around the dance floor, as Artie Shaw describes it, hanging grimly on to each other like tired trees in a hurricane and clutch one another for dear life like punch-drunk fighters, in search it seems of the same refreshing abandonment of their individual self in the communal rhythm of the group without being able to shake off even momentarily, as the Australians are easily able to do, the feeling of their separateness, their aloneness—or, to use a favourite of our time, the feeling of their 'alienation'.

But for our understanding of what leisure may have to offer us in future times, the comparison between the two ways of dancing, that of the Australians and that of young industrial people crowded on a dance floor and trying, not altogether successfully, to abandon themselves to the rhythm of a jazz band, is not without significance. In many ways the style of dancing and of music which now goes by the general name of jazz, at least in the early phases of its development, represented a breakthrough. They opened up springs of emotional spontaneity, spontaneity of the movement as well as of music-making which had been buried for some time below the rubble of standardised academic music-making and routinised forms of dancing. A similar breakthrough, as one saw from the life cycle of other dances, has occurred quite often before. Nevertheless some structural characteristics of that break, of which jazz is only one symptom among others, are markedly different from previous phenomena of a related kind. As in other cases, the model-setting groups belonged to the lower strata of society. But although rural traditions contributed to the new type of music and dancing, its main producers and promoters were highly urbanised groups exposed to, and to some extent stimulated by, all the pressures of highly industrialised societies. But the greatest, the most significant structural difference was due to the different nature of the social groups which contribute most to the models and standards of taste in music or for that matter in painting and in many other types of leisure enjoyment. In pre-industrial societies the ruling standards of taste, and therefore also fashions in taste, were as a rule determined by aristocratic or patrician groups, by Society with a capital S—that is to say, by elite groups which were very small in numbers, which had a very high status and, as a rule, very considerable power in the state. The masses of the people, above all the lower classes, were separated from these elites by a very wide social distance. Circulation of models from the upper

to the lower classes and from the lower to the upper classes, as far as it occurred, was therefore slow. The elites moreover, who were the arbiters of good taste and who had power enough to back their judgement against deviance, were groups whose members did not earn their living by means of highly-regulated occupational work. We often call them 'leisure classes', although the term is misleading. However it was, the aspiring professionals who through their occupational work provided for their amusements, for the enhancement of their life through arts and decorations, music and theatrical play and in many other ways, were servants; they were at any rate the social inferiors dependent on the model-setting elites. However much influenced the aristocratic and patrician elites might be, in particular cases, by the individual gifts of professional artists or entertainers, they were always very conscious of the fact that these men were their social dependants, and worked for the enhancement of their lives.

The fundamental change which occurred in the fashioning of all leisure activities, of art and literature, of music and dancing, of athletics, of games or whatever they may be, with the change in the distribution of power characteristic of processes of industrialisation, with the rise of occupational middle and working classes, is the emancipation of all professional groups which cater for the leisure enjoyments of people from their position as social subordinates of their clients and customers. With this change in the balance of power between the producers and the consumers of leisure enjoyment, including all those usually classified as 'cultural', the former have become to a far greater extent than ever before the arbiters of 'good taste', the people who set the standards and the models in the arts, in sport, in games, and amusements of all kinds. Of course, the decision does not lie in their hands alone. It lies in the balance of power between leisure producers and leisure consumers, between those who professionally produce or perform for the leisure enjoyment of others and those for whose enjoyment they cater. But compared with pre-industrial state-societies, with aristocratic and patrician elites both secular and clerical, it has changed considerably, particularly in multi-party states where the exchanges between leisure producers and leisure consumers take place within the framework of a relatively free market. In that case the status differences between the two sides have either disappeared or have become small compared with the top ranks of societies of previous ages. In quite a number of cases the status and the power potentials of leisure producers have even become decidedly higher than those of their consumers. Top-ranking film stars, television producers, actors, painters, sportsmen and sportswomen are examples. This is partly due to the great broadening of the demand for the professional provision of leisure enjoyment. That the balance of power between leisure producers and leisure consumers, in a number of cases, has moved in favour of

the producers, is partly due to the fact they form, without being necessarily institutionally organised, smaller and more closely interrelated groups of individuals than the consumers. The consumers of leisure provisions can make their power felt mainly through paying or withholding payment for opportunities of leisure enjoyment offered to them by their professional producers. The producers, however strongly individualised they may be, in many cases have the character of elite groups who form among themselves, through the exchange and circulation of ideas a kind of internal public opinion, a competitive estimate of each other's achievements and values, an internal status order of their production and performances. However much torn these elite groups may be by competition and rivalries, their relative smallness—relative by comparison with the consumers and, connected with it, their professionalisation—tilts the balance of power, to some extent, in their favour.

One cannot understand the specific characteristics of products and performances for the leisure enjoyment of people in industrial nation states without reference to this specific balance of power. In the context of this talk, I cannot follow the track of this analysis in all its ramifications. I must confine myself to selecting a few threads which, I think, are of relevance for my main theme, for the relationship between spontaneity and self-consciousness in the production of leisure enjoyment in our societies.

In the more differentiated societies of our time, leisure activities occupy a fairly broad band within the overall spectrum of human activities. They range from dancing to choosing pictures or sculptures for one's room which, once chosen, become for a time part of the silent company of our home, a stimulating source of leisure enjoyment. They range from playing cards or roulette to listening to a symphony, from hunting, from going to the races or the pub, to watching one of Shakespeare's plays on the stage. Some leisure activities might be called 'cultural', others not. The professionalisation of the occupational groups who provide the wherewithal of leisure does not have quite the same effects in the more popular sections of leisure occupations, which one might hesitate to call 'cultural', compared to those sections whose specialised representatives cater for a relatively limited public with relatively high standards of taste. The capacity and the willingness of broader social strata to pay for their leisure enjoyment, which is one of the conditions of the professionalisation and specialisation of leisure production, have resulted in what is generally known as a commercialisation of this production. This trend towards professionalisation of vast tracts of leisure production, as compared with the—to a much greater extent—home-made character of popular leisure activities in former days, has increased their characteristic as something sold at a profit and bought for the satisfaction of a need. From the

seller's point of view, this discourages spontaneity. For spontaneity in a business transaction entails great risks.

However, the satisfaction of those who seek, and who pay for, leisure enjoyment—the satisfaction of the customers—depends to a considerable extent on the appearance of spontaneity in the production of leisure enjoyment. For the customers' pleasure depends, in some measure, on the encounter with something exciting and unexpected, with a product or a performance which arouses a spontaneous emotional response. This response is difficult to evoke without a degree of spontaneity in the producer or the performer, which may be genuine but which may also be consciously imitated. The professionalisation and commercialisation of the production of leisure enjoyment for others has led, in societies such as ours, to various types of unspontaneous, highly self-conscious and professional performances of spontaneity. At the lower levels, such attempts at a trained, routinised, self-conscious and unspontaneous spontaneity often misfire. The faking of emotions which are not genuine, which are broken by the unemotional deliberateness and self-consciousness of their producers, is one of the characteristics of the kitsch style that is one of the common denominators of many spare-time provisions for people in industrial societies. In an attempt to evoke some more or less spontaneous emotional response in the consumer these productions and performances are endowed with emotion-evoking properties which through calculation and deliberateness are recognisable as a distortion, as a bad imitation. Through cool unemotional planning of an emotion-evoking response, in this case one merely achieves a product or a performance that has lost its innocence or at least the genuineness of feeling which it is intended to communicate to others, to a public, to customers.

One cannot enter here upon an exploration of the communicatory function of patterns, of shapes, of movements in visible, audible, tactile or many other media. The fact—still relatively little explored—is that they all are capable of conveying messages. They need not be deliberately structured in order to appeal to human beings. Trees, mountains, birds and moonlit nights grew into shape long before man. Yet they can evoke feelings, although at the present state of our understanding it would be hard to account for the affinity. But human beings have acquired a long time ago—we are still not quite clear since when, and why—the ability to organise and structure patterns and shapes and movements, including those of their own body, in a way which has the character of a message, which is meaningful to others and which, even if it is connected with verbal messages, has a non-verbal character. It is in the first instance a communication of feelings.

That is where the kitsch style in the industrialised societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries goes astray. Before this time folk art and popular

amusements might be offered for sale by people who tried to make a living in this manner. But in predominantly rural societies, not excluding their urban sectors, leisure was still a time in which one could let oneself go to a very much greater extent. Folk art might be clumsy, crude and gross, but the emotional message which it conveys, through the use of shapes, patterns, movements or whatever it may be, is usually quite genuine and spontaneous; its makers rarely wrestle with the difficult problem of how to speak to the emotions of others through something that one makes or does, while the spontaneous flow of one's own feelings is held back or broken by cool reasoning, by deliberately and self-consciously fashioning objects or oneself so as to convey a feeling message.

