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RESEARCH

Barbara Górnicka

Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment

A Long-Term Sociological Perspective

Springer VS

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Preface

People often ask me where my interest in studying nudity 'up-close' came from, suspecting me of having hidden quirks and inklings towards exhibitionism. The truth is that when I was searching for an appropriate topic for my doctoral study, I was enthusiastic about sociology and yet at the same time feeling rather disillusioned about the world in general. I could see how hard it was to influence any sort of positive change. Instead, I decided to find a topic that would keep me curious and interested for the next four to five years of my life – not something policy-orientated that would make me feel helpless and depressed. So off I went to join a local naturist club for a year, and more or less 'guinea-pigged' myself through my fieldwork. Am I a newly converted naturist? No. At the same time, I came to understand how pleasurable swimming could be when the water on my own bare skin wrapped the body in its silky cocoon. Or the feeling of a warm wind dancing all over my naked body on a sunny day, without a sweaty piece of Lycra or some similarly awful contraption supposedly designed to protect my modesty. As a woman, paradoxically, I would feel less sexually objectified when lying naked on a naturist beach than when wearing a bikini on a 'textile' beach. It is something I shall try to explain in my book; but, to fully grasp what I am talking about, everyone should try it for themselves at least once in their life. Is this an ethnographic study? I don't think so. I like to see it as an honest sociological account, using carefully balanced levels of involvement with the topic in order to engage with it and understand it better. It was not an easy study to do; it took a lot of facing up to my own strong emotions and fears, followed by quite a bit of distancing from the data gathered. The more strongly I felt about it, the more I was convinced of how important it was to keep at it and how little we still know about our hang-ups concerning naked bodies. I can only hope that readers will be able to appreciate the levels of honesty here, both on the part of the respondents and of the investigator, and will not cringe at the sometimes embarrassingly detailed descriptions.

I have to thank many people for their help in writing this book. First and foremost I would like to thank Professor Stephen Mennell, my mentor, friend and PhD supervisor at University College Dublin. I often wonder how my life would have turned out if I had not taken his class as an undergraduate in the last year before his retirement. I thank him for his support and patience, for always believing in me (especially when I did not), and for being a great source of inspiration to me. I am especially grateful for his relentless support and guidance

during this particularly difficult last year while I have been revising this book for publication. He has made me the sociologist I am today and I hope this book will make him proud. I would also like to thank Barbara Mennell for her hospitality and her help in copy-editing this book.

Many thanks, too, to Professor Tom Inglis for all his support, guidance, and making time to read my chapters despite his retirement, and always being a source of good discussion. I feel truly fortunate to have had both him and Stephen Mennell as my supervisors.

I should like to thank the Norbert Elias Foundation for its support, the many opportunities they offered me to learn a lot and to become part of a great network of researchers.

The people of Club Nautica and all the other naturists in Ireland must remain nameless here, but I would like to thank them for their trust, help, and openness towards me and for making this study possible.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my family, especially to my dear parents for all their love and support. I know it was not easy to put up with me while I was writing this. To my sister Marta and her husband Michał, for always being loving and understanding, and their supply of great wine. To my brother Marcin and his wife Anna, for all their support and for looking after my finances back home. And finally thanks to my nieces Maja, Iga and Nina, three little monsters who always bring a smile to my face.

Cas Wouters has been a true friend to me over these past few years, made me laugh, listened to me moaning, provided cups of best peppermint tea … and other herbs. And Jason Hughes has tirelessly given encouragement and support to me and my work.

I would like to thank several other people – Helmut Kuzmics (for his help in publishing this book), John Goodwin, Katie Liston, Paddy Dolan, John Connolly, Andrew Linklater, Steve Quilley, Jonathan Fletcher, Seán L'Estrange, Robert van Krieken and, sadly, the late Amanda Rohloff – their brilliance and passion for sociology rubbed off on me. It was always inspiring to be in their company. And to Hugh, Gerry and Maurice O'Neill for giving me a roof over my head when times were hard, and always understanding and supporting my academic endeavours.

Last but not least, big thanks to all my friends and colleagues, for their support and love, for giving me strength and a shoulder to cry on, especially Sophia Pallaro, Jean Murray and Ger Donnelly, Russell Ó Ríagáin, Irem Özgören Kinli, Kat Hatzis, Maria Keys, Magda Ściańska, Ciaran Ward, Eddie Arthurs, Conor Nolan, and Philip Errity.

Contents

Preface 7
List of Illustrations 11

1 Setting the nude scene 13
1.1 Main research problems and questions 15
1.2 Earlier academic studies of nudism and nakedness 15
1.3 Theoretical and conceptual background: dealing with the problem of shame and naked bodies 21
1.4 Outline of the book 26

2 Among the naturists 29
2.1 Gaining access to Club Nautica 30
2.2 The first swim 34
2.3 St Valentine's Day Party (18 February 2012) 38
2.4 Conclusion 42

3 From lewd to nude: becoming a naturist 45
3.1 The initiation-stage naturist: learning how to be a 'real naturist' 48
3.2 The first naturist experiences 49
3.3 Naturist codes of behaviour 52
3.4 Body management and self-restraint 56
3.5 The established stage: becoming a 'real naturist' 63
3.6 The naked body versus the sexual body 70
3.7 The conflict of identity 77
3.8 The transparency issue 81
3.9 Gendered aspects of naturism 82
3.10 Conclusion 83

4 The sociogenesis of nudism 85
4.1 'Nature' in naturism 85
4.2 The naturist club: a precursor 87
4.3 Naked sun salutations and the 'purification' of German society 88
4.4 Nationalism, respectability and the rise of nudism 91
4.5 The wisdom of the naked 95

4.6 The back garden revolution? The story of Irish naturism 98
4.7 Informalisation in the Irish civilising process 107

5 Natural bodies? Nakedness, eroticisation and shame 111

5.1 'Human' versus 'nature' 112
5.2 'Innate' emotions and 'master' emotions? 115
5.3 A short history of nudity in the West 119
5.4 Nakedness and bathhouses in ancient Greece and Rome 120
5.5 Nudity in Judaism 122
5.6 Nudity in Islam 125
5.7 Early Christianity and the naked body 126
5.8 'The art of choosing the right passions' 128
5.9 The titillating naked body 132
5.10 The pudenda agenda: between scopophilia and 'bushwhacking' 133
5.11 Conclusion 141

6 Nakedness as a theoretical problem 143

6.1 Norbert Elias and civilising processes 143
6.2 From psychogenesis to sociogenesis 146
6.3 Elias and the problem of nakedness 148
6.4 Theatrics, sweaty palms and the naked figuration: embarrassment in Goffman and Elias 151
6.5 Nakedness and its context 161
6.6 The quest for nakedness 162
6.7 Conclusion 164

7 Nakedness and the theory of taboo 165

7.1 Contexts of permitted nudity 166
7.2 The theory of taboo 168
7.3 A digression on sociology and anthropology 174
7.4 Back to Irish naturism 176

8 Conclusion 179

8.1 Up-close and 'involved' 180
8.2 Nature, nakedness and shame 181
8.3 Conceptualising the problem of nakedness 182
8.4 Ambivalence, involvement and detachment 183
8.5 Final remarks 184

Bibliography 187

Index 201

List of illustrations

Figure 1:	Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du monde*, 1866 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)	133
Figures 2 and 3:	Two typical sheela-na-gigs	136
Figure 4:	Agnolo di Cosimo, called Bronzino (1503–72), *An Allegory of Time and Love*, by permission of the National Gallery, London	140
Figure 5:	The Breslau bath-house	150
Figures 6 and 7:	Leopard-skin chief and young Nuer woman in the 1920s, from E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford University Press, 1940), facing pp. 16, 222,	175

1 Setting the nude scene

Since the dawn of humanity, the naked body has always been a part of our lives in one way or another. After all, we are born naked. The only aspect of it that is subject to change is the meaning given to it. Nakedness is in one sense very 'natural', as implied by the title of such organisations as the Irish Naturist Association (INA). But the meanings that prevail in our perceptions today fit more within Margaret Atwood's famous remarks:

> The female body has many uses. It has been used as a door-knocker, a bottle-opener, as a clock with a ticking belly, as something to hold up lampshades, as a nutcracker … It sells cars, beer, shaving lotion, cigarettes, hard liquor; it sells diet plans and diamonds, and desire in tiny crystal bottles (1991: 2–3).

If we were to go through the history of the naked body, we would see that, depending on various elements and social factors affecting the development of human societies, attitudes towards nudity went through some dramatic extremes too. Once the naked body was a symbol of purity and innocence, power and virility, then it underwent phases of being considered shameful or even dangerous. As Warren argued, 'in general … the display of the human form was sanctioned in art, but forbidden in nature' (1933: 163). But everyone knows that in all or nearly all known societies the sight of the naked human body has been hedged around with avoidances, restrictions and taboos, enforced by the emotions of fear, shame and embarrassment. Norbert Elias and later sociologists working under the influence of his theory of civilising processes have focused on how and why feelings of shame and embarrassment change in the context of broader changes of social structure. As long ago as 1939, in his classic book *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a [1939]), Elias traced how, from being a relatively unproblematic everyday sight among medieval European people, nakedness gradually became socially highly problematic by the Victorian era. Yet he also noted that even before the Second World War there were signs of relaxation and reversal: 'seen at close quarters, the movement seems to be proceeding in the direction opposite to that [of the "civilising process"]; it seems to lead to a relaxation of the constraints imposed on individuals by social life' (2012a [1939]: 182). On closer inspection, he found that this was probably not the case: it was more likely just a very slight recession or fluctuation within the overall process. But then, reflecting on inter-war changes in bathing manners, he expressed a more interesting tentative explanation:

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> It would have meant social ostracism in the nineteenth century for a woman to wear in public one of the bathing costumes commonplace today. But this change, and with it the whole spread of sports for men and women, presupposes a very high standard of drive control. Only in a society in which a high degree of restraint is taken for granted, and in which women are, like men, absolutely sure that each individual is curbed by self-control and a strict code of etiquette, can bathing and sporting customs having this relative degree of freedom develop. It is a relaxation that remains within the framework of a particular 'civilised' standard of behaviour involving a very high degree of automatic constraint and affect transformation, conditioned to become a habit. (2012a [1939]: 182)

This observation was taken up in later research by Elias himself (2013c: 26–48), and debated especially by Dutch sociologists, out of which there developed a comprehensive theory of informalisation processes (Wouters, 2007).[1] Changing attitudes to – and especially *emotions about* – how much of people's bodies may be revealed to others, and in what circumstances, form an important aspect of both formalising civilising processes and informalisation processes. They have been little studied in this long-term theoretical–empirical perspective.

This book is not concerned with any form of moral judgement on those who choose to use their naked bodies as a form of self-expression or identity, or whether they should be allowed to decide how to enjoy their nakedness. What it is concerned with is understanding why and how it has come about that we see nakedness shrouded in shameful feelings. In order to find some answers we first need to comprehend the ways in which shame and embarrassment operate, and how they can be managed and controlled; this is where careful examination of the naturist group proves to be extremely valuable. Then, to avoid this investigation becoming superficial and narrow in scope, I also attempt to track down the most outstanding clues in the history of the west that will help us form a fuller, processual view of the relationship between nakedness and shame.

Initially, this research's main focus was intended to be a sociological investigation of Irish naturism, set against the landscape of the rest of European naturist and nudist communities. I was particularly interested in understanding how it is possible for groups of people to socialise while naked without showing any obvious signs of sexual arousal or shame and embarrassment. I wanted to see how nakedness was handled in the public situations, what rules applied, and to make observations about naturist body language. All this was aimed at contributing towards our understanding of what often seems to become a theoretical lacuna: the place and role of sexuality in relation to nakedness, an issue often wilfully dismissed by naturists. Over time, however, during the development of

1 For an account of the phases of this debate, extending over four decades, see Wouters and Mennell (2015).

this study, it became essential for better understanding of the problems of shame and its relationship with nakedness to place them in a broader context of long-term changes. In order to do that, I needed to expand the historical part of the investigation into European historical accounts of nude works of art, standards of bathing, exercising and other aspects of personal bodily hygiene and propriety, reaching as far back as antiquity.

The reader might wonder how studying naturism in Ireland can extend our knowledge of the problem of nudity. Since naturism can be considered the purest form of displaying nudity – purest in the sense that it is not considered sexual – it helps us to understand better the taboos surrounding it, and also the mechanisms behind the feelings of shame and embarrassment in general.

1.1 Main research problems and questions

The goals of my research are both theoretical and empirical and, in order to achieve an appropriate level of understanding of the problem of nakedness, my main research questions are:

- In the history of the West, where does naturism fit with Elias's theory of civilising processes? How did western societies come to create a taboo around the naked human body? How did the feelings of shame and embarrassment develop in relation to the naked body?
- How does naturism deal with the problem of separating the sexual body and the naked body? What are the rules and standards of behaviour that govern naturist organisations? How do naturists cope with the shameful and embarrassing feelings linked to the public nakedness of their bodies?
- How did attitudes towards the nakedness of the body change in the course of European social history? Was the rise of nudism an example of the processes of informalisation?
- How did our conceptualisation of the notion of 'nature' develop over time? To what extent did it affect our behaviour and attitudes to our bodies? What can we learn from naturism about our relationship with nature?

1.2 Earlier academic studies of nudism and nakedness

Nudity today belongs among the most popular topics in mainstream culture, so it is not surprising that it has been reflected in the plethora of sociological literature addressing a great many aspects of it. What is surprising, however, is that the number of sources providing a more thorough account and analysis of historical

changes in nudity is relatively small. These sources very often also seem to take embarrassment and shame related to the naked body for granted, implying the false assumption that these feelings are innate in us. A brief review follows of some of the more outstanding and significant literature on the subject, which to a greater or lesser extent sparked the discussion that will be presented in this book.

As I emphasise later on, my interest with studying nakedness was stirred by the work of Norbert Elias; however, two studies in particular inspired my approach towards naturism and helped me in developing appropriate methodological perspectives to research it. One of them, by Smith and King (2009), although not even a sociological study, helped me to understand how important the ways of separating the practice of naturism and the sexuality of practitioners' bodies were to grasping the mechanisms and complexity of the relationship between shame and nakedness. It also gave me some hints on how specifically to approach naturists on these sensitive matters, and how to prepare myself mentally as a researcher, not only for asking intimate questions about details of their sexual lives, but also how to handle my own emotions and situation in the event of being sexually propositioned by any participant in my study.

In many respects the study by Story (1993) provided similar clues. Here the author gave me reassurance about my decision to join the local naturist club in Dublin in order to gain access to the prospective participants for my research. Methodologically speaking, Story advocates the importance of being engaged with one's study not only on a professional level, but on the personal level too. I shall provide a lengthier argument for it in the next chapter, but I would like to stress the importance of not being an 'outsider' when approaching a group like naturists. Story argues that adding the personal element to one's study may yield a profit in better understanding of important issues, but without affecting the credibility of the research findings in any way.

The next source of information for this study came in the form of a book by Jack D. Douglas et al. (1977), part of the sociological canon, especially for those interested in nakedness and also in various aspects of deviance and exhibitionism. The book itself really focuses not on the nudist movement in North America, but rather on the social phenomenon of the 'nude beach', which was determined more by the timing of the rise of hippie movement than the continental form of the original German or British nudist organisations, to which no references are made anywhere in the book. The authors focus their attention throughout the book on various experiences described by people they encountered on the beach, but they rarely comment on their own feelings during their naked participation, which makes their account seem rather incomplete, even bringing in a touch of hypocrisy. It is understandable that the book's publication was important for American sociology at the time, yet this kind of study on 'deviance'

has lost its value, because since then most of the so-called 'deviant' groups have become more or less assimilated into the broader society.

While we are on the topic of deviance, Howard Becker's *Outsiders* (1963) has proved to be helpful in other ways. Drawing on this and Hughes (2003), I was able to identify certain similarities between the patterns they respectively describe in learning to use marijuana or tobacco and what occurs in the process of becoming a naturist. In his classic study, Becker shows that people do not become marijuana users from the minute they light the first joint, but that it involves more than one stage to reach the point when they can fully enjoy the experience. He argues that beginners often lack a proper smoking technique to get high, and need someone with more experience to show them how to achieve the desired effect. The following stage involves learning how to enjoy the drug's influence on the body, which involves elements of self- and group acknowledgement of this taking place. The final stage is when the experienced smoker is able to take pleasure both from the effects of marijuana and the social experience that comes with it. Just as Hughes applied this model in his study on smoking tobacco, I contend later that the same logic applies to the 'career' of being a naturist.

There are also authors who deal with other issues, more obvious yet neglected in more general nudist literature, concerning gender and the practice of social nudity. Ruth Barcan (2004) sought, among more general aspects of nudity in mainstream modern culture, to look at nudism through the lens of relations between the sexes, which she reminds us lie at the core of nudist philosophy. There would be no true practice of nudism if men and women did not participate in it together. In the early days of nudism in Europe, this attracted the attention of social psychologists and sexologists, and resulted in the rise of some interesting theories, which I shall discuss in the second part of this chapter. This mixing of the representatives of both sexes during nude recreation unsurprisingly stimulated voices advocating sexual 'modesty' and 'propriety'. This is where old books and reports on public and recreational nudity prove to be far more informative and interesting than many newer ones. Through these direct reports, we can see how the process of understanding and conceptualising the problems of naked bodies and their then-new contexts took place.

In 1921, in a public lecture presented before the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, the Finnish sociologist Edward Westermarck addressed the same problem:

> I consider sexual shame to centre round the sexual *function*. It may be defined as the shame caused by the idea of that function or anything which is apt to lead to such an idea; whilst sexual modesty is the fear of, or the tendency to avoid, anything which would arouse sexual shame. It leads to concealment of the sexual function itself, or

> of any part of the body the exposure of which may too openly call forth a thought of it, or to the avoidance of any gesture or word that may have a similar effect. It should be noticed that sexual shame is felt at the exposure of certain parts of the body only when such exposure directs the thought to the sexual function … There are peoples among whom men or women, or both men and women, go absolutely naked or cover themselves in a manner which could have nothing to do with the feeling of shame. But this by no means proves the absence of sexual modesty (1921: 2–3).

Discussions of this sort, by many psychologists and anthropologists at the time, were prompted not only in relation to so-called 'primitive' societies discovered during the processes of colonisation of distant lands around the world, but also by the fact that nude recreation was becoming a major trend in Western Europe. While nudism and later naturism continued to spread throughout the western world at the beginning of the twentieth century, sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists were trying to unravel and at times embrace this bizarre social occurrence.

One of the first sociological studies on nudism was conducted by Maurice Parmelee (1929), who was Professor of Sociology at City College of New York. In his foreword to the book, Havelock Ellis – himself still somewhat cautious at the time – describes Parmelee's work as:

> marked by a sensitive appreciation of the directions of our social advance today combined with a recognition of those claims of tradition which must always temper any extravagant demands of social reform (1929: 1).

We shall return to Ellis's work, but I would first like to linger a little longer on the work of Parmelee. The way his book *Nudism in Modern Life* (1929) reads from the start, it becomes quite clear that it was written by a nudist as much as a sociologist. While the author describes the main postulates of nudist practice, he also addresses the key elements that might potentially spark controversy among the opposing 'camps of non-nudists' at the time. His accounts are full of details, such as the problem of the aesthetics of naked bodies: nudists' bodies, as they are themselves often aware, do not always measure up to prevailing standards or ideals of beauty. The book is pervaded by what was called the 'gymnosophic' philosophy,[2] yet there are moments when it is obvious that the book was written

2 The first edition of Parmelee's book was published in 1927 under the title *The New Gymnosophy*, but later editions appeared under the title *Nudism in Modern Life*. 'Gymnosophy' was a movement and a philosophy practiced in Europe and the USA from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, involving nudity, asceticism and meditation. Central to it was the thought that the nude human body is a natural condition and should be widely accept-

simply as a nudist manifesto rather than as a sociological study. This is evident in statements throughout the book, typified by '*when* the practice of nudity becomes widespread and universal'. [3]

Another valuable book on early nudism was written by an American couple – Frances and Mason Merrill (1931) – who describe nudism from the perspective of beginners to the practice, and how it gradually wins them over completely. Their accounts were all the more honest because they went to Germany to visit their friend, not knowing of his 'passion' for the naked form. Stunned at first by the frankness of Herr Koenig's photographic collection of nudist art and his lack of inhibition about sharing it with them, they felt as if they were experiencing something surreal:

> And yet, these cover pages, now that we came to notice them, did have a singular beauty. They seemed to lack the insinuating naughtiness of implication and coquetry that characterize our own pornographic art. In fact, these pictures left nothing whatever to suggestion. They were brutally frank in their display of everything aesthetic and otherwise pertaining to the human animal (1931: 6–7).

When, after a more or less agonising decision-making process, the Merrills finally decided to visit the Freilichtpark outside Hamburg, the beauty of the descriptions of their own mixture of emotions is what makes this book extremely valuable to a sociologist. Unlike Parmelee, they manage to connect to the reader through their naiveté and sheer curiosity towards something new:

> As for us, the moment was excruciating. We knew neither what to say nor where to look. At the same time we felt angry and disgusted with our own self-consciousness. Why should fright and embarrassment so overcome us, make us so abject in the presence of these women without clothes? ... We steeled ourselves to look at them, to watch them – tight mouthed, perhaps, but without flinching (1931: 26).

The Merrills represent any average person who becomes interested in naturism and goes about trying it out for the first time. Mostly people tend to try it as couples, rather than on their own, and what is especially characteristic of naturism today is that they tend to try it for the first time during their holidays, away in a foreign country where nobody knows them.

Other literary accounts on nudism from that era involve more of a 'bargaining' with this new form of unveiling of the body in a way unknown to western societies before. The Reverend C. E. Norwood (1933), a British clergyman, despite his clerical position discusses various aspects related to nudism and naked-

able for the betterment of society. This philosophy came to be associated not just with nudism and naturism, but also to with the hippie movement.

3 My italics.

ness in an open manner and admits that Christianity should take its share of the blame when it comes to the level of inhibitions that surround human sexuality and the body. He does not oppose the practice of nudism, but at the same time he warns the reader of 'overexposure', which according to him might backfire in the form of lack of interest in sex altogether. There are also other literary sources such as John Langdon Davies (1929) with his discussion on the future of nakedness, or Jan Gay (1933) who offers her story of experiences with nudism in continental Europe and in America where she grew up, and where, as she puts it, she had a special inclination for enjoying nakedness whenever she had the chance to escape her relatives' watchful gaze. Most of these sources provide accounts that seem to be in accordance with the *Zeitgeist* of that particular era. Despite the fact that the majority of people remained quite suspicious of nudism and its enthusiasts, most official and 'scientific' publications offered a fair and open debate over attitudes to nudity, and the possible implications of social nudity.

One of the more outstanding examples comes from George Ryley Scott who, in his book *The Common Sense of Nudism* (1934), offers a refreshing discussion about why we should welcome nudism to our everyday lives. But let the reader not be mistaken that Scott is yet another nudist fanatic, campaigning for 'limitless' nudity for all. He offers a critical narrative where he condemns nudists for their 'apologetic attitude' of their practice, which he thought to be overdone and impeding their development:

> It is not enough to chant the popular slogan: 'To the pure all things are pure'. This is empty claptrap. Purity, as at present recognised, is a comedy of frustration. To the pure, all things they wish to do, but cannot or dare not do, are impure (1934: 13).

Having published numerous books and articles on human sexuality, Scott, along with other specialists in the field, refused to play the game of denial of the existence and importance of sex and physicality of human bodies. He argues that the fear of sex operated throughout the general public, and often just as much in the medical arena, on the basis of misinformed sexual myths. He also contends that the level of secrecy that surrounded complete nakedness is one of the reasons why we have had such an unhealthy relationship with our own sexuality, which has been constantly reinforced by fear and suspicion of the unknown. Despite advocating open talk of nudism and its practice, Scott argues that nudists' own secrecy – which is meant to protect the identities of their members – and their operating in covert and off-the-beaten-track places do not help the 'progressive' way of thinking about their practices or about the naturalness of the sexuality of human bodies.

These were some of the main publications that I found useful. I hope they will assist the reader to grasp some of the main problems related to nakedness,

the mixed feelings about it, and the ways of managing it in the practice of nudism. Let us move on now to a more theoretical level of comprehending nudity, which will help to set the scene for what will follow in the book.

1.3 Theoretical and conceptual background: dealing with the problem of shame and naked bodies

At the core of the problem of nakedness lies its association with the sexual drive and the way many people believe that this is an inseparable bond. As late as the early twentieth century, psychologists and sociologists were already discussing this problem. One of the most renowned figures, who dealt professionally with the subject of human sexuality – apart from Freud – was the British physician Havelock Ellis. Ellis published seven volumes on various aspects of sexuality, including masturbation, homosexuality and society's relationship with sex. He was known for challenging Victorian taboos about the body and sex, and the lack of discussion about them. In volume 6 of his *Psychology of Sex*, entitled *Sex in Relation to Society* (1929), he discusses the shift that took place in European development, from an initially moral concern, dealing with naked flesh in the light of Christian values, towards becoming part of conventional social values and social etiquette by the nineteenth century. The shift was from being 'immoral' to being 'indecent', 'disgusting' and 'unhygienic'. Despite Ellis's openness to discussing all matters of sex, it is hard for a reader today to dismiss the level of caution or righteousness that permeates his writing. For instance, when he is discussing the topic of naked mixed bathing, which was very current at the time, one cannot but notice his moralising tone:

> Nakedness in bathing, remarks Bölsche in his *Liebesleben in der Natur* (vol. ii, pp. 139 *et seq*), we already in some measure possess; we need it in physical exercises, at first for the sexes separately; then, when we have grown accustomed to the idea, occasionally for both sexes together. We need to acquire the capacity to see the bodies of individuals of the other sex with such self-control and such natural instinct that they become non-erotic to us and can be gazed at without erotic feeling. Art, he says, shows that it is possible in civilization. Science, he adds, comes to the aid of the same view … It is scarcely necessary to add that the cultivation of nakedness must always be conciliated with respect for the natural instincts of modesty (Ellis, 1929: 107–8).

Although this quotation could be used as a definition of Wouters's 'third-nature' personality, which will be discussed later, it also brings up the issue of taking emotions such as shame or 'natural instincts of modesty' as a human precondition, something we are born with. Elias, as we shall see, argues against this type

of assumption and the oversimplification of human processes and emotions that govern them.

Despite his cautious attitude towards the open mixing of the sexes when naked, Ellis does advocate a change in discussions about sex. He argues that there is something 'sexually hygienic' in being able to view other naked bodies, especially those of the opposite sex, with the dispassion practised by nudists at the time. As he suggests, we tend to look at naked bodies with a mixture of attraction and repulsion. He uses the analogy of a child who needs to learn how to look at and enjoy flowers without plucking them: so does the man need to learn how to admire the beauty of female body without triggering 'the desire to possess it'.

It is hard to discuss the naked body without bringing up the role of clothes, which is what British psychologist John C. Flügel did in his work *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930). He addressed several important points on the relationships we have with our bodies. He argued that, during social interaction, we have mainly learned to read – apart from hands and faces – other people's clothes rather than their bodies, and that is how we tend to form first impressions. Flügel also contends that our 'habit' of wearing clothes implies the 'perpetual blush upon the surface of humanity' (1930: 20–1), and the sole reason we use clothes is to 'gratify' modesty. He refers to modesty as an impulse, more negative than positive, because 'it bids us refrain from certain actions in which we might otherwise be prompted to indulge' (1930: 54).

He considers modesty through five distinctive variables of inhibition. This inhibition:

1. may be directed primarily against social or primarily against sexual forms of display;
2. may be directed primarily against the tendency to display the naked body or primarily against the tendency to display gorgeous or beautiful clothes;
3. may have reference, primarily, to tendencies in the self or, primarily, to tendencies in others;
4. may aim, primarily, at the prevention of desire or satisfaction (social or sexual) or, primarily, at the prevention of disgust, shame, or disapproval;
5. may relate to various parts of the body. (1930: 54)

These variables may prove useful when trying to understand the mechanisms behind the variety of meanings and contexts that relate to naked bodies. Flügel uses a range of examples, such as feeling ashamed when over- or under-dressed during a social gathering, or the case of societies where the naked body does not trigger any inhibitory emotions at all.