One can recognise the problem very clearly in the art of the Renaissance and Baroque, where it became more pronounced than ever before. But the difficulty, the danger inherent in any attempt to curb in one's creation or performance the spontaneous flow of feeling through reflecting about it—already the attempt at projecting a three-dimensional space on to the two-dimensional canvas made by masters such as Masaccio or Uccello²⁹ represents a curb of this kind—was at that time still tempered by the fact that all the leisure productions which were not destined for the entertainment, the amusement and adornment of the people who earn their livelihood through work, and mostly through manual work at that, were destined for patrons, for customers from small, non-working and relatively closely knit elite groups. In their circles, the taste of the individual was, to a far greater extent than it was in the more highly individualised societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, supported by and dependent on the common standards of good taste developed in the elite circles themselves. In the wealthier court societies, in aristocratic societies, among the top ranks of the church, attention to the language of shapes and patterns, to all adornments of life was still a status requirement of a fairly high order. It thus had representational value, although attitudinising – the very deliberate aim of evoking sentiments – became very much stronger than it had been since the late Greek and Roman leisure production. The fortification of sentiment through deliberate reflection was held in check by the need for education and refinement as a social badge, as a symbol of one's standing in

²⁹Tommaso Masaccio (1401–28) and Paolo Uccello (1397–1475), both painters of the early Florentine Renaissance who were important in the development of perspective. In the 1920s Elias had set out to write a *Habilitationsschrift* under Alfred Weber at Heidelberg on the shared roots of the development of the arts and sciences in Renaissance Florence (see Elias, 'The emergence of the modern natural sciences', Appendix to *Early Writings* (Dublin: UCD Press [Collected Works, vol. 1]), pp. 111–23); although the thesis was never finished, references to these painters, among other Renaissance artists, crop up frequently in Elias's later writings.—eds.

society. It is perhaps misleading if one calls these former elites leisure classes; for the term leisure as it is used in our own society receives its meaning from the fact that it means 'leisure' as distinct from 'work'. And work is in that case usually regarded as the activity of higher value. But if one uses the term leisure without the inherent evaluation, it is certainly worth noting for any enquiry into the possibilities of future leisure activities that sensitivity to the language of forms, the socialisation of individuals for 'good taste'—within the limitations imposed by their function as a means of acquiring or maintaining social status—was a normal requirement for members of these leisure classes. The layout of one's garden, the representational character of one's 'stately home', the elegance of one's dress and one's movements, no less than the elegance and the refined shape of one's furniture or of the paintings and sculptures to be seen, of the music to be heard in one's home, all were the means of one's leisure enjoyment, adornments of sociability as well as weapons in the unceasing status rivalry of these groups.

One can see at a glance the structural differences in the relationship between the producers of leisure enjoyment and their customers, the consumers then and now. Broadly speaking up to the beginning of the nineteenth century the fashioning of patterns and shapes, of colours and rhythms for the leisure enjoyment of the upper classes, had style in the more literal sense of the word – that is to say one can distinguish a certain uniformity of the standards of taste which, in spite of many local variations and differences in the times of their rise and their fall, is noticeable throughout a very large part of Europe. It reflects the unity of court societies and in a wider sense of the aristocratic and patrician elites of that period. They might fight and kill each other in dynastic wars. But in spite of these rivalries their members never lost the awareness of their common characteristics as courtiers, as gentlemen, as patricians, in short as the social elites of their country which as such had more in common with each other than they had with the common people even of their own countries. The relative uniformity of the 'styles' to which we refer as 'Renaissance', 'Baroque', 'Rococo' or 'Empire' and their local variants, such as 'Regency' or 'Biedermeier', reflect the communications between these relatively very small and comparatively closely-knit social elites of this period. In this case the models of good taste were worked out within these socially powerful circles of leisure consumers. No doubt they consulted with these specialists, painters, producers of ballets, furniture-makers, architects or whatever they were who catered for the adornment of their lives, for their entertainment and amusement. But the last, the decisive word, lay with them.

You can see how this situation has changed. In industrial societies the initiative and decision in matters of taste over the whole field of production of leisure enjoyment, including the production for the adornment of people's home life,

now lies to a far greater extent than before with groups of trained specialists. In the life of their public, the consumer's education for sensitivity in matters of taste has become marginal. It may still be in small groups a status requirement, but by and large the vast majority of the members of the industrial societies are relatively uncertain in matters of taste. They are dependent on the initiative of specialist circles. In former days, the consumers of leisure productions consisted of comparatively closely-knit groups with fairly firm standards of taste and behaviour with regard to the provision of leisure enjoyment. Whether these standards received their firmness from an authoritative tradition which changed so slowly that the people concerned were often not aware of any change, or whether their strength was due to the social power and the manner of living of aristocratic and urban patrician elites in their role as consumers of leisure provisions and productions, they imposed themselves on the work or on the performance of any specialists who contributed to the leisure enjoyment and adornment of non-specialists. In industrial societies, as one can see, the position is greatly changed. Without clearly understanding this change in the structure of the relationship between producers and consumers of leisure enjoyments, one cannot understand the change in the character of these leisure enjoyments themselves. And, as 'culture'—in the sense in which this word is commonly used today in society at large, namely as a classificatory term for achievements in fields such as music, literature and the arts—is in fact an overall term referring to the leisure activities of the more educated strata of society, one misses, if one does not understand the change in that relationship, certain crucial aspects of changes in the character of culture.

For the purposes of a quick survey, it may be enough to say that leisure production in industrial societies constitutes a continuum extending from a pole which can be characterised as that of mass entertainment to another perhaps best characterised as that of elite culture. One of the most significant aspects of the great public of non-specialists which consumes leisure provisions is the relatively high degree of uncertainty with regard to the specialists' standards in forming these provisions. The circles of specialists usually work out among themselves, at any given time, fairly definite criteria for judging the higher or lower value of leisure performances and productions. In their circles one can encounter, as a rule, very definite professional standards of the work done, whether it veers more towards pure entertainment or towards high culture.

But the criteria and standards of these specialists penetrate, if at all, only in a highly diluted form to the consuming public. Accordingly, the consuming public, in judging their leisure activities, usually fall back on relatively untrained feelings. They are for the greater part not well able to articulate their feelings verbally in a relatively precise manner. To a large extent they are, for the verbal

articulation of their feelings as a yardstick for the relative value of an entertainment or a cultural production, dependent on specialists in verbalisation who constitute intermediary channels of communication between the producing leisure specialists and their consumers. The best known of these specialists in verbalisation are journalists who report in newspapers and periodicals week by week on various leisure events. They provide their readers with some information about the specialists' standards and criteria, sometimes in a rather diluted form. They thus have a chance to provide some education in knowledge and sensibility, some training of the perception with regard to the various types of leisure enjoyments, from films to dog racing, from cricket matches to concerts of jazz or classical music, chances not always fully utilised by them, which at present are rather scarce.

In that situation the greater part of the general public of non-specialists, in perceiving and judging the leisure specialists' production of entertainment and culture, are thrown back on criteria which for want of a better word one cannot help calling 'purely subjective'. In most industrialised societies one can discover a kind of non-specialist ideology with regard to the value of the leisure provisions offered to them, which differs in its accents very markedly from the specialist ideology. The non-specialist ideology is centred on sentences such as: 'I like it', 'I don't like it'. The implication is that a person's feeling, whether untrained or not, is the only criterion for distinguishing between the relative merits of leisure performances or productions. It may well be that people discussing with each other these merits may in fact also use less personalised criteria. They may say 'I like it because of these and these characteristics'. But the fact that communication with others does not allow the consumers of leisure provisions to remain entirely consistent in their reliance on highly personal feelings as the ultimate yardstick for the value of these provisions hardly affects the fact that the disbelief in the possibility of using less highly personalised criteria for perceiving, and for distinguishing between, the relative merits of different leisure provisions is the dominant factor in the ideology of the non-specialist consumers. Here one often encounters among those who reflect on problems such as these a very firm belief that this extreme relativism with regard to the value of leisure provisions is the only realistic and the only honest attitude. Whether it is stated explicitly or not, the sincere conviction represented by this ideology is that there are no intrinsic criteria for determining the relative merits of productions for the leisure enjoyment of people other than their personal feelings. According to this view therefore, it is not possible to say that this product is trash or kitsch and that product is not. If people take it upon themselves to assume that such judgements are more than an expression of their own personal feelings, they deceive themselves. Thus the

central argument is that one cannot say more than 'I like it', 'I don't like it'. One feeling is as good as the other. If one set of people like what the others call trash, their view is as good as that of the others.