On a theoretical level, this book's main influence comes from the work of Norbert Elias. The foundation of his theory of civilising processes lay in his study of changes in manners in Western Europe about bodily functions, and the development of social standards regarding 'outward bodily propriety' towards distancing all physical functions from the social scene. Elias briefly discusses nakedness on several occasions, especially when considering the rules and manners concerning bathing and sleeping. He mainly stresses the point that nakedness was not always considered shocking or even unusual in the way it gradually came to be perceived from the Renaissance onwards. Before then, covering up one's body was even considered suspicious:

> Special nightclothes are never mentioned in the monastic rules of this period, still less in the documents, epics or illustrations left behind by secular society. This is also true for women. If anything, it was unusual to keep clothing on in bed. It aroused suspicion that one might have some bodily defect – for what other reason should the body be hidden? – and in fact this usually was the case. (2012a [1939]: 160)

Through these observations of what may seem mundane everyday practices, Elias saw something more. He knew that every baby born anywhere in the world is joining a society with people who have their rules and ways of dealing with these everyday functions. He never suggested that all societies underwent the same civilising process; however, he saw that the changes in standards taking place through the generations are good markers of how these societies developed over time. Nakedness could be used as one example of how different some earlier attitudes and norms could be:

> This greater lack of inhibition in showing the naked body, and the position of the shame frontier represented by it, are seen particularly clearly in bathing manners. It has been noted with surprise in later ages that knights were waited on in their baths by women; likewise, their night drink was often brought to their beds by women. It seems to have been common practice, at least in the towns, to undress at home before going to the bathhouse (2012a [1939]: 160–1).

Elias left the question of nakedness open to further investigation by social scientists. He was asked about it in an interview in 1974: was 'the return to nudity' a case of a de-civilising process? In his response, Elias referred to the example of streakers, who are known not only for being naked in public, but also for generally running or 'fleeing' through the public scene (Elias, 2013b: 176). Elias saw this as evidence of revolting against the taboos that surround nudity today and which have been building up since the Middle Ages.

There are voices who denounce Elias's theory of the civilising process, the most vigorous of them being German anthropologist Hans Peter Duerr. Between

1988 and 2002, he wrote five volumes in a series entitled *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozess* ('The myth of the civilising process'); the first volume (Duerr, 1988) is dedicated to the problem of nudity and shame. The kernel of Duerr's critique is that he judges Elias's selection and evaluation of historical evidence by the yardstick of the standards of historians and anthropologists at the end of the twentieth century (Hinz, 2002: 76). No doubt there is some truth in that; it would be surprising if there had not been advances in historiography in three-quarters of a century. It is probably true, for instance, that some of the sources that Elias used present rather sexualised environments such as brothels, rather than 'innocent' spaces in the public sphere. And similarly, it is no doubt true that strong feelings of shame have existed in (structurally) simpler societies. Duerr contends that the areas of sexual privacy have always been protected to some extent. Many 'simpler' societies regulated eye-contact with the private parts of men and women by introducing 'phantom walls' (Duerr, 1988: 165–76) that inhibited sexualised ways of dealing with people in the public sphere. But there is nothing to quarrel with here: Elias never in fact claimed, as Giddens (1984: 129) crudely asserted, that 'sexual activity was carried out in an unconcealed way in medieval Europe'.

There have been a number of counter-critiques of Duerr's argumentation (Goudsblom and Mennell, 1997; Wouters, 1997; Hinz, 2002; Krieken, 2005), including a response by Elias himself (2008 [1988]). They all point out that, whatever the faults of Elias's handling of evidence, Duerr's own vast assemblage of unorganised anthropological and historical amounts to a vast 'rag bag bound into a book', as Schobert (1992, quoted by Hinz, 2002: 81) put it. He appears to give equal weight to anecdotes by eighteenth-century missionaries and newspaper reports of incidents untypical of the present day – such as a report of British naval wives flashing their breasts to cheer up their sailor boyfriends as they sailed out of port to fight in the Falklands War (Hinz, 2002: 85). The problem, as Goudsblom and Mennell argue, is that Duerr is trying, through his own jumble of empirical facts – not all equally reliable – to prove that there is no pattern of development of the sort that Elias sought to demonstrate. The strategy is logically and methodologically unsound.

Indeed, Duerr exaggerates the universal significance of nudity *per se*, and ignores the broader issue of an overall pattern of change in standards of emotion management that is central to the theory of civilising processes, a trend – associated with growing structural complexity – from spontaneity towards more tightly woven webs of control. Duerr's main objection to Elias's theory arises from a misinterpretation of one of the core elements of the theory of the civilising process – an objection often also used by other unobservant critics – which results in placing the Eliasian approach close to the colonialist ideology. Furthermore, Duerr not only wrongfully attributes one civilising process to all mankind, in

various parts of the world, but also implies that shame surrounding nakedness, or about such other matters as defecation (Goudsblom and Mennell, 1997), is somehow innate and universal:

> those who today laugh at a myth like that of Genesis have themselves done nothing other than mythologise history, and that this 'myth of the civilizing process' obscures the fact that, in all probability, in the last 40,000 years there have been neither wild nor primitive peoples, neither uncivilized nor natural peoples ... and it is part of the essence of humans to be ashamed of their nakedness, however this nakedness may be defined historically (Duerr, 1988: 12, translation by Robert van Krieken).

Despite his impressive collection of jumbled facts, nude pictures and pieces of art, none of Duerr's criticisms of Elias in *Nacktheit und Scham* (1988), nor his theorisation (or rather lack of it) of the problem of nakedness and shame is convincing. One of the opposing voices to Duerr is Cas Wouters (2007), whose elaboration of the theory of *informalisation* is one of the best demonstrations that Duerr was wrong in his lengthy critique of Elias. Elias established that there had been a distinctive rise in the processes of *formalisation* from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, with an increase in shame thresholds and more pronounced rules about manners and regulations of emotional controls. What were considered the wild and unruly elements or the 'first nature' personality, over time gradually became tamed to the extent that the rigours of more appropriate and expected restraints of behaviour became more automatic and habitual – so-called 'second nature'. The peak of formalising processes in Western Europe was reached in mid-nineteenth-century Victorian England, where even the sight of a woman's ankle or calf was considered inappropriate. However, around the *fin de siècle* and then in the 'Roaring Twenties', the first waves of permissiveness or informalisation of the strict rules were observed. What had earlier come to be considered immoral or forbidden, slowly and to a certain extent came to be permitted again. One of the informalising occurrences of that time was the more relaxed and welcome reconnection with the naturalness of the human body, reflected in the rise of nudist or 'free body culture' in Germany and Britain. As Wouters has shown in his research on German, American, Dutch and English books of manners and etiquette from around 1890 until the end of twentieth century, is that despite the waves of relaxation of emotional regimes, the most dramatic occurrence of informalisation happened in the 1960s and 1970s in western societies. It was visible in the rise of various social intimacies such as the disappearance of the last vestiges of chaperonage in male–female relations, public showing of affection through holding hands and kissing, less restricting forms of dressing, and less formal ways of dancing (Wouters, 2007). Wouters

refers to this as 'the controlled decontrolling of emotional controls',[4] which lies at the core of understanding the theory of informalisation:

> It was also only in the second half of the twentieth century that the dominant mode of emotion regulation apparently reached a strength and scope that enabled most people to admit to themselves and to others to having 'dangerous' violent and/or sexual emotions and impulses, without provoking shame, particularly the shame-fear of losing control and giving in to them. Whereas previously, sexual and violent emotions, like emotions in general, had come to be viewed as dangerous. (Wouters, 2007: 201)

Such 'third-nature' personality structures are particularly important to the discussion and investigation of attitudes towards naked bodies, and a crucial element in understanding how it was possible for groups to practise social nudity without the 'fear of slippery slope', of going back to the 'first-nature', more directly impulsive, type of behaviour.

1.4 Outline of the book

This book comprises eight chapters, in which I present an 'inside and out' perspective on nakedness. In chapters 2 and 3, I describe the fieldwork I carried out among nudists in Ireland, and report on my participant observation in Club Nautica, the naturist swimming club in Dublin, and my interviews with practising Irish nudists. This enables me to draw on these findings when I subsequently embark on a full theoretical and historical account, unpacking the issues that arose from my fieldwork, and other questions concerning attitudes to nakedness, setting them in a broader longer-term perspective.

Chapter 4 focuses on the historical background behind the rise of nudism in Germany, its historical preconditions and the influence on it of ancient Greek culture. It then moves on to the circumstances of the beginnings of the first naturist organisation in Ireland in 1960s, and its struggles and development up to today. In chapter 5 I discuss the importance of the way we conceptualise 'nature' in regard to the problem of shameful feelings and nudity. I use Elias's theory of the civilising process together with a short history of changing attitudes towards

4 Elias and Dunning first used the expression 'controlled decontrolling' in an article written in 1969 and later reprinted in their book *Quest for Excitement* (2008: 77), where they wrote 'one can say that all leisure activities embody a controlled decontrolling of restraints on emotions'. The idea was taken up in the early 1970s by Cas Wouters, who has applied the idea more widely, frequently using the phrase 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' in developing his theory of informalisation. The idea is central to Wouters's concept of 'third-nature' behaviour, which will be discussed later.

nakedness in western history, focusing on its meanings within pagan, Judaic, Muslim and Christian traditions and teachings. I also make a connection between how over time we have dealt with the most 'natural' or animalic aspects of our bodies – such as the treatment of bodily hair or how genitalia were displayed – and the ways in which stricter controls over our behaviour came to be applied, especially over the sexual drive.

Then I move on to chapter 6 where other theoretical dilemmas concerning nakedness and feelings and modes of behaviour attributed to it are discussed, such as the origins of embarrassment and shame, and the role they played in the processes of our development from the Eliasian perspective. Moreover, through drawing on some of my own observations from the fieldwork, I also focus on more short-term explanations of how embarrassment is handled during challenging situations, such as seeing others naked or being seen naked by others. In order to do that, I used Goffman's theories to unravel some of the more problematic aspects of how people behave when faced with stressful social situations. Then the chapter moves on to theoretical explanations of how it is possible for groups like naturists to socialise while nude, without showing any obvious physical signs of sexual arousal, and how nudity's link to sex depends on the array of various contexts.

Chapter 7 deals with the fundamental problem underlying nakedness: the gradual processes of its *tabooisation* and then *detabooisation*. Here, drawing on examples of various prohibitions and avoidances of nudity, I use the theory of Norbert Elias to offer an alternative to the misleading existing theories of taboo offered by Freud and Mary Douglas.

Lastly, in conclusion, I offer a brief outline of all my findings from the chapters throughout the book, and attempt to bring together my main arguments.

2 Among the naturists

In this chapter I report on my participant observation in a nude swimming club in Dublin. I am going to describe not only what I *observed*, but also what I *felt*, in an unfamiliar setting that was replete with potential embarrassment.

The story of my research on naturism in Ireland began a few months before I attended my first meeting with the club in Dublin. As a young researcher, I felt an intellectual hunger, and the need to venture out into the field. Long before the research proposals and ethical approvals came through, it had become clear to me that in order to do the justice to the topic I had to leave the safety of the library and my desk behind me. It was almost a rite of passage. That is why, when it came to studying Irish naturists, the only way I considered appropriate for me to gain access to the group, collect valid data and try to see the world through their eyes, was to join them and become one of them for a year.

People often ask me about the 'real' reasons for deciding to study naturism. It is as if they are waiting for me to admit some 'dirty' little secret – such as exhibitionist tendencies. How did it actually feel to bare it all among strangers, they would ask, or 'what sort of people' would normally engage in this type of activity? And these were among the more intelligent questions. There were many others asking about participation in naturist orgies, accompanied by winks and nudges. Some people would refer to me as 'the sex expert' or dismiss the value of my degree and my research, because the subject of my study was regarded as trivial and odd. Considering that my day job at the time was as a barmaid in a busy, traditional old pub in Dublin's city centre, I quickly grew rather reluctant to discuss the topic of my research with any of the customers. And it would not be an exaggeration if I were to say that I had similar experiences with students and staff of my own department. When I bumped into one of the senior lecturers at a party given by a mutual friend, he expressed his utter disbelief that anybody would choose to study 'such a topic'. Judging by the fact that he had spent his entire academic career researching the problems of social class, it was more than implied that my topic was not 'serious' or important enough. Besides that, many people felt uncomfortable with me, especially when I was discussing my plans for or experiences in my fieldwork. It made some people turn red, giggle, make an awkward joke or just go very quiet. This has convinced and reassured me of the validity of my research as a contribution to the field of sociology of emotions

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and the body, and of how much I could contribute to the understanding and knowledge of our own shame and embarrassment.

It is safe to say that there were many occasions when I felt quite defensive about my study, and refused to answer or shrugged off banal questions and comments coming my way. Despite how it might have seemed to them, in avoiding their questions I was not being standoffish, prudish or fuddy-duddy. I enjoy my share of the banter, dirty jokes and never-ending innuendo with which the English language so magnificently abounds. But there came a time, or rather a point of saturation, when I felt more wary as a woman about the kind of reactions my engagement with this study would trigger, especially when combined with the character of job I was doing for a living.

All this being said, I thought I was being paranoid, especially after I made a short appearance in a programme on nudity in Ireland which was broadcast on one of the national TV stations.[5] I was approached once during my lunch in work, by one of the pub's customers who put his hand on my shoulder and said to me: 'I saw you on TV. I know what you're into …', followed by a wink and a smile from beneath his bushy moustache. Ironically enough, I felt safer parading around naked during my naturist meetings at the local club.

2.1 Gaining access to Club Nautica

When I initially contacted the gatekeepers of the club, I sent a description of my study, in which I introduced myself. My intention was to create a sense of trust and rapport between us. After several exchanges of emails and phone calls between me and committees of the Irish Naturist Association (INA) and of Club Nautica (a Dublin-based naturist swim club), I felt that at least I was being asked all the right questions and being given the appropriate kind of attention for a researcher. Eventually a lunch was scheduled with the club's secretary and his wife. When I arrived in a busy café somewhere off O'Connell Street in Dublin's city centre, I quickly scanned the room to see if I could guess which group of people would fit the image of naturists I had in my mind. I sensed that I should be looking for middle-aged people who exuded a 'sense of mission' of some sort, because that was the impression I had gained so far from my telephone conversations with them. One table with three people having tea and scones caught my attention, but just to be on the safe side I rang the secretary's mobile phone. It happened that my intuition was correct, and I had managed to select the right table. After an exchange of pleasantries, introductions and the traditional

5 The programme was *Angela Scanlon: Full Frontal*, RTÉ One, 16 October 2014.

Irish 'where are you froms?'[6] and the 'Jaysus, your English is very good', we were joined by another couple of club members. It became clear to me then that the reason I was being so outnumbered during the meeting was that they were not only taking my research offer seriously, but also that they might have considered me a threat to the privacy of the club members. During the meeting, which eventually took the form of a more relaxed interview conducted by the naturists, I was asked about my reasons for researching this particular topic, ethical issues such as participants' confidentiality and my credentials as a researcher. One of the main concerns for Paul (one of the members who arrived late with his wife Niamh) was that once the participants had signed the consent forms, they would no longer be anonymous, so he wanted to know who would see those signed copies. After I assured him that they were for my eyes only, he then asked me details about my data collection or, to be more precise, he asked, 'So ... er ... would you be sitting somewhere in the corner with the clipboard and observe us like we're some sort of wild tribe from the Amazon?' He seemed a lot more at ease when I told him that I wanted to become a club member and attend all the meetings as an equal – naked like everyone else. I also told him that I would never be walking around during the club meetings looking like a 'typical researcher', so that people would act naturally around me even while knowing that I was there to do the research. That is also why I specifically stated to them that I would not be formally collecting any data until early the following year, and that for the time being I just wanted to get to know everyone at the club, and let them to get to know and trust me.

After all the questions had been answered and the consent forms shown, the deciding factor in gaining permission for the study seems to have been that I wanted to become a member of the INA and join Club Nautica in their activities, and pay my monthly fee like any other naturist member. That I believe was the moment when they actually saw how serious I was about my study and that I was not looking for a 'quick fix' of information from them. Towards the end of the meeting our conversation became much more relaxed and I could see how warm and welcoming they could be to newcomers like me. I was given the nuts and bolts of practising naturism in Ireland, including that, strictly speaking, it could be regarded as illegal under the laws governing public exposure. My 'interviewers' explained the rules of participation during naturist meetings, when I should try not to do anything that could be found offensive by other members. The general atmosphere at the table was friendly, but at the same time I could not help but notice the sense of firmness and defensiveness in the way they interacted with me. There was an air of openness, but they wanted to be taken seriously.

6 One of the more characteristic elements of Irish people is their asking, on a first meeting, where a person is from. It normally comes up very early in the conversation, similarly to the American 'What do you do for a living?'

They would have had no problem in refusing me access to the club if they had felt it could cause any upset or disturbance to the members. I sensed that I could not afford to let my guard down and needed to choose my words carefully. While the women played the more soothing and caring role of giving reassurance to the beginner, the men asked more direct questions that would help them to be sure that I had no ulterior motive. Of course I was outnumbered by the group, so all in all the meeting felt rather intense. Was this the way all applicants were screened? I posed this question to one of the older members of the club during a swim a couple of months later. He said that they used to be much stricter about the screening process. First phone conversations took place between the members of the committee and anyone interested in trying out naturism. If the person passed the first stage, which consisted of making a good impression and showing understanding of what naturism was, then a face-to-face meeting would be arranged outside the club. If that went well, the potential member would then be invited to come for one of the swims and see whether the naturist experience was found agreeable. The first guest meeting with the swimming club at the designated venue would usually be free but, after that, financial arrangements would be made, which also involved filling out application forms for the so-called passport of the INF (International Naturist Federation), which would guarantee entry to any naturist site in Europe and some in other parts of the world.

A good deal had been implied, but probably not everything was spelled out to me. What interested me most here were the strict criteria people had to meet before they were accepted as members. In practice, only couples are welcome to join. My case was different because I am a woman, and, as they told me, there is always a shortage of women present at the club meetings, and they try to balance out the numbers.

I was struck by the reserved and cautious character of their manner and organisation. As they said themselves, because Ireland is such a small country and 'somehow everyone knows everybody', they have to put a lot of emphasis on the confidentiality of their members. They have teachers and even once a priest amongst them, and so they had to recognise the fact that the general public in Ireland might have serious problems with accepting their choice of pastime, and that there was a risk of it and them being stigmatised.

Since most of the regular swimming club meetings were suspended for the summer, I was just in time for the start of the new club's season and the first meeting was due to take place in the Crooked Glen[7] swimming pool the following day. The timing for me personally was unfortunate, since I was menstruating. I knew I could not, or at least I felt I could not, bring up the issue in front of the rest of our small assembly, and so when we were all leaving the café, I took one

7 The name of the location has been changed. It is an area not far from Dublin's city centre.

of the female committee members on one side and explained my problem to her. She smiled warmly, and in a mother-hen like way explained that at times like these it is perfectly all right to wear the bottom of a swimsuit. That is all very well, but the more I thought about it at home, the less reassured I felt. I had agreed to bare it all for the purpose of my research, but making my bodily functions somewhat public and obvious in front of a group of strangers was yet another emotional challenge. Unfortunately, not even tampons are completely invisible. Having nowhere to hide them due to the required dress code, I experienced a brief moment of self-pity and annoyance on behalf of the whole of womankind. Dealing with this problem of having a period is embarrassing for women, but, thinking about it, it is mainly the case due to the tremendous sense of embarrassment and repugnance evident through the rolling of the eyes, flinching or shuddering by men, thanks to whom menstrual blood has turned blue on our television screens. Then yet another nagging thought occurred to me that day: after spending a lot of time studying the literature on nudity and what makes the human body erotic, I could not help but think of the rationale of the striptease. If I were to show up 'only' topless to a naturist gathering, would it not seem provocative or teasing? It might also draw some additional attention to me, in which case ironically it would have been easier to handle the embarrassment of being stark naked than having them wonder why I only went 'half-way'. I decided that it was pivotal for me to participate fully naked that day. I admit it is a surprisingly strange way to handle fear of my own embarrassment. Could it be that it is one of the biggest human tragedies in general that half the time we struggle to find a way to fit in with the rest of the society, and the other half to find the way to stand out by just the right amount? Maybe the naturists are yet another group in a society that is trying to play with that balance. Perhaps it is what connects all fringe groups.

Speaking from the perspective of the time that has passed since then, I can understand why the group acted so suspiciously towards me and my research. It has become known to me that the naturist community in Ireland has tended to attract attention from various media, and the general message of the club or the privacy of their members is not always at the top of these agencies' priorities. Even now I am convinced that being a young female researcher with a certain sense of naïveté that I carried with me while doing my fieldwork helped me in the process of establishing the rapport with the club members. I was not perceived as dangerous or untrustworthy by the people who participated in my study.

During my year-long fieldwork I attended numerous swims with the Dublin-based Club Nautica, and also several naturist private house parties or sauna nights. I carried out my observations on rules and regulations, body language and on the ways events were organised. In this chapter I shall report some

detailed observations about two of the main events, and give more general notes on the rest of them.

2.2 The first swim

So how does one, researcher or not, prepare for a nudist experience? In my case the build-up before the event became quite stressful, since I needed to embrace two roles: that of a 'good naturist' who does not break any rules, and that of a researcher trying to blend in with the rest of the group, never to make anyone feel uncomfortable about my presence, and simply to keep my cool all the time. During my preparations before the first swim, I could not help but notice what Butler (1990) calls the 'performativity' of the body, which made me realise yet another role I needed to embrace – that of a woman. I felt that, especially in the case of women, there must be a certain way of presenting their bodies, such as treatment of all bodily hair or possibly keeping to a diet or exercise regime in order to look good naked. It almost struck me that one would probably be expected to make same preparations before the naturist meeting, as one would before a 'sex date'. I thought it was all very well that it was a naturist gathering, with greater acceptance than usual of the flaws of the human body – including a whole array of shapes and sizes – but that women would still be expected to look a certain way, to take care of and treat their bodies in a certain way. In a situation where by default one is quite literally not able to hide anything, it is hard for a woman especially not to conform to conventional standards of bodily hair maintenance. So auxiliary hair – pubic hair to some extent or other, hair on the legs or even the hair around the face and the nipples that might occur during the hormonal changes that take place in a woman's body over her lifetime – are expected to be tended to in our wider modern society, an assumption that then slowly trickles down to the naturist environments too.

After the club's secretary and his wife picked me up in their car outside my home one late September evening, we headed to the swimming pool in Crooked Glen located in Dublin city. We were among the first to arrive, so we waited in the car for other members to turn up. I looked around the grim surroundings of the neighbourhood and the swimming pool building itself, and could not help but think how unfortunate their choice of this venue must be if they were trying to impress and attract more members. It could give the whole event a rather clandestine character, if one did not know better. While I was busy filling out the forms for my official membership, I noticed more and more cars pulling into in the car park outside the pool. Donal and Linda (the names by which the secretary and his wife will be referred from now on) recognised most of the members' cars, but interestingly enough most of them continued to stay in the car. It was

not until moments later, when I saw a group of loud schoolchildren pouring out from inside the building and hurrying into their coach, that I understood why nobody was going inside before. When eventually we went inside, we were greeted by the female lifeguard who came in specifically for Club Nautica swim nights and waited for the other fellow naturists to come in. Some weeks later there was one occasion when a male lifeguard was present instead of our usual one, and I must admit that that unnerved me slightly. Even though by then I was feeling more comfortable coming to these naked swims, I was struck by my own reaction to the new lifeguard. It felt different because, unlike other men who attended the swim, he was not a naturist and he seemed more of a threat to me. I am aware it had nothing to do with him. He was just doing his job and most likely was rather embarrassed himself with the 'naked soup'. It was entirely my own projection of fears and a realisation that if he were not one of 'us' he might not have developed the same indifference, or even innocence, towards all the naked bodies around him, especially naked female bodies. Of course, he was also dressed in his uniform, which automatically created an imbalance that was quite hard to ignore for a beginner like me. Moments like these seem to be harder to ignore for women than men. Even though it was absolutely impossible for any physical harm to come to any of us, I still felt this invisible air of some kind of symbolic threat of 'violence', the innate fear of being in a very vulnerable position. I suppose it could be compared to the feeling that materialises within every woman when approached by a man in the street at night, with nobody else around, even if the man just happens to be there at the same time and means no harm at all. It is almost a primal fear that women cannot really control, and it appears even in situations of even the minutest possible danger or threat.

When it was time to head back to the changing room, I had to pass the lifeguard on my way. I managed to internalise my shame and make it look completely nonchalant, even though on the inside I was holding my breath and imagining his eyes following my naked body (most likely it was not the case at all); I felt the physical sensation of the skin on my back creeping with embarrassment. I could not tell if any of my other female companions felt the same way about it. In retrospect I wish I had asked.

At my first swim, after the introductions had been made, I noticed that some fellow swimmers stayed more reserved towards me after they found out who I was and my purpose in joining the club. Some of them over time approached me and asked me questions about it and became more reassured and open to my presence, others opted for keeping a safe distance from me till the very end. Since Club Nautica strives to create a safe and family friendly environment for practising naturism, only couples or women were accepted and allowed to join. I was informed that this was so that women would be more secure in attending and would not feel threatened when outnumbered by male members. Most of the

time the numbers were kept at a fifty-fifty ratio, and children were present during most swims I attended. That night seventeen club members attended the swim and the number included three small boys.

One of the most striking things that a first-timer like me comes across is that, since it is a naturist swim, both men and women can use the same changing room. Some members chose to take off their clothes in slightly more private corners of the room, where boxed off open-ended changing spaces were available, and others chose to do it openly at the centre of the changing room. Some might think that the moment a group of strangers take off their clothes, chaos will ensue. Chaos, that is, in terms of their behaviour (or rather misbehaviour), manners forgotten, a Sodom and Gomorrah of sexual misconduct. This is the only way some people could imagine such a moment. But when you actually do bare everything in front of other people, all you can hear is a ringing noise in your ears, interwoven with the sound of your pounding heart. Your body does not forget how to move, it does not lose control over its impulses. So there it was, the moment I stood completely naked in the room in front of all these people whom I did not know at all. If you were to imagine this, you would consider it the thing of a worst nightmare.[8] Yet they were all strangers to me, they were all naked too, and they paid no attention to my nakedness. It was odd to think that the last time I had stood naked in front of another person was in an erotic setting; now I know that what created the erotic setting was so much more than just our naked bodies. People at the club did not seem to care about nakedness and there was comfort in that – a sense of naked solidarity. Some might think that if you were to be so vulnerable, it would be better to be surrounded by people you knew and trusted. I think it is quite the opposite. These people did not know any other 'version' of me. I did not have to work with them every day, bump into them in my local supermarket or pub. To me, it made it all feel both safe and unreal. There was shame, embarrassment and some awkwardness too; but, despite the initial shock to the system, I knew that it was only one aspect of my life, which did not define me. I could walk away from it and leave it behind me. I had reckoned that if one were ever in this situation, somehow one would 'innately' know what to do (and what not to do); and, more importantly, one would know what one would not like other people to do while one was in this vulnerable situation. On the other hand, it did not now feel as if anything unexpected could ruin the whole atmosphere. It felt solid to me. I also felt that if somebody made a false move or made someone feel uncomfortable, it would not be by chance, but quite intentional. The framework is such that, for it to work, ulterior motives can have no place.

8 As Myers (1989) asserts, the bad dream of being seen naked in public is one of the commonest dreams within Western societies; it was even confirmed by some of the naturists in my study.

Since the room was quite cold, I rushed into the safety of the swimming pool, which unfortunately was quite cold too. I must admit that doing that also gave me the advantage of being in the water by the time the rest arrived, so that I could observe the body language and the ease of walking around naked almost flaunted by most male members. Being in the water for some reason gave me a false sense of feeling less exposed. Some women seemed more comfortable than others, but it was really hard to say whether it was due to the embarrassment or the sheer cold temperatures of the venue itself. As I was sitting in this cool pool of water, I discreetly watched all the naked bodies jumping in or slowly coming into the water. I had never experienced seeing so many naked bodies in front of me, all at once anyway. I was curious about them, but I did not find them at all sexually arousing. Maybe it was because the context of the situation was not appealing to me erotically, lacking the 'right' kind of intimacy, or maybe it was simply due to the fact that I did not find any of the men physically attractive at all. This was true when a few months later a young couple from Eastern Europe joined the club, and the man was a young and good-looking bodybuilder. He had an admirably well-sculpted body, and even though it was pleasant to notice it standing out from the pool of bodies 'filled with the air of bygone decades', it still did not feel erotic to me. Was it my inner restraint or was it the carefully orchestrated atmosphere of the event that stripped this happening of any unwanted desire? It felt like seeing something behind glass, something that we were always curious to see, but now that it is here in front of our eyes, we take a moment to consider it and acknowledge it – but once it is satisfied the curiosity is fleeting.

Since I cannot swim, I stayed with the group of other non-swimming women in the shallow end of the pool, but we were frequently joined by other members who would stop for a quick chat. I noticed that most of us maintained constant eye contact with the person we were talking to, and there were no obvious signs of anyone overstepping that rule. I myself was tempted not to keep my eyes on other people's faces, but to keep looking to check whether they were looking at my naked body. It was all new to me so I felt the need to check in case they were in any way ambivalent about their indifference towards all those naked bodies surrounding them.