Of course, the argument is not always verbalised in this extreme manner. One will have to test this suggestion about the nature of the consumer ideology more systematically. But there is a good deal of evidence for assuming that although impersonal arguments are put forward in discussions about the merits of different types of leisure provisions, among non-specialists the conviction that ultimately it is a question of individual taste which serves as the criterion for the value of leisure productions and performances, and that it is a mere pretence of some people, particularly of experts, if they explain what they regard as differences in value by means of references to intrinsic characteristics of the activities, the works or performances in question. Essentially that is the gist of the argument; by means of such seemingly objective criteria people merely rationalise their own personal preference.

The specialists' criteria for judging performances or productions in their own field are different. They rely to a far greater extent than the public on criteria referring to intrinsic merits. For want of a better word one might call them 'objective' criteria. The situation is complicated by the fact that almost all groups which are professionally engaged in the provision of leisure enjoyment for others have a profound hierarchical structure. They consist of relatively small top groups formed of people who have reached, as a result of a competitive struggle, the position of highest professional status. And this competitive struggle itself fosters the development of impersonal criteria of performance. One of the most intriguing problems is to what extent the structure of the formal and informal organisation of a leisure occupation allows individuals to come to the top who possess those qualities to which one often refers as creativity—that is to say, sufficient spontaneity of imagination and sensitivity to be able to perceive possibilities in their leisure provisions not perceived before, and sufficient forcefulness to back their own innovatory powers against the opposing pressures of routines and conventions. It is probably no exaggeration to say that, contrary to appearances, the social situation and structure of elites specialising in the provision of leisure enjoyment has rarely been more conducive to experimentation and innovation than it is in advanced industrial societies of our time, at least in those in which governments do not take it upon themselves to exercise strict control over leisure provisions, as they do over the non-leisure activities of their citizens. Where this type of curb on the imagination and spontaneity of the providers of leisure enjoyment does not exist, they have in many branches of the leisure field today a scope for experimentation and innovation hardly matched by that of any

other period. Their power in relation to the consuming elites, for instance in relation to any 'good society' and in relation to governments and other state elites, is very much greater than it was in most previous periods of history. The functional democratisation of industrial societies has almost completely swept aside the slur of social inferiority formally often associated with specialist groups who merely provided entertainment and amusement, enjoyment and pleasurable excitement for others. The facts themselves, the rise in the social status of leisure-providing groups nearer to the entertainment as well as nearer to the cultural pole, are obvious enough for everyone to see. But the more theoretical implications of the facts with regard to the diagnosis of the developmental direction in which we are heading as with regard to distinguishing characteristics of the products of these specialist groups have perhaps not yet been sufficiently analysed and illuminated. The former, the increased status of leisure-providing groups, from film actors to painters, from professional footballers to architects and boxers of the top rank, to mention only those few, is probably not unconnected with the financial rewards which people at the top rank can expect to receive for their achievements, if not in all, at least in many of these specialisms. But the financial rewards themselves are symptomatic of the fact that the shortening of the working hours, the lengthening of the spare-time periods, and the higher standard of living all round in the more advanced societies are leading to an increased demand for leisure enjoyments of a variety of types. And tacitly, though perhaps not yet explicitly, they are symptomatic of the re-evaluation of leisure occupations compared with work activities and non-leisure spare-time activities having already begun.

The significance for the intrinsic characteristics of leisure production can be briefly illustrated here by reference to certain changes in the character of art. Briefly speaking one can say that in considering the nature of works of art one can distinguish—although in no way separate—the function which they have for their makers and the function, potential or actual, which they have for others. Whatever else they may be, they are vehicles which communicate meanings from one person to another. It is not surprising that the changing position of artists in society had a profound influence on the character of the work of art itself. One takes account only of one part-aspect of this change in the position of artists if one tries to relate changes in the character of works of art to the fact that in industrialising nation states artists produce to a greater extent than before for an unknown public. The fact that the consumers buy pieces of art like other leisure enjoyments in the open market, that the artist's public is no longer a relatively solid and well-integrated group, is one of the factors which accounts for the greater chances of power and autonomy at the disposal of artists in industrial societies where the production of art is not state-controlled and where their

products can be sold and bought in a free market. The greater autonomy of the producers of works of art is reflected in the greater autonomy of the work of art itself. The greater power of artists in relation to their public is reflected in a shift of the balance between the function and the meaning of a work of art for its producer and the function, the potential meaning which it has for consumers, in favour of the producer. The lessening emphasis on the representation of scenes or objects which are meaningful not only for producers but also for consumers of art, and the growing emphasis on the pleasures to be derived from pursuing the imminent balances and contrasts, the organisation and dynamics of the composition itself, is symptomatic of the increased autonomy of the work of art as well as of the artist. We have a variety of school names by means of which we try to classify and interpret the various directions taken by this tendency of artists to explore, in accordance with the change in their social position, the greater chance that they have in following the imminent logic of their composition. Although one cannot do without classificatory terms such as cubism or expressionism, few of these terms are particularly meaningful, and some like the term 'abstract art' are slightly absurd. All works of art 'abstract' from something. The greater emphasis on the enjoyment to be derived from exploring the inexhaustible universe of the compositions for their own sake—whether made of sounds, of three- or four-dimensional objects, of two-dimensional shapes, patterns and colours or whatever it may be—should not deceive us about the fact that art producers throughout the ages have always tried their hands at, and probably enjoyed the exploration of, the imminent logic of their composition. [That fact applies] whether they did it mindful of the need for communicating with a non-specialist public by representing something which conveyed other meanings as well—as in church pictures or portraits—or [whether they] had few representational associations, as is the case with a great part of our musical heritage. I always found it interesting that most of the paintings of Vermeer van Delft,³⁰ which today are held in the highest esteem because of the painter's obvious enjoyment in the exploration of the imminent possibilities of his compositions, in the dozens of shades of colour and light of a silky material contrasting with a darker background, in the contrast between the intimacy of a small room and the wider expanse of the fields outside as seen through the window—were apparently not produced for the market, or if they were produced with that aim were never sold. They remained in his house until he died, perhaps because they represented the personal explorations and musings of an individual with a visual sensitivity above the normal standard of his time, and

³⁰Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), painter of the Dutch 'Golden Age'.—eds.

were sold relatively cheaply. In the form of 'abstract art' painters simply undertake this kind of exploration with a higher degree of autonomy than before. What is more, the top rank of painters have become powerful enough to impose on their public the results of their own spontaneous explorations of the unknown possibilities of visual compositions. The level of sensitivity of these specialists in our time is usually far in advance of that of the greater part of the non-specialists, and as the means of communication between the two groups are still extremely rudimentary and ineffectual—as the various specialists for verbalisation who could act as intermediaries, whether journalists or art historians, still provide little help compared to the magnitude of the task—the great mass of the non-specialists trail far behind and are thus deprived of an immense source of leisure enjoyment and enrichment. Once more the sociological analysis of present conditions proves a good point of departure for loosening our imagination with regard to the future of leisure. No doubt, future societies will find ways and means for shortening the time lag between innovations in the production of art and the chances that consumers have of understanding and enjoying these innovations.

Perhaps one may add that the experimentation with visual shapes—and the mastery one may acquire in that field, the enjoyment one may derive from this mastery, which form part of the artist's craft throughout the ages—was by no means unknown, and was not always pursued without clear and particular awareness, though one might hardly have thought of it as 'abstract'. It may be enough to mention one example from antiquity. It is only preserved for us in a brief anecdote. But the story speaks for itself. The famous painter Apelles, so the story goes, landed on a journey at the Isle of Rhodes where Protogenes,³¹ another equally famous painter, lived and worked. Apelles hastened to the workshop of Protogenes but he found there only an old servant-woman who asked him who he was. In reply Apelles seized a brush, drew a thin line on a tablet which had been prepared for painting and left the house. Protogenes, on his return, recognised that only one man could have drawn a line like this; he crossed it with another even more subtle and, when leaving again, left a message: he was the man for whom the unknown was looking. Apelles, calling a second time, succeeded in cutting Protogenes' line with yet another colour (the lines, we are led to assume, were drawn in different colours). In the face of this miracle of art, the line of Apelles, Protogenes declared himself defeated. That a simple stroke with a brush can have a perfection, a music of its own, was known to the great masters of the east as it

³¹Apelles and Protogenes were Greek painters of the fourth century BC, in the time of Alexander the Great. None of their work survives, but their reputation comes down to the present largely through the writings of Pliny the Elder.—eds.

was to those of antiquity. However, it required a specific social position of artists, in relation to their customers, before the specialists' expertise and enjoyment in the problem of visual composition could take wings and impose itself upon the market. There is no reason to assume that they will forever remain where they are today. Tomorrow they may take pleasure again in applying to the representational objects the new possibilities which they have discovered through their exploration of semi-representational or non-representational composition. The achievement and greatness of a work of art does not depend upon either its representational or its non-representational character. It depends on the inventiveness and power of the artist's vision and of the composition which communicates it to others.