I noticed that most of the female members had trimmed their pubic hair. Some had none, others showed clear signs of bikini-line treatment. It is hard to tell from observation alone whether this was a factor in the 'performative body' notion connected with nudist practice, or was more to do with the general standards of beauty prevalent for women these days.

No intense gawking at anybody was taking place, yet I could not help feeling discomfort, and chose to get out of the water before most of the male swimmers did so. It is one thing to swim naked or even share a changing room, but I

must admit it felt odd to shower in front of other people. We had only three open-fronted shower cubicles available to share among the 15 people on average, all coming out of the swimming pool at the same time after the hour for the naturist swim was up. I was startled the first time when I was taking a shower and turned around and saw other members waiting for their turn. I felt rather disconcerted by it, and it led me to think later when I returned home, that my intuitions were not inaccurate at all. The sight of a woman, or a man for that matter, lathering and gently touching their naked body and running their hands up and down it is a long-established sexual trigger and fetish in our culture. It is always intimate and has become something erotically pleasurable for a spectator. It is a staple of blue movies. There is a very fine line between what is considered necessary bodily hygiene and an erotically charged sensual activity. Showering proved to be one of those moments that made me stop in my tracks and made me think.

2.3 St Valentine's Day Party (18 February 2012)

The party was on Saturday night at 8.00 p.m. in the private home of one of the club's committee members, who stepped in after the couple who had initially volunteered to throw it cancelled two days before it was due to happen. I refer to it here as a 'Valentine's Day party', but in fairness only because it happened to take place around that time of the year. No naked cupids were involved in the event.

I was picked up from a city centre location by two couples who volunteered to give me a lift on their way to the party. When we arrived, Mary Jane (the hostess) was at the door, fully dressed since she was on opening doors and preparing food duty. Once we walked in to the house we were greeted in the dining room by the already naked host Stephen. One could tell right away that the house itself had been prepared for the naturist party, because the temperature was quite high in all the rooms, so that it might have felt uncomfortable sitting in one's clothes. The curtains on all the windows were carefully drawn.

Because this was my first 'proper' naturist party I decided to follow the others in the order and timing of behaviour and manners. It looked as if the group of us who had just arrived were not rushing to take our clothes off. It was a rather cold evening outside, and so they decided to warm up a bit first. We were, after all, the first to arrive. It also made a sense for Mary Jane to keep her clothes on since she was preparing chicken curry and wanted to avoid burns.

Within the next hour or so, more people began to arrive at the party, most of them couples. In total there were around twenty people at the party that night. It looked as if the smokers were lingering over taking their clothes off since they needed to go out every now and then. One of them, though, was clever enough to

have brought his bathrobe, in order to slip into something warm quickly if he needed to go outside again for a quick smoke.

Certain rules were in place that night, apart from the usual one about members and their guests behaving in a manner that would not cause any offence to other members or their guests. All members had to bring their own towels to the party so that they could sit wherever they liked, provided it was on their own towel. It is considered rude and inconsiderate to sit on a towel that belongs to someone else, and even more so if someone sits on a chair or a sofa without putting a towel over it first. I was watching throughout the evening, and the whole 'towel rule' worked quite smoothly in practice. It was not the German holidaymakers' style, however; nobody was reserving their seat with their towel so that no one else could sit there. A person did not have to walk around with their towel if they wanted to leave it on their seat. It could be left wherever he or she was sitting last, and if someone wanted to take that seat, they could remove the towel and put their own down in its place. This shows that a certain level of repugnance towards some aspects of the naked human body still exists among naturists. The 'towel rule' may be considered a common-sense rule that nobody questions. Whether it is a naturist holiday resort or someone's private house, it seems to be crucial to keep up hygienic practices on all accounts. This appears to be a good example of the distancing towards natural bodily functions that happened during the European civilising process. In a way it reminds me of the rule with menstruation, because we all know it happens, but when a woman in a naturist setting is wearing a sarong or a bikini bottom we would not like to discuss why. People sitting with their naked backsides on their towels seems to be a similar case; both involve parts of our bodies responsible for some unavoidable and necessary physiological functions. Both were pushed behind the scenes of social life long ago, symbolically separated from the front of the stage.

I had been watching the general dynamics of the group at the party, and at some point I noticed that most of people were behaving in a manner not too different from a dressed-up party. The body language seemed to be quite relaxed and people gathered around standing in small groups. But it is important to note that most of the guests kept eye contact during conversations, and it was rare to catch someone's eyes wondering into the area of someone's body below head level. A person was more likely to be noticed looking at the intimate parts of another's body with a blank sort of stare – the kind of stare when one does not necessarily see what one is looking at – rather than staring in a more impertinent manner. All the same, I noticed people looking at me when I was passing by.

Body distance was maintained at all times unless it was with a spouse. It was more noticeable when it turned out that it was a member's birthday and a cake with a candle was presented. I did not see anyone, apart from his girlfriend, hugging or kissing the 'birthday boy'. Photos were taken, though most of the

people moved away from the background or beyond the camera's range, and some women were actually hiding behind their husbands.

Once again, I noticed that most women had shaved or waxed their legs and pubic hair, apart from those who seemed to prefer to keep things more natural. As for the men, I noticed that some had shaved their crotch too, or showed signs of the hair having been treated at some point (hair growing back on various parts of the body). I shall revisit the issue of bodily hair more closely in the next chapter, reporting on my interviews with participants, who were asked directly about their attitudes towards bodily hair.

In general, the appropriate body distance was observed, apart from in the cases of spouses – and of Derek, the one and only single man at the party. Unfortunately, he sat next to me, and he seemed to ignore the fact that our bodies were touching (a 'cheek to cheek' situation'). On a couple of occasions he apologised for sitting too close to me, yet within seconds the same situation arose again. I also noticed him looking at intimate parts of my body while we were all sitting around and listening to the songs sung by other club members.

When towards the end of the night I went upstairs to the designated changing room, Derek came in to say goodnight to me while I was in the process of dressing. It seemed more awkward for me as a non-nudist than for him. I convinced myself at the time that it would be better not to upset the atmosphere, and I let it go, but an unpleasant feeling of having been violated came over me the moment I reached home. I decided to try to tackle the matter subtly with the secretary's wife, and she and her husband had apparently noticed my discomfort on the night of the party while I was sitting on the couch next to Derek. The moment I mentioned his name, Donal (the secretary) appeared and exclaimed 'I knew something was going on there!' They immediately apologised and reassured me that Derek would not be invited to any parties in the future; indeed technically he should not have been at the party that night. He had been a club member with his wife and children in the past, but was so no longer. The hostess happened to bump into him that day in the local supermarket and felt the need to invite him to the party. The following week after the party I received an email from Derek, forwarded to me via the club's secretary, in which he expressed his remorse if

I had felt uncomfortable that night. He blamed the woman on the other end of the couch who, he said, kept pushing him towards me. I suppose what really happened there that night lies in the eyes of the beholder.

Another thing that I noticed during the party was that women never sat with their legs open, even though many of them were sitting around the fireplace on the floor. On the other hand, men present at the party, despite their nudity, showed no signs of inhibitions about sitting with their legs apart. They were more likely than women to give the occasional scratch to the crotch area. We

could argue that the same gendered body language applies among dressed or 'textile' people in everyday life, but what needs to be noted here is that throughout my fieldwork, it was evident that men tended to feel more comfortable in displaying their naked bodies than did women.

Throughout the evening people expressed interest in the fact that I was researching Irish naturism, and, apart from the usual questions about my reasons for choosing this particular topic, a couple of people asked me whether I had joined the club on my own or with a spouse or whether I had been a naturist before I decided to study the subject. Towards the end of the evening, while I was waiting for the people giving me a lift home to get ready, the hostess of the party expressed her awe at my bravery in deciding to join the club on my own just to gather materials for my research. I realised yet again how important it is for these women to participate in naturist activities only if their spouses or other women are around. It is also important to say that most of these women had been naturists for at least 15 years. The party came to an end at around 2 a.m.

The hosts' children had been put to bed and sent their rooms as the party was beginning. I was told that it was an adult party and that children were not allowed to participate. They had seen naked adults during the fortnightly swims organised by the club, so it was probably more about them being in the way of 'adult fun' than any problem with their naked participation. I was by far the youngest of all guests at the party, with the modal age-group being the late forties, fifties and sixties.

Technically, the so-called Valentine's Day party was the second naturist party I attended. The first had taken place before Christmas, and it was also Club Nautica's and the INA's Annual General Meeting. The number of people who attended was quite low. I had a chance to meet the INA's president with his wife. The oddest thing that happened there was that despite the party being advertised as a naturist party, we all remained fully dressed throughout. It was my first naturist party at the time and I remained puzzled by it, and by the fact that nobody had raised the issue during the evening. It was on our way home that Paul and Niamh mentioned it. They explained to me that it was probably due to the fact that it was a cold evening out that day, and also that it was really up to the hosts of the party to initiate the act of 'disrobing'. This in some way adds to the conditional character of naturist gatherings, with certain levels of uncertainty and even insecurity in the manner in which the meetings are held and organised.

The problems of shame and embarrassment, and the need for confidentiality, can perhaps be observed more clearly today in Ireland than in many other countries. The reason is that, until well within living memory, the Roman Catholic Church held what Inglis (1998) has called a 'moral monopoly' in the Republic of Ireland, and used its hegemonic power position to impose an unusually rigid and conservative code of behaviour and feeling. Many of the members of

Club Nautica with whom I talked would, in their younger days, have had to surmount unusually strong obstacles, both from social disapproval and from their own inner feelings. Even today, that is associated with the Club being more nearly a 'secret society' than would be necessary in some other countries. For the effects of the inculcation of a strict Catholic habitus do not disappear overnight, even though the secular power of the Catholic Church in Ireland has in many respects declined dramatically in the last two decades or so. This is an instance of what Elias called 'the drag effect of habitus' (2010 [1987): 288–90).

2.4 Conclusion

Is my personal account valuable for my research on nakedness and embarrassment? Is it not one of the most basic rules of 'science' as we know it to try and keep the researcher objective and detached? Did I break this rule in my research? I would like to argue that especially over the course of time I have learned the value of my own emotions about my fieldwork, having first underestimated and rejected them. I tried to set aside or silence my own feelings, which ranged from apprehension, fear, shame and distrust to enjoyment and gratitude towards the people who admitted me to their naked world. My attempt to exercise the utmost care for the comfort of the participants in my study might have pushed my own emotions into a secondary and unimportant place.

Ever since deciding to study naturism and beginning to try to access to the naturists' environment, I had attempted to prepare myself for it mentally. I accepted and tolerated their right to choose how they lived their lives with suppressed judgement and an open mind. Logically and rationally I had accepted my choice of becoming one of them too; yet on an emotional level it made me uncomfortable and at times even threatened by it. That is why I often felt disoriented and uneasy before and after the meetings with the club, but rarely felt this when actually surrounded by all these people. In Freud's terms, it was my 'superego' slowly coming to terms with the slight distortion of the world as I once knew it. The atmosphere of enduring benevolence among the club members was constantly intertwined with my own feelings of ambivalence. This ambivalence did not entirely desert me until the very end of my fieldwork. I suppose it is the way we gradually 'learn' how to enjoy our naked bodies and naturism, after we slowly and willingly step over certain thresholds of the feelings of shame, embarrassment, discomfort or even guilt, which nevertheless tend to linger at the back of our minds to some extent. I can only provide a thorough analysis and insight of my own experiences in more detail, because the data collected during the interviews do not always reflect it to the same extent. Most participants admit to these feelings more or less directly, but I sense that most of them, sometimes

after decades of practising naturism, have lost their memories of these awkward and uncomfortable experiences. Perhaps it is necessary and a part of the process to forget them, and then once having done so, one comes to enjoy naturism, maybe no longer as such a thrilling experience but instead as a peaceful recreation when one finally feels more free. Only ‘more free’ – because I doubt whether anyone can fully let go of all self-restraints and inhibitions.

3 From lewd to nude: becoming a naturist

In this part of the book the focus shifts from naturism seen through my own personal perspective, towards naturism seen through the eyes of individuals I encountered during my fieldwork. Their sometimes very personal accounts allow us to grasp the intricacies of practising naturism. What I am trying to achieve in this chapter is to develop a better understanding of the processes underlying the management of basic feelings such as shame or physical lust, in order to grasp how naturists manage them when they are displaying their naked bodies in a semi-public scenario. 'Semi-public', because they are surrounded by other people who choose to strip off their clothes at the same time, so there is no blatant power imbalance – which would have arisen in a fully public place where some people were wearing clothes.

I asked my interviewees to go back in time and describe the first occasion when they stood naked in front of other (naked) people in a naturist setting. I enquired about their memories and the feelings that they experienced at that particular moment, how they felt in their bodies, and whether and how their body language changed at the time. Then I also asked about whether their relationship with their own bodies had changed in any way since they started to engage in naturism. And since they started shedding their clothes – which would normally have been an important part of their identity – had they felt that they had to present and look after their bodies in any particular way? These questions were based on the assumption that they would be more likely to treat their bodily hair in a certain way, or try to improve their fitness before the start of 'the naturist season'. Then I felt it was unavoidable to ask about the relationship between the naked body and human sexuality, and see how the feelings of the sexual drive and arousal were handled during naked interactions. It was especially important and interesting to see how various incidents were described and experienced from the different perspectives of the two sexes, especially in the cases of couples being interviewed. The things women tend to find embarrassing and cause them to feel tense are not always as problematic to men, and *vice versa*.

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with Irish naturists who were either practising nudism through being members of official Irish Naturist Association (INA) clubs or who had decided to do it on their own, without club membership. In the process of selecting participants, I tried to choose those naturists who represented different statuses or criteria, such as male/female, single/married, different age groups or sexual orientation.

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The interviews varied in length. The majority of them lasted around one hour. The shortest interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes, but others took up to one hour and a half. To ensure that the participants felt more relaxed and secure during the interviews, they were offered a choice of being interviewed in the comfort of their own homes (alternatively their trusted friends' homes), or in a public place such as quiet hotel lobbies, or in a designated office on the university campus. In some cases, the naturists interviewed volunteered as couples, but they were always interviewed on a one-on-one basis, with the spouse not present in the room.

When I was reading over and analysing my transcribed interviews, certain themes began to emerge, such as specific body language, or sets of rules that seemed to be in play although they were more implied than spelled out; other aspects included the gendered side to experiencing naturism, or the way naturists perceive themselves as a group. But while these themes began to arise as part of this bigger puzzle, a more substantial theme began to emerge connecting all the above elements into a broader structure. It became evident to me that before a person actually comes to be a naturist, or a 'real naturist' (a term on which I will expand later), they have to learn gradually how to be one. The problem is, though, that it is a process which naturists do not seem to be really aware of. So even though it is evident, it is quite hard to document. Most of the naturists seem to be convinced that it is something you try once you are already comfortable enough with your own body; but, as my findings will show, that is only a small part of one side of the coin. My study shows that in order to be able truly to enjoy naturism, one needs to go through certain stages in one's practice of naturism and gradually build up a 'learned confidence' about how to operate and to enjoy it. It is very similar to learning how to smoke and how to enjoy smoking cigarettes or marijuana,[9] although it is not so much a matter of learning a technique of doing it, but rather a learning process that mainly takes place on a *psychic* level.

From now on, I shall refer to the first stage of becoming a naturist as the *initiation-stage naturist*, and the subsequent stage as the *established-stage naturist*. I shall explain this distinction in more detail.

Articles and books putting naturism in a broader theoretical framework are scarce, but I came across an article by Howard C. Warren dating from 1933, in which he discussed nudism and body taboos from a psychological standpoint. What stood out for me was that both he and I write from the perspective of insiders

9 This idea was initially introduced by Howard Becker in his celebrated essay 'Becoming a marihuana user' (1953), more widely known in the book entitled *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1966), and it was later also adopted and developed by Jason Hughes in his study (in an Eliasian vein) of cigarette smoking (2003).

to the naturist world, and even though there were similarities in what we observed, we came to contradictory conclusions.

Warren makes a series of statements and reaches conclusions about the problem of taboo and the naked body, which quite surprisingly tend to play down the role of heterosexual sexuality. One of the most astonishing examples of it is when he accuses John C. Flügel of making too many far-fetched interpretations of sex symbolism. Warren brings up a number of examples regarding naked body taboos, which he claims to be far more severe than that of exposing the naked body in front of people of the opposite sex:

> The least rigid type limits the taboo to exposure of the body before those of the opposite sex, which carries with it prohibition of nudity in any mixed group. By the term social nudism is meant the lifting of this intersex taboo (Warren, 1933: 162).

He lists what he considers a more severe form of taboo than that regarding mixed sexes, such as the taboo of 'contemplating' one's own nudity, of being seen naked by members of the same sex, or the 'familial taboo' according to which children should not see their parents naked. He also makes a snap judgement by saying that the taboo surrounding the naked body exists universally in all societies – including, as he puts it, among 'the savages'. But my main contention with Warren lies at the psychic level of his argumentation about breaking, as he refers to it, the 'body taboo'. His basic problem is that he did not understand the shame mechanisms well enough before venturing out to the nudist site. What happened then was that he either did not give enough credit to his own feelings of shame and completely underestimated the subjective side of his 'social experiment', or falsely assumed that emotion such as shame can be immediately overcome. He failed to understand that, as Elias demonstrated a few years later in his book on civilising processes, and as more recently Goudsblom (2015) has reminded us, shame is an emotion with a history, and it takes a long time to lessen its influence over a person. In his article, Warren refers to his experience with nudism as 'the sudden and "painless" removal of the body taboo' (1933: 171), but unless he had been raised in a nudist family or environment, I am afraid he suffered from a great deal of denial and lack of self-reflection. Quite a shocking statement from a trained psychologist, I thought.

3.1 The initiation-stage naturist*: learning how to be a 'real naturist'*

What I have called the *initiation stage* includes the moment in time when a person begins to wonder about the practice of naturism and starts to imagine what it would be like to try it once, and to see whether it is something they might be interested in doing in the long term. It also involves imagining and trying to predict their own mental state and their reaction to displaying their nudity to others, and at the same time trying to predict the reaction of those to whom it is displayed. They must also prepare to cope with feelings of shame that will come with it. It needs to be stressed that after this emotional build-up has taken place, it seems to be followed by a *cathartic* experience for the beginner naturist. I believe that expecting a *shock* reaction as such was a rather lazy assumption on Warren's part, and his claim that no manifestation of shame takes place during the initiation stage is an overstatement. That is mainly because people who take their first steps towards nudism are not coerced into doing it, and would not even be wondering whether to try it, were it not that at some level they already know that it is something they can handle. Instead of *shock*, then, a person tends to experience a rush of energy coming from their having stood up to one of the greatest social fears. Most respondents, including other naturists whom I encountered during my fieldwork, became interested in naturism after coming across something written in a newspaper, whether it was articles about naturism or (in the case of older members) a naturist advertisement placed in a national daily newspaper. Only two respondents admitted to having been curious about taboos surrounding nudity from when they were children, and seemed to remember the transition from being allowed to wear no clothes to the moment when it suddenly became something severely frowned upon or forbidden:

> *How young?*[10]
>
> Er ... I first remember ... you know ... I suppose around six or seven ... that type of thing ... and people kind of sound at that stage, you know it's important to put on some clothes like ... you know ... [Laughing] ... er ... and cover yourself up so I suppose from that age, but it would've been something that I've been quite aware of all the way through my teens and I think, that would've been ... I suppose ever looking back, it's something that would've been quite repressive really I suppose ... the fact that you had this

10 Italics are used for my questions and remarks, and regular type for respondents' answers and comments.

> ... er ... desire that you were quite isolated with like ... you know ... it wasn't something you could talk about ... (Brian, 38)

In all the other cases, it is evident that the respondents became curious about it after the idea presented itself to them. Another thing that struck me was that, in the case of couples joining naturist clubs or those who regularly attended naturist holidays, it was always the man's idea to give it a try in the first place. It was generally the male partner who sought out more information about it and set out to convince his female partner. I shall discuss this in more detail in a moment, but let us keep to the question of the *sublimation*[11] of feelings of shame and embarrassment stemming both from their own naked bodies and from seeing the naked bodies of others. It is apparent that although the term originated among psychologists, this process of sublimation is actually part of a broader process discussed first by Norbert Elias and then developed by Cas Wouters. The account below shows how it actually takes place at each stage and how the major element in both stages is a type of thrill-seeking. The thrill is experienced differently depending on the stage of sublimation to social nudity, and develops over time to a more controlled thrill, which can best be described by the phrase 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls'.

3.2 The first naturist experiences

It was interesting to note that, when discussing their first steps into naturism, most of the participants tended to use words such as 'liberating', or 'freeing', or said that it gave them 'a sense of happiness' when they described how they felt the first time they appeared nude in front of other people. But once I urged them to give me a more detailed account of what exactly was going through their minds at the time, in some cases their answers changed dramatically:

> *Okay. So going back to the first time, back in Greece in 1984 when you decided to try it all out. Can you tell me more about it? How did you feel when you took off your clothes, what was going through your mind?*
>
> For the first ten minutes it was excruciatingly embarrassing! That's the way I felt! I felt I'm totally exposed. (Liam, 68)

Or:

11 In the Freudian meaning of the term, sublimation refers to redirection of strong instinctual and animalistic feelings towards a more socially acceptable release of some kind

So do you remember the first time you went to the resort? That was the first time you stripped in public? How did you feel? Did you feel…?

Nervous.

Nervous?

Yeah. I was very nervous walking out from the chalet. We had a chalet down in the woods. It was sort of like these chalets dotted through the woods and the main road would have, say three or four cul-de-sacs off them with a chalet at the end of them. So you could step out of your chalet in the morning and you could see from here to … maybe to that far building through the trees before you met the main road. And walking from there to the main road was very anxious as to what to expect.

From other people or from yourself?

From myself. Em … The main thoughts would be as a guy am I going to get aroused when you see other people … or what to expect when you get out there. I suppose getting aroused was probably the main thing that would be playing on your mind.

Was that a problem for you?

Em … Not once we actually got into the whole swing of it. Once we got out and got going, no … but the initial stepping out of the apartment? This sort of feeling that you're doing something wrong? You're being naughty because you're stepping out … (Luke, 48)

And also:

Em ... so going back to that first time in Portugal, were you embarrassed when you took off your clothes?

What I find is, sort of, you'd be nervous for the first thirty minutes to an hour.

Okay.

> But after that, sort of, you just relaxed. It was just the time, to, for to … just to learn to relax.
>
> *OK. What does it mean? What does it take to relax? Would you be hiding parts of your body first?*
>
> Yes.
>
> *Would you be watching who is looking at you?*
>
> Yes, yeah, a little bit, yeah. Then you just sort of lay back and sort of relax. (Greg, 53)

As we can see from the above accounts, following the build-up to the moment of baring it all in front of other people for the first time, there comes the state of sometimes extreme initial embarrassment and nervousness. This is marked by either avoidance of looking anyone in the eye – or quite the opposite: checking if anybody present is looking at others' exposed bodies. Showing one's embarrassment in the most obvious forms, such as covering one's pubic region or frantically checking for people's reactions, would be giving in to feelings of shame, therefore doubling the embarrassment. The reason is that during the intergenerational civilising processes in Europe described by Elias, people gradually learned that public display of uncomfortable and inconvenient emotions can be testing for both sides, the person who displays them and the other, on the receiving end, who in a way is forced to acknowledge the former's public humiliation and even show pity and sympathy. We live in a time when experiencing someone else's act of public humiliation is considered just as undesirable, reprehensible, or even disgusting, as the act of causing someone public humiliation itself.

Some other cases of first naturist experiences were accompanied by the thrill of nervous excitement of doing something 'naughty' and taboo, which is directly connected to the feeling of catharsis, with strong passions aroused that do not necessarily involve sexual passions at all. It is also crucial to note here Greg's mentioning that a person in this type of situation learns to 'sort of relax', which proves the point I am trying to make in describing the first, initiation, stage of becoming a naturist. This is of course directly connected to the thrill that comes with it:

> *When you took off your clothes and ... that initial moment, what was going through your head?*
>
> I think I just felt the sense of happiness really, you know … that er

> … I suppose because it would've been awkward with my wife there as well, it was something I had to take a bit of a risk like as well. But I think initially … I suppose it was quite of a rush like you know … where was like … I suppose something a bit daring and that type of thing you know like, so that would've been initially kind of part of it, and then I suppose seeing other people's reactions you know er … (Brian, 38)

The respondent admits to experiencing the 'rush' of feelings that came with being faced with his own shame and doing something daring and unorthodox. Even though these strong feelings do not last for long, it does not mean that a naturist has rid himself or herself of all embarrassment, only that they have become used to experiencing it, so that it is not experienced as a state of 'inner shock' as such any more. Then comes the part of coming to terms with the situation and rationalising the whole experience more:

> Without a doubt! It was one of the most liberating experiences going to a naturist resort or beach and actually finding that, [feigned shock] 'My God! I'm completely normal!' You know? Well, there's such a range of 'normal' but if I was ever shy about any part of my body to go along and see people of all shapes and sizes naked … there's nothing different about me to anybody. I have to say, I don't know if it's just me, but you feel much more relaxed, much more comfortable when I'm naked than if I've got a little bikini on. (Lisa, 41)

Most of the participants in the study who described how it felt to appear naked in front of other (naked) people in a public place seemed to have experienced this 'rush of energy', as if they were 'stripping off' their embarrassment first, to see what happened next. It is the daring and forbidden act that is so enticing for most naturists. Then came the feelings of 'happiness', 'freedom' and 'joy' – but the letting go, or rather learning to control embarrassment and shame, was the first and foremost step they had to take.

3.3 Naturist codes of behaviour

To ensure a smoother and more successful transition, there is quite an elaborate code of behaviour or etiquette. The intriguing part about naturist etiquette is that it is rarely spelled out to beginners and first-timers. It seems to be mainly implied, or to depend on people's good sense, which means relying on all the learned but deeply habituated inhibitions that feel like second nature to the people involved. As argued by Elias (2012a [1939]), these generally involve most of our physical bodily functions, including that of experiencing sexual arousal fol-

lowed in the case of men by erection. These instances, depending on the context of the situation, are usually shrouded in a thick coat of shameful emotions. In order to demonstrate this point, we need to note two things about naturists and their etiquette.

First, that despite the fact that the rules are not openly distributed and displayed throughout naturist resorts, or even in the naturist clubs in Ireland, most people tend to seek out – or sense that they should seek – this type of information on naturist blogs or simply ask someone in charge, before venturing out naked first:

> Um … rules. I think the only rules, one of the first times I went to Brittas, a fella came up to me and what he said was, 'Don't go beyond the river and don't go within sight of the house in that direction …' He was just sort of defining the area for me.
>
> *What about in the other countries? In Greece or ...*
>
> No, nobody has actually said any rules to me I think.
>
> *Would you sense that there are rules?*
>
> I sense rules. You gather rules.
>
> *Like what?*
>
> Like not to take off your clothes in front of somebody as they might regard it as a proposition or something.
>
> *What else?*
>
> Em … what kind of rules do you get? Em … what rules are there? I don't think there are any other rules that anyone has ever said to me but the rules that are written down everywhere … like what would happen if you get an erection and so forth.
>
> *There are rules like that?*
>
> Well, yeah. People find references to this …
>
> *Okay. Where would you see that? On the internet?*

> On the internet, yes. I don't think I've seen that anywhere else or if anybody has actually talked about such matters.
>
> *Well it would be interesting when you arrive in a hotel, 'So these are the rules …'*
>
> Yeah! I've never actually been in a nudist hotel. I've been in campsites, visited campsites, not actually camping but as a day visitor. So in that sense I'm not really … if you went to a hotel you might get some sort of rules there, I don't know. (Liam, 68)

The point I am trying to make here is that 'naturist wannabees' sense intuitively that there must be some sort of rules that govern people in this unusual social setting. The second important aspect is that the only rule that tends to be spelled out in naturist environments is the so-called 'towel rule':

> When we went for coffee I went to sit down in the chair and they said to put down the towel. [Laughs]
>
> *Who was that?*
>
> A waiter. (Tom, 64)

It would seem that unless they enquire about the rules themselves, they will find them out sooner or later in practice. I would even go as far as to say that it is possible that, for some, finding out the rules through their experiences in the naturist site forms an intrinsic part of the thrill-seeking experience. Most of the rules seem to be expected on the basis of their *common sense*, such as an ultimately important rule in the naturist setting of respecting people's privacy:

> But sure, you wouldn't dream of producing a camera anyway … You'd respect people's privacy. It was never a problem. Em … I'd read rules in say … Oasis. They have a page of rules. There's nothing in it that I thought …
>
> *What kind of rules?*
>
> Ah, just not taking photographs of people. Respecting people, basically.
>
> *It's funny, anytime I come across the rules it's always very general*

> *and broad – respecting other people. That's very … you know for someone else it might be …*
>
> Ah but they'd get the vibes! (Tom, 64)

Using a camera is not something that anyone would really consider misconduct until they found themselves in naturist environment, and then it all becomes quite obvious and logical.