The greater autonomy of artists and their work in relation to the customers illuminates some aspects of contemporary production for the leisure enjoyment of people generally. One often speaks regretfully today of what is believed to be the increasing commercialisation of leisure enjoyments. It is a phenomenon which, as far as leisure pursuits are concerned, whether more cultural or more entertaining, stands in need of closer inspection than is possible in this context. It can imply that the spontaneity of invention of artists and entertainers in industrial societies is apt to become subordinated, and distorted by business agencies intermediary between the actual producers and the customers, to the requirements of the optimal sale and the maximal profit. It is undoubtedly possible to observe in contemporary societies again and again how soon any innovation in the field of leisure enjoyment that wins the acclaim of people elicits flattened and cheapened imitations. It becomes, as it were, routinised and stereotyped for and through mass consumption, thus losing its freshness and genuineness and, through this transformation into a consumption good to be sold at the mass market, becoming a piece of kitsch.

Thus commercialisation in the field of culture and entertainment, if one looks closer into the matter, reveals itself as a phase in a recurrent cyclical movement. It is different from, yet in certain regards reminiscent of, the cyclical movement that one can observe in former days in the development of the forms of dancing mentioned before. There too one encountered recurrent waves of innovation and routinisation, the former always being distinguished by their greater scope for spontaneity and the greater emotional refreshment they provided, the latter by their greater emphasis on routinised movements and formal elegance demanding a higher restraint of emotions and often devoid of any appeal to the feelings of the dancers. It is not uninteresting to compare this type of life cycle of leisure products with the cycle of innovatory spontaneity and routinisation through which many leisure creations are passing in our own time. One can see more clearly in this way that routinisation in the form of commercialisation of leisure productions is often a complementary phase of a cyclical wave that gains its momentum with an innovatory phase of greater emotional spontaneity.

Compared with the life cycles of dances in pre-industrial dynastic state societies which have been mentioned, the cyclical waves of leisure products which lead from innovation to routinisation are relatively short. But that may be partly due to the fact that we do not have sufficient distance from these phenomena, and that the period of observation at our disposal is rather short.

Let us take as an example a few episodes from the development of jazz music. The references to Artie Shaw's autobiography that have already been made before indicated a relatively short cycle in the life of a jazz musician leading from the participation in the adventurous improvisations of early jazz makers to the position of a slick, established and commercially successful band leader. This individual development was not uncharacteristic of one of the cycles in the development of jazz generally.

If one goes back far enough into the origins of jazz, one encounters a pattern very similar to that characteristic of rising dances and dance music in earlier periods. The roots of jazz are to be found in the music of a lower class, in fact of the lowest of the low. It is the music of people upon whom external restraints weighed much more heavily than internal restraints. It was African folk music transformed into the work songs, the play and religious songs of African slaves; the channels through which the folk music of Negro slaves travelled into the cities need not concern us here. What is important is its obvious function: it carried with it a strong emotional appeal of a very elementary kind whose nature deserves closer attention than it has found so far. It is largely unexplored. What common elements of feelings are aroused in people by the strong repetitive, rhythmic beat of drums and other percussion instruments, which can still be heard with all their elementary sophistication in the forests of Africa and which, now transformed, merged with elements of a European tradition of music-making and extended their appeal to sections of urban populations, particularly to younger sections, first in the great cities of the USA and then in those of many other industrial societies?

Whatever the common springs of feeling were to which this new kind of music-making, this descendant of a pre-industrial folk music, appealed, the strength of the appeal itself, and of the needs stimulated by it can be gauged, to some extent, from its success. The traditional type of music-making, though not necessarily the traditional type of music itself, left relatively little scope for improvisation and spontaneity of performance, whether it took the form of a serious concert or of entertainment. Prior to the coming of jazz, music-making, the performing of music in public, was dependent on a high degree of professionalisation. In the performing arts, as elsewhere, professionalisation secures firm standards of training and competence, but it also strengthens the tendency towards an unquestioning acceptance of traditions. It is apt to produce specific deformation. Clichés of professional excellence, routines of virtuosity and other similar academicisms tend to establish themselves through a whole hierarchy of

highly institutionalised channels of teaching, through which individuals have to pass as a means of acquiring professional qualification and with it the chances of appointments and of promotion. Once grown up, the professional encrustations can be loosened a little from the highest level—that is, through the teaching and the example of people who have reached the top of their profession—but the imminent weight of such a professional shell is usually too great to allow any radical break with its inherent tendency towards routinisation and from the tendency to transform innovating models travelling from the top to the bottom of the professional hierarchy from becoming academic clichés.

It was one of the surprising aspects of the new type of music-making rightly or wrongly associated with the name of jazz that it developed largely outside the established professional framework which until then had determined the training, the outlook, the career of musicians and, apart from a small number of innovating individuals at the top, even the kind of music regarded as professionally acceptable. In relation to the professional music establishment, the jazz musicians were, in the broader sense of the word, outsiders. It would go too far here to explore this rise of a new type of music as an outsider movement and the significance of this configuration for the nature of this type of music. The fact that from now on the new type of music-making, the jazz type, could establish itself and for a time grow in strength as a separate stream of music side by side with the other older stream without being absorbed by it raises a good many problems which are well worth exploring. But one cannot do it here. In this context the relationship between these two streams of music-making can serve as a paradigm. The newcomers, the outsiders, were able by breaking through the established methods of making music to revive a practice that had formerly flourished in the European tradition, the practice of spontaneously improvising music not only in private but also in public and not only by one individual but by individuals in groups. I have given before an example of this type of spontaneous improvisation. There is no doubt that the emotional make-up³² of urbanised American Negroes had a great deal to do with this reopening of the floodgates of spontaneity. But it could not have gained the impetus it

³²Earlier in his career, when writing in German, Elias had often used the term *Habitus*, which had been common enough in German and French sociology before the Second World War. But the word 'habitus' was more or less unknown in English in the period when this essay was written, and so he generally used terms like 'emotional make-up' or 'personality make-up'. Later, after the term had been reintroduced into English largely through translations of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Elias began to use it again. Elias's definition of habitus was far pithier than Bourdieu's: he described it as 'second nature'—that is, all the aspects of feeling and behaviour that individuals have in fact learned since birth, but which are so deeply habituated that they are experienced as simply 'natural' or innate.—eds.

did if it had not corresponded to some dormant needs and dormant potentials in a variety of other outsider groups and finally in a fairly wide section of the younger generation in industrial societies themselves. In a way one is confronted here with a highly significant and symptomatic phenomenon—symptomatic, that is, of certain aspects of the development of industrial societies. For the renewal of spontaneity is no longer a return to the complete innocence and unselfconsciousness with which music and other manifestations of people's powers of imagination may burst forth in very simple societies or, for that matter, in children of all societies. It was a spontaneity at which people to some extent consciously aimed. It is possible that some of the Negro performers still preserve, as the example quoted shows, some traces of the earlier unselfconsciousness in improvising—the sheer, immediate form of music-making prompted by some elementary urge and akin to the unselfconscious and spontaneous call to a communal dance in the case of Australian Aborigines, which has been described before. But for the greater part, spontaneous improvisation in groups came in the course of time to be cultivated as a very conscious, a very enjoyable communal experience. And this combination of spontaneity and self-consciousness that has been achieved there, and for all we know which may disappear sooner or later under the burden of a new routinisation, is nevertheless highly significant for a much broader trend in our own time.

One encounters here a number of problems which I dare not answer because to do it briefly, as would be necessary in this context, would create all kinds of misunderstandings. But I can at least mention one or two of these problems themselves. Self-consciousness is apt to inhibit spontaneity of performance. You may remember the story of the lame bird and the millipede. The lame bird had escaped captivity where his wings had been cut and one of his legs had been broken, and now he had to fend for himself. When the millipede passed by in his leisurely way, the lame bird found that even he was too fast for him in his present condition but he was very hungry, and being something of an intellectual he hit upon a very ingenious ruse. He slowed down to the movements of the millipede by flattering him a little. How he admired, he said, the millipede's elegant movements. 'Yes', said the millipede, with his small and rather high voice—without, however, interrupting his journey—many people had told him that. 'And how,' asked the bird 'do you actually do it? I have difficulties even in moving my two legs but with the number of legs which you have, how can you manage? What for instance do you do if you want to move leg No. 73?' 'Wait a moment,' said the millipede slowing down a little, 'I never thought about it. Now let me see,' he said standing finally still. 'How do I do it?' There he stood thinking for the first time in his life how he actually moved his legs and while thinking about it he suddenly found he could not move them any more. And so the clever bird got him.

The danger of thinking, the danger of self-consciousness, paralyses the grace and ease of movement. The problem was summed up early in the nineteenth

century, when it became very acute, by a great German romantic poet, Heinrich von Kleist, in a thoughtful little reflection called 'The Puppet Show'.³³ He liked to watch a puppet show, he said, not only because of the stories they play, but also because of the movements of the puppets:³⁴

They are limited, but legs and arms, if the puppets are well made, always have the centre of gravity in the right place, whereas human beings when they move their arms and legs very often seem to have it in the wrong place. Or look at animals. We once had a tame bear, I remember. I liked to fight him as a boy with a wooden sword. He would stand there on his hind legs and ward off with the shortest movements of his fore-paws every thrust I made against him. He never fell for any of my feints. I wondered whether he saw from my eyes what was meant as a feint and what was not. His world was limited, but it had a completeness of its own, body and mind together and there was no deception. Or again, I remember once travelling through a village and watching the children bathing in the river. The innocence and spontaneity of their movements in contrast to the self-conscious artificiality of the movements of our men of the world struck me at this moment very forcibly. I remember seeing a young boy sitting there exactly in the pose of the old Roman statue of a boy pulling a thorn out of the sole of his foot.³⁵ He was about to go. I called him back

³³Heinrich von Kleist, 'Über das Marionettentheater', in *Berliner Abendblätter*, 12–15 December 1810. In English, the text has been published under various titles: 'On the Marionette Theatre', 'On a Theatre of Marionettes', 'About Marionettes', as well as 'On Puppet Shows' (translation by David Paisey, Hamburg: Rohse, 1991).—eds.

³⁴What follows is not a quotation. Elias is evidently paraphrasing Kleist's story from memory, not entirely accurately. Kleist attributes the technical points about the movements of puppets to a friend who was principal dancer at a local theatre. Moreover, it was neither Kleist nor this friend who had a tame bear; the friend had encountered the (chained) pet bear at the estate of a Baltic nobleman where, after a fencing match with one of the nobleman's sons, he had been challenged to fight the bear not with a wooden sword but with a rapier. The point about the bear skilfully parrying his thrusts is, however, accurate, and Elias's inaccurate summary of Kleist's story does not invalidate the conclusions he is drawing from it. It is likely that in the original talk from which this essay is derived, Elias would have been able to signal verbally more clearly than in the typescript when he was paraphrasing Kleist and when he, Elias, was drawing conclusions from the story. For that reason, we have printed this paragraph as if it were a quotation, even though it is not.—eds.

³⁵The reference is to the famous Hellenistic-Roman bronze sculpture, known variously as the *Boy with Thorn*, *Fedele* or the *Spinario*, which is now in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome. Since antiquity, many copies have existed, including examples in Paris and Florence. As Kleist tells the story, he (or his hypothetical narrator) had travelled with a 15-year-old friend to Paris and seen the Paris version of the sculpture. Later, after swimming, the friend had placed his foot on a footstool in order to dry it. At this moment both the friend and the narrator were instantly reminded of the sculpture they had seen earlier—eds.

and asked him as a favour to sit down again in the same pose as before. He tried, but he did not succeed. He could not do consciously what he had done before unselfconsciously with the greatest of ease.

Thus Kleist travels in his thoughts from the perfection of the movement of wooden puppets to those of animals and unselfconscious village children to those of the learned and elegant deformed by self-consciousness, and suggests in the end, with a phrase which I find arresting and which is the main reason why I mention his reflections here, that people might perhaps be able to enter paradise again through a door on the other side.³⁶

That implies, if I may state it more explicitly, a certain deviation from the ordinary romantic line of thought. As a rule, romantic discontent with the deformation of rationality, self-consciousness, scientism, and the whole contemporary scene dominated by them turned the eye backward to the past, to the childhood of human beings where they, so it seems, could follow the prompting of their spontaneous feelings unburdened by the inhibiting power of reflection. The specific romantic character of this nostalgia for spontaneity, unselfconsciousness, for the innocent ease of movement and for liberation from the fetters of reflection, was projected into an idealised past task which, the romantics themselves knew, could never return. Nor—if they could have returned to the simpler life which they endowed in their imagination with all the qualities of a counter-image and cure for all the ills with which their own society was plagued, if they could have returned from the town to the village, from a commercialising and industrialising society to one of the simpler societies without much commerce and industry—would the romantics have found the reality as attractive as their ideals. The peculiar romantic quality of the nostalgia for innocence and spontaneity and its projection into the past sprang to some extent [from the fact] that it was incapable of finding fulfilment without destroying the identity of the romantics themselves, and that they themselves, without being able to face up to the inner contradiction of their longing, were not wholly unaware of it. The longing for something one cannot gain without losing oneself is, as it were, the keynote of romanticism. Kleist's imagination—perhaps not wholly unaffected by the grand Hegelian image of the spirit's evolution—turned, as we have seen, in the other direction. Not by means of less, but by means of more reflection, not by lowering, but by heightening self-consciousness, that is implied in his little story, might

³⁶At the end of his essay, Kleist questions whether it is necessary to eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to fall back again into the state of innocence. For Kleist, grace seems only to return either by having no consciousness (like the puppet or the bear) or by having infinite consciousness like God.—eds.

human beings regain paradise lost? Or, in other words, in order to alleviate the infirmities of that part of oneself to which one refers as reason or rationality, one need not negate or destroy it, one rather needs to cure its present weakness and to strengthen it.

Thus interpreted, Kleist's paradigm, high in the air as it may seem, can be of help in sharpening the awareness for certain trends in the contemporary world. I am at the moment merely concerned with capturing these trends in the field of leisure. It would not be difficult to discover them also in other fields. I have so far considered, as you may remember, two different types of phenomena of which one might say that they are apt to stifle the spontaneity of man—routinisation in society, and self-consciousness and reflection in individuals. It is just as well to say that they are not necessarily identical. You must forgive me if I do not enlarge on this point in the context of this talk. Nor can I do justice here to the whole complex of problems hidden behind the concept which I use here, by way of shorthand, behind the concept of spontaneity. Why should spontaneity, and particularly emotional spontaneity, be regarded, you may ask, as a thing of value? The way in which I use that concept suggests, as you may have noticed, that spontaneity has something to do with creativity. I think it has in some, though not necessarily in all, cases. But I cannot do more here than draw your attention to the problem itself. I cannot enlarge on it.

What is of relevance and what is my concern here are certain characteristic trends in our own time directed towards a very deliberate and self-conscious opening of channels of emotional spontaneity in conduct which, for a considerable time, have been wholly or partly blocked within the framework of the European tradition. I am going to give you a few examples. Most of them, although not all, are connected with the production of leisure enjoyment. They all point in the direction which I have tried to illustrate by means of the Kleistian paradigm. They are not concerned with a romantic retreat from the twentieth century towards the relatively unselfconscious spontaneity of former ages, of less complex societies. They are concerned with a highly self-conscious attempt at breaking through the hard shell—produced by whatever it is: inbred self-control, self-consciousness or routine—to the springs of emotional spontaneity. So let me give you, more or less at random, a few examples as symptoms of this trend.