> *What about that club in Ireland? Back in the 70s? Did they not tell you something about keeping eye contact or bringing a towel when you are sitting?*
>
> Well the hygiene thing is obviously … bring a towel into the bar or whatever or bring your towel to sit on. I'm sure there must have been rules like that about bringing a towel and showering and all that sort of stuff. I don't ever remember seeing rules written down, I suppose one just did what everybody else did. Yes, the business about towels, I'd forgotten about that. They have that in campsites, you know, please bring a towel if you are going to sit anywhere. (Maria, 72)

Maria, in this quotation, speaks about the rule as a matter of 'hygiene'. But the towel rule is particularly intriguing from the perspective of Elias's theory of civilising processes. It is directly linked to some of the examples he used when explaining how natural human physical functions – defecating, urinating, and breaking wind – were gradually moved behind the scenes, and how stronger feelings of repugnance towards these functions developed. The towel rule is mentioned to all newcomers in one way or another, but once it has been pointed out no one seems ever to dispute or argue why it is in place. It seems to be universally understood that sitting on a piece of furniture with one's naked backside is unhygienic, so the general message seems to be that, yes, they do accept the naked human body in all its forms, but they imply that they should not forget about the basic physicality of it either. The repugnance threshold is in place here.

Other rules apply in the naturist environment too:

> Yeah. Em … again I did Google the rules for it, like 'top ten rules' and you always bring your towel, no direct staring at people and this sort of stuff. Observe, you know, whatever the general norm is in the area you're walking into. So if you walked into a restaurant and everyone is clothed you'd be expected to put on some clothes.

> So, they were the sort of general stuff, you see, so we just followed those rules. It's second nature to carry a towel everywhere. It's easier for a guy because you walk into a non-naturist area one towel will cover you. If you are a woman you have to carry a bath towel with you. It's much bigger. So, that's just it. (Luke, 48)

Other general rules include that against staring at other people's naked bodies, which, as I shall describe later, is a significant impulse to those who are very new to naturism and are not used to seeing a multitude of naked human bodies. It is also very often practised by the 'textile' gawkers who tend to hang around or pass by the edges of the naturist area particularly slowly for the reason of feasting their eyes and satisfying their voyeuristic curiosity upon the, to them, unusual phenomenon. As the respondent Luke mentions above, over time these rules become second nature to people, which is evidence of the gradual process of learning how to be a naturist and how to enjoy it without experiencing quite as many inhibitions.

3.4 Body management and self-restraint

Also part of the same process is the question of body management. This includes not only body language, but also more physiological elements like erections that can be quite daunting for male naturists:

> *Em. Okay. So what was the biggest struggle, at times, when you had to be naked around other people? Can you think of anything?*
>
> Now I, I suppose, let's say for starters the fear of getting an erection.
>
> *Did it actually happen or is it just more the fear?*
>
> Eh, I suppose more the fear but, let's say on sort of, eh … let's say in holidays in one or two locations … yes it did.
>
> *OK.*
>
> You just learn to roll. Turn around or whatever — you just didn't want to embarrass anyone. (Greg, 53)

It does seem as if getting an erection in front of other naturists is one of the worst-case scenarios for men, but what is interesting here is how they already know the measures that need to be in place in order to deflect the temporary crisis. It is also crucial to note that Greg mentions that he is expected to turn away and hide his erection in order not to embarrass anyone, ignoring his own embarrassment in the situation. Other respondents provide more detailed accounts of how to deal with or avoid having this problem in the first place:

> *Did you ever have a problem with getting excited in front of other naked people? Did you find it problematic?*
>
> Em … no. In the very beginning I would say I possibly would get slightly excited about it. You know? I'd have to change my mind or something.
>
> *OK. So what would you do then? Would you try to hide it?*
>
> Ah no, I've never had a public erection in a naturist campsite. If my mind started to wander or something like that, I've been so long doing naturism that it doesn't really come into it at all any more. (Phil, 76)

Or an even more detailed comment from Luke:

> *So is it like some sort of unconscious block? Something you don't want to do? Is there a way of controlling it?*
>
> Yeah. You can feel … you can feel it happening. So if we're sitting in a bar I can feel something happening well, you can definitely move … If you're lying like that it's definitely obvious. If you sit like this, things get moved around a bit. You can consciously make a decision to think of something else. Once you're aware it's happening you can then consciously stop it from happening. I mean, tightening various muscles and what-not. Em … but yeah, it would be rare … well I have to say it hasn't happened to me where I get fully aroused sitting somewhere in a bar that I'd have to cover myself with a towel. (Luke, 48)

Here Luke describes the nuts and bolts, a type of protocol for handling erections in the naturist environment. It seems as if it is something that every man knows anyway, which is why it might be considered even more offensive if it takes

place in public without the man involved showing any remorse. What Luke describes next puts this rule-breaking act for naturists into a new perspective:

> *Was it ever caused by another person or was it kind of ...*
>
> Oh it was never caused … I wouldn't say that by looking at another person on the beach …
>
> *Was it maybe the situation, you kind of feel ...*
>
> It's caused by the same reason that it's caused by – when you're sitting anywhere, as in … sitting at home some time. I can have an erection here and you wouldn't know about it. I could be up five seconds, ten seconds and back down again. There's nothing sexual about it. Why it happens, that's just what the body does. Now I'm speaking personally for myself, I don't know about other guys. That could happen, sitting on a beach, eh … but eh … that's not to say that I haven't been aroused in a situation like that. There could be situations where we're sitting like this, around the table and Lisa decides to reach up with her foot and touch me and just, she'd do that just to annoy me and then go, 'You getting some beers?' and I'd say, 'Nah, you go get them …' [Laughs] and she'd do that just for fun. (Luke, 48)

The above passage shows us that many people forget that not every erection is caused by an erotic stimulus *per se*: it is a part of a healthy male physiology which normally remains hidden under one's clothes. Yet in the context of a naturist site, the only way of interpreting this seems to be as *sexually predatory*, even if that is not the intention at all; that is why so much emphasis is placed on its complete eradication, or at least on dealing with it politely. We could go as far as to say that it is now considered a physiological function that belongs in the same category as urinating, defecating and vomiting; in other words it belongs solely behind the scenes of public social life.

Let us move on to other aspects of the initiation stage which naturists need to master before reaching the next phase of becoming a mature naturist. If we go back to our respondent Luke and his first-time naturist trial, we shall be able to see some other forms of body language:

> *I see. So when you went ... actually got to the part where the rest of the people were, did you feel, you know, a bit awkward and try to cover but not really cover?*

> Yeah, I think on the first morning I was wearing, I think the first morning I actually walked up wearing shorts and Lisa just had, eh … it wasn't as warm as we hoped it was, Lisa was wearing a zip-up type of fleece. That was all she was wearing. When we got there I remember Lisa unzipped and that was it. It took me about … an hour before I took the shorts off.
>
> *Did you feel as though your body language was slightly different in the beginning?*
>
> Yes, yeah … it's, eh …
>
> *Were you conscious of how you sit?*
>
> Yes.
>
> *How would you sit then?*
>
> Well, I mean, as a guy when you sit down you have to — well guys generally don't close their legs when they sit down because there is something in the way. So, I mean, now … you either have to lift that away or push it down and that's just the way it is. So, em … If you're lying down or standing everything hangs normally. When you sit, because your legs are there, everything either gets pushed or squeezed and just looks different. (Luke, 48)

What is evident here is the gradual process of getting used to or embracing one's own embarrassment in the act of stripping off one's clothes in public. Sometimes, for some people like Luke here, they need to go through certain phases before feeling comfortable with their own nudity, especially in relation to everyone else present at the time. We can see from this participant's testimony that initially he struggled to embrace his own body language; he said it was different from what it would have been if he were dressed. He noticed he had to move and sit in a certain way while in the buff. It took some adjustment and certainly did not come *naturally* to him, as some of the respondents would claim:

> *Did you feel as if you have to ... your body language was a little different than if you were wearing clothes? You have to move a different way or sit in a specific way?*
>
> No, no. Not at all, not at all. Bear in mind Barbara I've been doing

> it for a long time. It's quite natural for me now.
>
> *I know, that's why I'm going back to the very first experience …*
>
> The very first experience … no, it … I suppose I was slightly excited or slightly embarrassed or slightly wondering about it. It suddenly became quite normal and natural and nobody seemed to take any … upset about it. (Phil, 76)

Thus, in cases of some more experienced and older naturists who have been practising naturism for decades, it seems as if it is hard for them to remember their feelings from the first time, and possibly they had let go of these sometimes uncomfortable memories. I also sensed that some of the participants in the study discussed their experiences in a rather boastful way and possibly chose to describe some of their feelings in a more *cavalier* way than it possibly could have been:

> That would have been our first time, but at the same time, like, Hannah had always gone topless when she was abroad. Even sometimes in Ireland if the beach was quiet. We had talked about it before, you know, it wasn't sort-of, shock or a big culture change if you know what I mean. (Greg, 53)

And:

> I suppose we have the advantage that I was brought up in the, sort of, Presbyterian culture, so – we're not actually Roman Catholic. We're probably a little bit, sort of, we're a little bit … we're not as conservative thinking. I was going to say we'd be more liberal thinking. (Greg, 53)

The different forms of body language naturally concern female naturists too:

> Yeah … eh… [Laughs] I do know what you mean! I suppose I never actually feel myself consciously moving any way differently but yeah, you wouldn't bend over to pick something up and moon someone, you'd tend to crouch down. Em … I wouldn't be so … I wouldn't feel as though I was moving anyway differently. (Lisa, 41)
>
> *What about the way you sit. Would you sit with your legs open?*

> No, I probably wouldn't. Then again sometimes, I often like to sit with one leg up over the other, so you know, I would tend to sit whatever way I felt comfortable … yeah I would be a bit more aware. I'm not going to leave my legs gaping apart!
>
> *What about seeing other people? How would they ... ?*
>
> Some people would now, you'd be like 'Jaysus! Would you look at yer wan!' [Laughs]
>
> *Men or women?*
>
> Well, with a women you'd be much more inclined to notice her sitting with her legs open, with a fella … fellas tend to sit that way anyway. It's not so obvious. (Lisa, 41)

And then there are also other elements noticeable about different forms of body language, such as touching or body proximity:

> *So you'd keep in mind that it's not really something you can do in the company of other people?*
>
> Well, it's not really something I would do anyway, you know? But yeah, I would be a bit more aware of touching somebody when they are naked than if they had clothes on. Yeah, yeah.
>
> *That's why I was asking about the whole body proximity, how you actually are around other people and what if there was dancing going on in some club?*
>
> I'm not sure if I'd be very comfortable about dancing [Laughs] because there's …
>
> *Not with other people ... but even with Luke?*
>
> Em … well again, I couldn't be brushing up against Luke if he was naked because he'd get an erection. [Laughs] Do you know what I mean? So practically that doesn't really work! (Lisa, 41)

Or:

> You'd be careful about touching people. If you were going in through a door in front of me, with clothes on, I might put my hand on your back. [Laughs] I wouldn't as easily …
>
> *I see.*
>
> That would be just in case you'd feel uncomfortable.
>
> *So it seems that you're very aware ...*
>
> You would be a bit … aware.
>
> *That's a bit stressful!*
>
> No. No, it isn't a big thing, but I want you to understand it. I'm only trying to think of the things that I do more automatically than you'd think. (Tom, 64)

And then there are rules about maintaining eye contact with other people with whom they interact:

> *But do you feel that you are more concerned about the eye contact than looking at any other parts of the body?*
>
> Em …
>
> *Are you more aware of that? That's the rule?*
>
> You're more aware of it on a one-to-one basis or in a conversation. If there were six of us sitting around here in a bar having a drink you'd be more aware that you are making eye contact as opposed to not …
>
> *Would you be consciously or subconsciously stopping yourself looking below eye contact?*
>
> You'd be … Yes. You'd be conscious that you wouldn't be looking below. Yeah. (Luke, 48)

And:

> In a sense yes, I mean, you direct your eyes. Even though you might notice the rest of the body you would … if you were talking to them you keep eye contact, yes.
> (Liam, 68)

What is discernible here so far is that there are certain sets of rules that not only serve as an element of self-policing, but also prepare for – or rather are critical elements in – the next stage of learning how to enjoy naturism.

3.5 The established stage: becoming a 'real naturist'

In order to emphasise still more the main differences between the initiation and the established stages of the process of becoming a naturist, I would like to refer to a remark in Warren's article. He uses it in a slightly different context, but it also happens to fit my two categories quite well. The words 'the first is a task, the other a recreation' (1933: 172) encapsulate the gist of my argument in this chapter. In order to learn to enjoy naturism a person needs first to come to terms with his or her own feelings of shame, and move past them in some way – although it is impossible ever to overcome them completely, which is what can make one vulnerable in a situation when someone is not following the rules of mutual consideration. Once the rules for practising naturism become more like second nature to a person, and following them is more intuitive or habitual, then he or she can finally trust himself or herself, other people present, and the environment they find themselves in, finally to relax and enjoy the recreational side of it. This is the second and last stage of becoming an established naturist, who can clearly draw the boundaries between what is allowed and what is not, and who knows how to get away with something without causing any offence. In Eliasian terms, we could call it a *mimetic* form of leisure or pastime, where the people involved relate to 'real-life' situations, in this case trying to act as naturally as if everyone were wearing clothes. Or at least they are able to keep up the pretence that it is 'safe', because they are clad in their own strict rules of decency and modesty. It does not go quite as far as poking the proverbial bear, but is more like standing in front of it behind the glass pane. In the words of Elias and Dunning,

> Comparison between the excitement generated in 'real-life' situations and that aroused by leisure events shows similarities as well as differences clearly enough. … In serious, non-mimetic excitement, people are liable to lose control over themselves and to become a threat, both to themselves and to others. Mimetic excitement is socially and personally without serious danger and can have a cathartic effect; but

> the latter can transform itself into the former. Examples are excited football crowds or pop fans who get out of hand. (2008 [1986]: 62)

In the case of naturism, this is represented through balancing the risks of being ostracised in one's own community (at some point in time anyway), against the risk of crossing the line and losing face among fellow naturists. This balancing act is what maintains the established naturist's attraction to this type of recreation. Despite what naturists may say and think, it is simply impossible to go back in time and overwrite all the years and generations of instilled feelings of propriety, modesty and shame, and return to some sort of make-believe state of a 'natural' and 'pure' phase of contentment in operating naked in a social setting. But, according to the theory of informalisation, it is possible for them to reach a stage when enough trust is established for them to play at walking a tightrope around boundaries laid down through centuries of formalising processes in our western societies. In other words, what was forbidden before is slowly and only to certain extent permitted to happen. How that happens I shall explain in chapter 7 on taboo.