Take children's paintings. In former days children were taught to paint in accordance with the canons of the adults. If the latter were illusionists and representational, children were taught as soon as possible to follow in the footsteps of their elders and betters. Their own doodlings and scribbling were treated as childish and clumsy imitations of the artistic efforts of adults without any intrinsic artistic merit. Accordingly, children were taught as soon as their age permitted it to

abandon their worthless childish ways and to learn the sterner discipline required for drawing and painting in the adult manner. Now, as you know, we have changed the tune. Children are allowed much longer what is often called 'freedom of self-expression'. This change in our policy with regard to art education is due to a considerable extent, as you know, to the fact that the canons of adult paintings themselves have moved away from the demand, dominant in European painting since the Renaissance, that paintings should represent correctly on the two-dimensional canvas human beings or other objects in a manner which gives the illusion of a three-dimensional space. Instead, adult painters too have emancipated themselves from the exclusive demand for a true representation on the canvas of things perceived outside. They have gained greater autonomy, greater freedom of experimentation with colours and shapes, with lines and light, with the shape of human beings and other objects and the only discipline imposed upon them is that of the imminent logic of their composition and their vision, not that imposed by the need to make the canvas a mirror of things outside. The greater social autonomy of artists, their greater power in relation to their potential customers—greater by comparison with former ages—has its counterpart, as I have said before, in the greater autonomy of the painter's universe in relation to the world outside. Suddenly there open before us adventures of composition and of vision which remained unexplored as long as the painter's imagination was tied to the three-dimensional world outside. In fact it was tied even more narrowly by certain conventions which very severely limited the selection of objects from the three-dimensional space regarded as suitable for painting. The painter's greater freedom of experimentation, in fact, has not only begun to open up for our delectation wholly new territories within the autonomous realm of visual music now called absurdly 'only abstract' art, it has also greatly expanded for us the scope for visual discovery and enjoyment in what we call 'nature' as well as in our cities, which may soon find their way back on the canvas. In fact, in the first flush of emancipation from the older representational tradition, and of people's enjoyment of their own power to create a pictorial universe of their own, the differences between representational and non-representational art have been vastly overstressed. As I have said before, the value of the painting depends on the consistency, the novelty, the power of its vision and its composition, whether it is representational or not.

One of the most striking and portentous events connected with this development in adult paintings was the discovery of the extraordinary power of innovating pictorial visions and compositions which many children possess. I have already referred to the open problem of the relationship between emotional spontaneity and artistic creativity. The experience with children suggests a hypothesis with regard to the relationship between the two which, according to our present

lights, is perhaps a little surprising, which cannot be stated without very great caution but which needs stating, for what it is worth, so that it can be explored more systematically and either confirmed or refuted. Many of our former practices in the field of art education seem to have been based on the implicit assumption that children have to be taught any knowledge they may have about the fitness of patterns and colours in relation to each other which is the essence of any visual composition, as it were from scratch, in the same way in which they are taught to read and write or to manipulate figures: if they don't learn it, they don't know it. Children's choice of colours and their invention of design are, as a rule, comparatively simple if they are given reasonably free range. Before the age of thirteen and even longer, their colour schemes are relatively simple and so is their design. But although their composition may be clumsy, although their capacity for co-ordinating movement of their fingers or hands and eyes may not be fully developed, they rarely make glaring mistakes with regard to the fitness of the colours they use in relation to each other, and in many cases their capacity for innovation in composition and in vision surpasses anything they have been taught. The hypothesis which suggests itself on the basis of these and of a good number of other observations is that some elementary aptitude for judging the fitness of pure colours and simple patterns in relation to each other asserts itself as an unlearned potentiality, unless it is deformed by disturbing experiences—of which disturbing forms for teaching may be one. Some confirmation for an assumption of this kind can be found in the fact that one rarely, if ever, encounters in peasant art, or in the art of simpler people, compositions of colours and patterns which clash, which are as inconsistent in relation to each other as those which can be found, say, in advertisements or in cheap household decorations in industrial societies.

In fact one can say that a specific tension balance between emotional spontaneity and its highly self-conscious control and examination is at the root of many trends in contemporary art. It helps to explain the ubiquity of deliberate experimentation in contemporary art. This has widened once more the gap between the experts and the mass of the public. The constant drive towards new visions, the exploration of visual possibilities which have never been explored before, has left the great mass of the public without unified standards, without yardsticks with the help of which they can judge the success or failure of any of these experiments. Even among the professionals, among art critics and other experts, among professional painters themselves, the uncertainty is great, though they will probably find it difficult to admit it. This is the price that has to be paid for the enormous upsurge of experimentation and innovation in art. As is usual in such cases, it will need time to sort itself out. There can be little doubt that few other periods in the history of painting can equal ours in creativeness in the production of great

works of art which are likely to delight people in future ages as much as, and perhaps even more than, in ours. The fact that artists can give freer rein to their spontaneous individual vision, untrammelled by the demands of any established 'good society' that can impose the extraneous canons of its status requirements on the painter—and the greater power of individual painters in relation to the buying public—has a great deal to do with it. They are freer than painters were ever before to follow the promptings of their individual imagination provided they are capable of disciplining it, of organising what is at first experimental and more or less chaotic, with a craftsman's patience and perseverance with their intimate understanding of the nature of their materials, whether brushes and canvas or colours and shapes.

But it is inevitable that side by side with those capable of patiently fighting the good fight between the spontaneous power of their own imagination always hovering between chaos and the unexpected great vision on the one hand, and the often painfully slow organisation of their raw material, of the burning lava which has erupted from their mind, on the other hand, there are many others whose vision is a sham, whose spontaneity a pseudo-spontaneity, whose experimentation a sad imitation of the genuine thing. The difficulty is that at the present moment, while we are still in the midst of this great burst of creativeness and innovation, only comparatively small groups of people have the gift and the training which enables them to judge, with a high degree of certainty, in which paintings the spontaneous innovatory power is successful and the craftsman's conscious efforts at marshalling the spontaneous forces into a coherent composition have succeeded in objectifying the highly personal vision so that it can communicate itself to present and future generations, and in which cases vision and composition represent nothing more than an affected or mannered imitation.

Picasso represents in an almost symbolic form the whole trend of which I have spoken—the tension balance between spontaneity and self-consciousness. He evidently has a very great capacity for 'letting-go', for opening the floodgates of an imagination under the pressure of powerful emotions and then of curbing it with a cool and eminently lucid intellectual power of judgement, of sorting out, of testing the imminent pictorial logic of the vision that has come to light and of consciously reorganising and polishing it until every pattern, every spot of colour has the fitness in relation to others and the whole composition has the perfection at which he aims. With him, eyes as well as hands, the power of vision and the craftsman's skill and perseverance, now struggling, now combining with each other, share in the production in equal measure, as in other cases sometimes the effort ends in failure. The experiment leads into a blind alley. It would be very wrong to imagine that everything a great painter produces is a great work of art.

Perhaps that was the case in former days when the individual painter could rely to a much greater extent on common standards of taste and visual sensitivity, at least in certain layers of his society, as a protection against his own doubts and uncertainties. In our time a man like Picasso, a great painter, generally travels to a much greater extent alone into the unexplored territories of his vision. He has to fight out the doubts, the uncertainties, largely with himself. In his struggles with the spontaneous powers of his vision, in his search for the best way to tame it, to organise it, to objectify it so that it can speak to others, he is almost wholly alone. It is not surprising that he does not always succeed. Moreover, Picasso, perhaps more than most other painters of our time, is himself very much preoccupied with the problem of the painter's spontaneity and self-consciousness. One need only to look at his attempt to re-paint one of Velázquez's paintings, his preoccupation with painting, a painter painting a painter, in order to see this. His preoccupation—not as a philosopher but as a painter—is with the problems that arise from the simultaneity of several levels of consciousness in human beings.³⁷

I cannot do justice here to the relevance of the work of Picasso, and perhaps one or two other contemporary painters, for the problems of spontaneity and self-consciousness. But one cannot avoid mentioning him in this context, if only in passing because few other contemporary figures are as representative as he is of this specific characteristic of our age. However, once the problems are articulated, one discovers symptoms of the same trend in many other places. Remember the technique of brainstorming used in some boardrooms in order to stimulate the production of new ideas in groups where people were urged to utter freely, without any particular responsibility and to some extent in competition with each other, any suggestion connected with a particular project that crossed their mind. The spontaneously and more or less irresponsibly produced ideas are then collected, like fish brought ashore in a net from the stormy seas, and critically sifted in a calmer atmosphere. That, too, is an attempt at self-consciously suspending the emotion-controlling, critical powers of judgement and at consciously utilising the innovatory powers of an emotionally charged spontaneous activity, whose results are then again exposed to the examination of the previously suspended powers of critical judgement.

³⁷Here, Elias is referring to Pablo Picassos' series 'Las Meninas' consisting of 58 paintings. These paintings are reinterpretations of Diego Velázquez's painting 'Las Meninas' (1656). Picasso finished them in the year 1957. See Elias's further comments on these paintings in his Introduction to *Involvement and Detachment* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2007 [Collected Works, vol. 8], pp. 49–63); and, on Picasso, 'Stages of African art, social and visual', in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009 [Collected Works, vol. 16]), pp. 209–32.—eds.

Or remember the new technique of acting introduced first, as far as I know, by The Actors Studio in New York. The development was in part connected with the demands on the mode of acting required by films as distinct from those made by the stage which had been sanctioned by a long tradition. On the stage the speaking of words had often been regarded as the central part of a role. Compared with this, the movements of the face, the head, the arms and legs, the behaviour of the visual person as a whole, had remained secondary aspects of the actor's part. As a result these movements, in fact acting as a whole often had the character of something consciously thought out, though not necessarily felt, by the actor. The new training method was essentially based on the idea that the actors should go first of all through the emotional experience of a person in the situation in which they would find themselves on playing their particular part in the play. They should first move their face, their arms, their legs, their whole body spontaneously prompted by the feelings, by the emotional experiences of a person in the situation of the part they would play on the stage. Having experienced what it feels like to be such a person, they could then take up deliberately the gestures, the movements, the expressions they had spontaneously produced and standardise them consciously and deliberately for their performances on the stage. In this case too, as you can see, human beings were urged to build up their part in a play by means of a genuine emotional identification with it, but not primarily as a feat of reflection. Once more, reliance was placed as the first step on the power of the spontaneous emotional experience to produce visual patterns, gestures of the body, expressions of the face, or whatever one may call it, which were more genuine, more complete and convincing than anyone might discover merely by an act of projection, as it were, from outside about the way a person in the situation of the part one had to play might behave.

As a last example, let me return once more to the development of jazz and to the problem of the relationship between emotional spontaneity and routinisation. I have mentioned that the rise of jazz music as a kind of folk music of highly urbanised industrial societies represented a breakthrough—a breaking through the dominant and established tradition of music-making in European and North American societies. The re-establishment of musical improvisation of groups of players in public was, as I have already mentioned, yet another re-opening of the gates of emotional spontaneity in a field where they had been institutionally closed for several centuries. Characteristic of the structure of industrial societies is the recurrent struggle between tendencies towards opening of the gates of innovating spontaneity on the one hand, and towards closing them again relatively quickly through the routinisation and the commercialisation of the products of innovation on the other hand. Thus the jazz music of the improvisers in New

Orleans and Chicago, some of whom Art Shaw describes very vividly in his reminiscences of the 1920s, transformed itself, as he also mentions, into the swing music of the 1930s and 1940s which increasingly represented a transformation of the more spontaneous jazz of outsider bands into commercial dance music played and recorded by large professional dance bands. It left relatively little scope for improvisation. The original innovations of the twenties transformed themselves into fairly monotonous harmonic clichés. Then again a reaction set in against the routinisation. It spread from one or two very small places—where pioneering musicians tried out their innovations, against fairly strong opposition, as new-style jazz—to England, France, Sweden and other parts of Europe until again a measure of routinisation set in, which however did not drown the innovatory power of small bands. The example may be enough. As a small-scale paradigm, the cycles, the dialectic movement between strong trends towards the purposeful commercial routinisation of spontaneous inventions and a new breaking-through the routines by means of fresh innovations that one can observe in the development of jazz music including that initiated by the Beatles, may help to sharpen one's awareness for a host of similar cycles in other fields.³⁸

Reconciling Spontaneity and Self-consciousness: Education for Controlled Decontrolling

Together with the other examples I have given, the example of jazz also throws light on some aspects of the task which one has in mind if one speaks of 'leisure tomorrow'. Barring major war, the problem of what people can do with their growing leisure time will increasingly demand our attention. To find realistic ways and means for dealing with this problem will prove difficult for several reasons. It is just reorientation of present-day attitudes towards leisure. The present outlook is burdened by a tradition which treated leisure activities as an indulgence, as a disguised form of idleness, as activities of distinctly low value compared with the other activity which ranked by tradition very high in the value scheme of European societies—compared, that is, with work. It will need a great effort before people in industrial societies with this tradition behind them will be

³⁸Later, Elias and Dunning once more refer to The Beatles. They cited a poem of David Kerr 'The Beatles at the Shea Stadium' (1966) as an example of a 'mimetic event'; see Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, 'The quest for excitement in leisure', in *Quest for Excitement. Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008 [Collected Works, vol. 7]), pp. 64–65.—eds.

able to accept the fact that leisure enjoyment has an indispensable part to play in the lives of people, as indispensable as occupational work or family management. Without this re-orientation of the traditional value scheme, no effort to make use of the prolonged leisure time that will soon be available to more and more people will be of any avail. It may well be that, half-unconsciously, people in authority are afraid of reassessing the function and value of leisure because they have it in mind that any raising of the status and value of leisure activities will weaken the will of people to work. I think one will have to make this problem more explicit and face up to it. You know the saying, 'give a dog a bad name...'. Even today great numbers of people find little emotional stimulation either in the routines of their work or in the routines of their unexciting family life. Some vague hopes seem to be attached to the stimulus they may receive from shorter working hours and longer time for leisure. But one often has the impression—which urgently requires closer investigation—that now many people already do not quite know what to do with their leisure time, or that the level of satisfaction they derive from whatever they do in their leisure time is not very high. It may well be that an upgrading of leisure activities in the social scale of value of industrial societies—contrary to the present assumptions which I have mentioned—may benefit the capacity for work.

The problem is doubly difficult because barriers to leisure enjoyment are not only raised by the dominant social scale of value as such, but also by its individualisation as part of the make-up of the individual. In fact, certain aspects of the personality structure of the basic personality type, developed through numerous channels of socialisation in the great mass of the population of industrial societies—if one excludes some symptoms of change in the present younger generation which may or may not last when they grow older—strongly militate against their chances of an enlargement of their capacity for strong emotional refreshment to be derived from leisure activities. I have spoken of a development that enables people consciously and deliberately to loosen the hold that built-in self-controls—their reasoning, their self-image as a rational human being, their ego-ideal, their conscience—has over their emotions. And thus, by freeing to some extent the springs of their imagination, by giving rein to their emotional spontaneity, [it enables them] to open up for themselves possibilities of innovation and creativeness as sources of leisure enjoyment either for themselves or for others, provided they can in a second move regain their control and subject the products of their spontaneity to their conscious intellectual discipline with its organising capacity and so forth in a continuous dialectic movement. I am using the example of certain trends in the production of art as an illustration of a problem of wider social significance. The illustration shows possibilities of going beyond

the traditional psychological configuration usually represented by the concept of rationality, which in turn is associated with a specific direction in the development of societies usually conceptualised in terms such as rationalisation or bureaucratisation. The concept of 'rationality' refers to a personality structure in which feelings are strictly and permanently subordinated to [the] well-adjusted and realistic power of reasoning. It is closely connected with a code of norms also subjecting all impulses not in keeping with the demands of rationality to a strict control deemed to be equally rational, with the specific code of norms to which we usually refer as 'morality'. In both cases emotion-controlling agencies such as reason or conscience are treated as absolute rulers. Feelings, emotions, drives—all the impulses of human beings traditionally classified as 'irrational'—are treated as absolute servants and subordinates. The simple metaphors are quite sufficient in this context to indicate my problem. The examples that I have given above of trends in the development of our time are characterised by a conscious loosening of the strict rule of these built-in controlling agencies, of a controlled and temporary decontrolling of non-rational propensities of human beings. Although at present these tendencies are confined to very limited areas, they point to possibilities of a civilised manner of living without the absolute supremacy of 'rationality' and 'morality'—supposed or real—over other levels of people's makeup or habitus. This manner of living would be characterised instead by a type of equilibrium with a less uneven distribution of power between, let us say, the cortical and the visceral level of human beings and all the other levels within the continuum between the two. I do not think that one can enlarge the range of leisure enjoyment for people without a more deliberate education in that sense.

At present, as I have said before and as I am sure you know, the lines of communication between leisure-producers—particularly in the field of art who represent this less uneven type of equilibrium—and the mass of the public of industrial societies are few and far between, if they exist at all. Art is a very good example in this case because the helplessness, the uncertainty, the feeling of uneasiness and often of hostility which the majority of population experience if they are confronted by this trend in art is in many ways symptomatic of the great gap which exists in our societies between the width and the strength of the power of imagination of the pioneering artists and the extremely confined and narrow power of imagination of the mass of the population. Little effort is made in industrial societies, so far, to enlarge the power of people's imagination, although one can discover intentions and small beginnings in a number of schools. The main emphasis in education, as far as one can see, is as strongly as ever directed towards the absolute rule of rationality and morality, with games as a means not so much of developing the capacity for leisure enjoyment—that is at most a by-product—but

[rather of] draining off 'unhealthy emotional strivings', as leeches were used in former days to drain off 'unhealthy blood', or of correcting a purely physical imbalance due to the 'lack of exercise' in a sedentary education for a sedentary society. The open problem of the balance between the various levels of the personality—crudely expressed as the 'feeling—reasoning' or the 'visceral—cerebral' balance—has not been sufficiently studied and conceptualised to catch the eye of those in charge of the planning of education.

As a result, an educational tradition attuned to a demand for implicit containment of drives and affects, without any explicit examination of the pattern of containment and the method by which it is achieved, still rules undisputed in the homes as well as the pedagogic institutions of industrial societies. The attempt, not without success, by sections of the younger generation of our days to break through some aspects of the existing pattern of containment—namely a swing of the pendulum in the direction of unreflected spontaneity—is [just] as unreflected as is the pattern of containment: the unreflected ideal of the absolute rule of self-control and rationality itself. The revolt has all the characteristics of a power struggle pure and simple. Neither side has more than ad hoc ideas as to what it is all about.

One might think that the reaction of the general public to certain trends in modern art is in that respect symptomatic. The wholesale condemnation of these trends by regimes with a strong emphasis on discipline and subordination of the individual to the 'reason of state'³⁹ is merely an extreme manifestation of a deep emotional uneasiness and often of a genuine revulsion of feeling on the part of people who have the power to act in accordance with their feelings. But the feeling itself is undoubtedly shared by a great number of people who would not dream of advocating the destruction or the prohibition of these works of art, who would be content with simply registering their dislike. The reaction to Picasso's work is a good example. As I have said before, it is one of the paradigmatic expressions of the striving in our time for a different balance between spontaneity and self-consciousness—or, in more familiar terms, between 'feeling and reasoning'. It is not a reaction which one can simply conceptualise as aesthetic; it is very often a reaction which contains elements of emotional distaste. In the face of many of Picasso's pictures it is difficult for the spectator to remain emotionally neutral. And the feelings they arouse are for many people unpleasant rather than pleasant. The fear, the uneasiness which they arouse, are apt to block comprehension; they create barriers for the perception of the vision contained in his compositions. The same is

³⁹Here Elias uses the German word *Staatsräson*.—eds.

true with regard to many other products of modern art. The same trend, of course, can be observed elsewhere—in literature, for instance, or in music. But the clash between the feeling–reasoning balance (to use a convenient shorthand) of the producers and that of the great mass of potential consumers is perhaps most immediate in the case of the visual arts. The latter are able, if one can use this expression, consciously to relax the vigilance of their consciousness, apparently without unbearable guilt feelings. The latter still live under a psychological regime where severe breaches of traditional taboos—of the absolute rule of rationality and morality in their traditional form—are threatened by punishment in the form of anxiety or fear, of feelings of guilt, of shame or, if turned outwardly, of revulsion and disgust.

That is not to say that the supremacy of rationality and morality is ever more than an ideal and an unattainable ideal at that. However, as such, as an ideal, it determines the demand which people make on themselves. Leisure enjoyment, particularly if one is conscious of it as leisure and as enjoyment, if it is not saved from reproaches through the classification as art or culture, often assumes in their own estimation the character of something inferior in value if not illicit. A good example is the role of sociable drinking as a leisure activity. Its function is essentially the same as that which I have mentioned before with reference to other activities. It weakens the power of people's controlling agencies—their reasoning, conscience, or whatever one may call them—in relation to that which is normally constrained, inhibited or repressed, their drives, affects, emotions, and other related impulses. It enables people to open themselves to an enjoyable emotional arousal through the company of others by means of a change in the balance between spontaneity and self-consciousness. The ubiquity of sociable drinking as a normal institution in many human societies indicates the strength of the need for redressing the balance between spontaneous emotional impulses and built-in cortical controls which in ordinary life veers towards the strong and persistent rule of the latter, again and again in favour of the former. Our understanding of this interplay and its fluctuations is at present extremely limited. The sociological and psychological exploration of these problems is in no way commensurate with their importance in the life of human beings. In this case one can simply observe that a great number of people enjoy the redressing of the balance between impulses and controls, between spontaneity and self-consciousness, between the 'flow of emotions' and the 'rule of reason', or whatever one may call it, in favour of the emotions—with the help of a few drinks. They cannot achieve this loosening of the built-in controls in full consciousness and at will. Hence they achieve it quickly with the help of a drug. Often enough, moreover, they punish themselves afterwards for the short-term rebellion against the supreme rule of their

rationality and their moral sense with an attack of bad conscience, severe or mild as the case may be, which is probably one of the elements of every hangover.

I thought perhaps the example of sociable drinking may make the problems I have raised appear a little less far-fetched.⁴⁰ We have to accommodate ourselves to the fact that the words, the concepts at our disposal, are not yet quite developed enough for a relatively simple exposition of problems such as these. You may have noticed that I often had difficulties in finding the appropriate words for what I have to say. I am quite conscious of the fact that terms I have frequently used, such as 'rationality', 'morality', 'reason', 'spontaneity', 'emotions' and many others, are crude approximations; they are imprecise and open to misunderstandings. But from both the theoretical and the empirical angle, the scientific exploration of the complex and multi-polar tension-balance between the various levels of a human personality to which ordinary words such as 'emotion' and 'reason', 'spontaneity' and 'self-consciousness' refer is still in the dull doldrums, suffering from the understandable reluctance of many scientists to explore vital problems of people lying in what may appear to them as a danger zone. For the time being we have to make do with what we have. Short of inventing a new vocabulary, one has to use the available concepts; one has to be content with speaking of redressing the balance between 'emotion' and 'intellect', 'drive' and 'conscience', 'spontaneity' and 'self-control' and in many other ways which suggest that a person consists as it were of many little persons fighting each other. A clearly constructed overall model of the human being as an organisation of many levels of excitation and inhibition varying in degree and in kind is still lacking.

Still I hope, with all these imperfections, the general drift of my thoughts has become reasonably clear. There is much to be done. Already today, as you can see, our leisure activities, from sociable drinking to sightseeing in a museum of modern art, from playing, or listening and dancing to jazz music, to seeing a play or a film, in fact all our variegated leisure occupations provide for a change of gear in personality balance which prevails elsewhere. The idea that what we do in our leisure time has no real function in our lives and deserves our censure as a kind of indulgence, a simple concession to humans' natural bent towards idleness and sin, is far from the mark. But at present it needs a very great, a very conscious effort to discover a common function behind the multitude of things people do in their leisure time. All our leisure activities have obviously developed

⁴⁰Later, Elias and Dunning will refer to the example of drinking alcohol once more; see Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, 'Leisure in the spare time spectrum', in *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008 [Collected Works, vol. 7]), p. 104.—eds.

because people felt some need for them—but not because people knew what these needs are. They have developed unplanned and undirected in a fumbling way and haphazardly. An unplanned civilising process has left us with an heritage of built-in self-controls, partly conscious, partly automatic, which are deceptively even and strong, which are, compared with those of earlier ages, more deeply and inescapably internalised; it has left us with an unplanned civilised armour containing within its walls the more elementary forces—many powerful impulses of people which, left to themselves, are springs of danger as well as of enjoyment and satisfaction. All our leisure activities procure for us in some sense a temporary relaxation of the often harsh and stifling rule of our civilising armour. It is, whatever one may say, a highly controlled decontrolling, a highly civilised decivilising of human beings' more spontaneous propensities that leisure activities in societies with a high level of differentiation and integration such as ours produce. There are many problems, many tasks before us which one can see more clearly from such a diagnosis.

In this talk, I have chosen one of them as a focus for closer consideration—the relationship between self-consciousness and spontaneity. At present the two propensities are apt to act as antagonists. Spontaneity lapses if self-consciousness is heightened, and if we are to give freer rein to our spontaneous impulses, self-consciousness, it seems, must be inhibited. If I think about the development of leisure in future times, and about the task before us, this—it seems to me—is one of the central problems that deserves our attention. It is a central problem of any education for leisure or even more generally of the socialisation of children. Is it not possible to heighten people's emotional spontaneity and their self-awareness, the clear light of their consciousness, at the same time? Is it necessary, as is done in many of our present leisure occupations, to put out this light in order to give freer rein to the spontaneity of our feelings, or as it is widely done in our routine activities and particularly in the routines of our occupational work, to damp and to dull the spontaneity of our feelings, if we are to do whatever has to be done in the clear light of our reasoning, in full consciousness and control of ourselves? I warned you at the beginning that I would take some liberties in this talk with your and with my imagination. Here we have reached the final point of our journey. Have I reached the height of the mountain of Utopia? Have I led you on to a problem which, though as yet rarely discussed, may prove fruitful in some future time? I am inclined to think the latter. I think we should more consciously explore the latent potentialities of human beings to heighten the power and the pleasures of their self-consciousness, of their clear and articulate reasoning, and the full awareness of themselves and the powers of their emotional spontaneity with all the potentialities for imaginative innovations dependent on them at the same time.

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