This process of transitioning between the initiation and established stages of becoming a naturist also poses other questions. Since becoming a 'true' naturist is a process of controlled decontrolling of emotions and their controls, where does it leave the notion of the (naked) body itself? Shilling and Mellor refer to this development of 'corporeal techniques, skills and dispositions' (2007: 535) as *body pedagogics*. Although we cannot directly adopt the logic of Heidegger's 'technological culture' advocated by these authors, more attractive is the idea of the 'fading away' of the body as an *object*, which happens wherever one is caught up deeply in an activity. This directly links to Leder's (1990) concept of *dys-appearing* body. Several studies – such as Nettleton (2013) on fell walking, Wacquant (2004) on boxing, or Crossley (2004) on circuit training – could be reconceptualised in terms of 'body pedagogics', but it is Hochschild's (1983) famous study of emotion management among flight attendants that is most useful here. Thus, when naturists move from one stage of engagement to another, forms of routinised body and emotional maintenance occur similar to those observed by Hochschild. Not only do they become able to control their feelings of embarrassment and shame, but they can also manage more physiological bodily mechanisms. In the later, established stage, discipline, both emotional and bodily, allows for a sense of the enjoyment of nakedness within a naturist context.

What constitutes being a 'real naturist', as I have called it? The easiest way to answer that question is by giving examples of people behaving in a way that is unacceptable and deviant within naturist circles. It is important to note that every participant in my study had experienced, or at least heard of, breaches of naturist etiquette at some point during their years of practising naturism:

Did you have any experience of ... someone was coming on to you?

Yes.

In a naturist situation?

Yes.

Can you tell me about it?

Eh, it was a couple who, again, I think the naturist part of it for them was only the fact that they could be with naked people. It had nothing to do with enjoying lying on the beach naked. They had access to naked people. (Luke, 48)

Even just looking at the choice of the respondent's words in this passage, it is clear that that he felt deceived and used. Here, the swinger couple were portrayed as offenders, almost as predators – 'they had access to naked people'. He implies that such people join naturist clubs only to seek access to potential sexual thrills and to people who would be willing to 'experiment' with them. As the story continues, we can see how much more vulnerable he felt during this incident:

Okay ...

[Chuckle] It's easier to, I mean … if – they were swingers, so it's easier to …

Where was it?

It was actually in a friend's house.

In Ireland?

In Ireland. There was six of us having dinner and she started to feel me under the table [Laughs].

Did anybody else notice?

No, no.

What did you do?

> Em … well I had to wait until things subsided before I could move to a different chair. Now she was quite drunk that night and things went rapidly downhill after that. A taxi was called and she was sent off with her boyfriend, but … they would be known to latch on to another couple to swap. (Luke, 48)

We can clearly see the vulnerability of this man, and we could even go as far as to say that he was sexually assaulted. If he had been wearing clothes he would probably have reacted differently and most likely confronted her in front of everyone and disclosed her actions. But because he could not hide his erection under clothes, he had to endure his own embarrassment and helplessness instead. More theoretically, one might say that normally a man's erection is seen, symbolically and historically, as a sign of virility, power or even (especially in feminist theory) violence. Most likely the swinger woman interpreted the fact that Luke displayed physical signs of an erection as meaning that he was actually enjoying it. Then the story unravels further:

> Em … it's very uncomfortable, it's very awkward, especially the other people that we were with. I think that … I mean … em … when she put her hand on me and started playing with me basically, em … I got aroused. Now, if it was only the four of us I would have no problem standing up and saying I'm sorry I'm not into that, go away, but because there was another couple with us too, who I knew would have been mortified. Now, I more or less had to shimmy away and, say, wait until things subside before I could make any move. (Luke, 48)

The respondent felt completely trapped by the situation he was in. Looking at this story from another angle, here is a short account by his wife Lisa, who was present at the table at the time this incident took place:

Did you see that coming?

> No, no. I really didn't. I really didn't believe that they would behave like that in somebody's home. I know they did that, I knew they did it … They'd go to Cap D'Agde[12] and do all sorts of stuff

12 Cap d'Agde is one of the biggest naturist/nudist resorts located in the south of France, famous for having a section on the beach where all sorts of sexual behaviours are allowed. There is also a bigger family section there which still attracts naturists from around the Europe.

> but I wasn't expecting it in, you know, in the setting that we were in. Obviously *they* felt that that was the thing.
>
> *How did you feel about it when they actually ...*
>
> Horrible! Dirty! Dirty! It was absolutely *awful*. I couldn't *believe* they would do it, it absolutely ruined the whole night …
>
> *Did they actually just ask you if you ... or was it just hitting on you and making ...*
>
> Oh the girl had a hold of Luke's willy! We were sitting at the dining table and she was saying, 'Keep your hands on the table, just keep talking!' Luke nearly died. He didn't know what to do! He nearly died; the whole thing was just so uncomfortable. I … he … he, you know? Started putting his hands on my legs, I pulled away, pushed him off, but…
>
> *Did Luke push her away?*
>
> No, he didn't know what to do. I didn't know what was going on. He was sitting opposite me and I went to the loo and he came charging after me to the toilet! I'm like, 'What's with you? You've never come to the toilet with me before!' and he's like, 'Lisa, Lisa, Lisa ….' (Lisa, 41)

The 'real naturists' can be quite strict in drawing a moral line. When these lines are being blurred, or blatantly crossed as is evident in this case, they find it threatening and offensive to them and to their reputation as a group. The implied code of morality and naturist manners can be quite specific about where the lines are drawn. I suppose it depends on individual inclination, but in general when acts or matters may potentially be interpreted as sexual, one is no longer regarded as acting as a 'naturist' but rather as an 'exhibitionist'. These incidents are quite rare, but it also means that naturists must always remain vigilant for this type of behaviour. When Luke was trying to rationalise his story, he mentioned that the smaller the gathering, the greater the chance that the atmosphere becomes too intimate; this risk also depends on whether it takes place in people's homes or in a more open and public location. This reminds me of one of my own observations, which I described in the previous chapter – the incident at the Valentine's Day party when one of the guests kept making physical contact with my body. It raises the question of whether it is crucial for naturism to be more

social and public, because that provides another level of surveillance for people who engage in it. The next example, though, shows that this is not always the case either.

Respondent Greg told me a story that took place under the INA's watch during one of the naturist camping trips in the West of Ireland, where mostly single male members attended, accompanied by some couples from Club Nautica. The camping site was run by the open-minded Doyle family, whose level of tolerance was emphasised to me by the respondent, who told me that that in the past they had accommodated 200 Hell's Angels. The Doyle family was also no stranger to catering for naturist guests:

> *What kind of problems?*
>
> Em … the lady who, Mrs Doyle, at one stage she was offering massages. She trained as a masseuse. And so, that was fine. So, lots of us, because we got on well with her or whatever, we'll all sign up. We'll all have a massage or whatever. That worked out well but some of the INA guys, sort of, bothered her or annoyed her so they did. It was sexual comments or whatever.
>
> *So do you reckon that those INA, the single men, did they join looking for some sexual activities?*
>
> I don't know. I have a feeling that some of them did, but … it's very hard to know because the problem is that first of all you don't know anyone. You don't know the guys. It's unfair to make that judgement just based on … let's say, one experience. Sometimes, let's say, there can be a healthy side of group culture as well, as a group gets together they can, let's say, promote positive aspects and, if there isn't sort of, not as many meetings or events then perhaps … let's say, some of the darker thoughts or not as nice aspects might emerge or someone's attitude could be different. Had it been a larger group it might have been influenced differently. (Greg, 53)

This is a very good example of how, once you remove and then suddenly reintroduce bodily contact into the naturist milieu, the moral lines may become slightly distorted or blurred, which may cause more incidents. It becomes clearer that for a naturist *movement* to function properly, from the very beginning of the process of socialisation into their environment the no-sexual-behaviour rule needs to be introduced and strictly obeyed. It is a good test of Wouters's (2007)

thesis about second-nature behaviour, but at the same time it goes to show how fickle this boundary is. It is as if in the case of 'third-nature behaviour', even though it is under control, second-nature feelings and emotions can easily be accessed and activated, which is probably part of the appeal in the first place. Since breaking the most important rule of naturism would be shameful and offensive, sufficient levels of self-control are employed here, so that gazing at the naked bodies of other people does not trigger any unwanted sexually charged sentiments.

Another example shows how vigilant naturists tend to be towards people who break the rules or are about to break them:

> *How does it happen? What do they do ... to make you think that?*
>
> I suppose you walk too kinda close to people, or … you know, acting, behaviour that just wouldn't be … kind of normal, come to feel you know you're up to something, you know it catches your attention and you're wondering what are they doing now, you know, or …
>
> *Is it the way they look at other people?*
>
> Er … you do see people; I mean you do see other people … I would only think of one particular occasion, when there was a kind of family there I suppose with friends and stuff like that and they would share an area … and … this other man was staring at his wife, and again his wife would be in a swimsuit like you know, but he would walk around the huts and kind of looking in, I suppose … where you wouldn't be able to see it normally. And you're kind of going: 'he may think he's being very discreet, but he's not!'. Like everybody knows what he's up to, and then … the camera kind of there like you know, and he walked past them and kind of 'click!'. They actually approached him and er … gave out to him, said it's inappropriate and all that type of thing …
>
> *So he was naked himself when he was taking the picture of them ...*
>
> Yeah … (Brian, 38)

It is quite clear that experienced naturists can tell immediately if a person is new to the practice. First they are able to assess the situation and the newcomer, and if a person seems genuine in his or her actions and intentions, they feel they can

relax again. However, if the person is new to naturism and is acting in a suspicious manner, it seems also to be picked up very quickly. Brian adds something that is essential to understanding naturist practice:

> *When you say privacy, I mean if you're obviously in a public place, like let's say in the beach, you said you were at the beach ...so ... what exactly does it involve?*
>
> Er … I mean … I suppose you're respecting people's space you know … er … just because you don't have clothes on it doesn't mean that other social rules don't come into play like … (Brian, 38)

Brian hit the nail on the head here: just because people decide to shed their clothes, it does not mean that all standard forms of propriety have been abandoned and that there is some sort of form of invitation to illicit behaviour. This is yet another example that demonstrates that the codes of behaviour in relation to naked bodies change according to context. Sometimes being naked changes the code, and sometimes it does not. Until people recognise and make sense of the subtleties of these contexts, naturism will remain sexually confusing to them. I suppose there are, and possibly always will be, cases of people in this environment who will choose to ignore the rules and attend a naturist site for a quick and cheap thrill. It is a risk that open naturist sites and the people who attend them have to take.

3.6 The naked body versus the sexual body

The connection between the initiation and established stages is the process through which attitudes towards the naked body undergo a radical shift from being mainly associated with sex – which itself was the product of long-term processes in which the naked human body became eroticised – towards more sexually neutral and controlled attitudes and reactions. Now, even though erotic feelings or sentiments may be experienced, the person does not usually act on them. It is understandable that this transition is marked by tensions, which the beginner naturist learns to resolve in moving from the initiation stage towards the more established stage of practising naturism. Liam provides an insight into this:

> I think that when we are living in a society where we've grown up to associate nudity with sex there … it may be impossible to put it

> one hundred per cent out of your mind. Um … I think that some people, sort of, take advantage of that to bring a sexual element into it. I don't think it's intrinsic. It's a matter of custom. I would find that I might have some sort of sexual feelings on a sparsely populated nudist beach and if there were a lot of naked people around, a crowd of naked people around, I don't feel anything like that. You know? I think the actual presence of other people reduces the sexual element I feel.
>
> *Really? Why is that?*
>
> I don't know! [Laughs] I don't know how it's … I don't know what the reason for it is. It's counter-intuitive I know but that's the sort of way I …
>
> *Do you feel you have to restrain yourself and control yourself when you are around other naked men?*
>
> I would feel … eh … I would feel more of a temptation, shall we say, if there were one or two than if there were a whole crowd.
>
> *So you think there is something about intimacy coming into it?*
>
> Yeah … um … maybe it is that sex is something you do with only one person, well, most of the time for most types! (Liam, 68)

Here Liam stresses a very important aspect of practising naturism: that having a lot of naked people around on a naturist site automatically strips the atmosphere of the eroticism that would normally surround a naked body. There is something about having an intimate number of people in the gathering that puts the 'risk' of eroticism to the front of the stage again. To think of it now, except for a trusted and well-established friendship between people or those who are partners already, I have not heard of many very small naturist gatherings. It becomes clearer to me now that when people arrive at naturist house-parties, they tend not to take off their clothes right away, but seem to wait for more people to arrive. This is something that did not occur to me while making observations in the field. It is also one of the reasons given by our respondent Luke for the incident of sexual assault. There is a link to the Foucauldian notion of surveillance: there is always a chance that someone might be looking at the person involved, and very little if any room for breaches of the code of behaviour. That is one aspect of it, but there are also more internalised mechanisms of self-restraint and self-policing that

seem to be at play in a naturist site, and here – in a fairly free-ranging part of our conversation – Liam continues trying to explain exactly how it works:

> *Do you like to look at other naked bodies when you are at the beach?*
>
> Yes, but … um … I sort of feel that it's something that needs to be done discreetly because … well, both because I think it's a bit rude and also that I really don't want to investigate that aspect of it. I feel that it's preferable to switch yourself into a non-sexual mode, you know?
>
> *Oh … so there is a switch?*
>
> Ah … yes I suppose there is. Yes, I suppose …
>
> *I'm just interested in the mechanics behind that. Of all the people I've been interviewing either say yes or no; you know … I don't really believe them when they say no. [Laughs]*
>
> [Laughs] Yeah!
>
> *You don't have to go into any specific details, I just want to know how you calm yourself down or reduce that … I mean, especially for men it's difficult …*
>
> Well at my age it's not too difficult! [Laughs] The possibilities sort of diminish! Um …
>
> *But there is this aspect I suppose – if there are other naked people … the human body can be very beautiful.*
>
> Yeah.
>
> *There is something nice about it, just to look at it.*
>
> Yeah.
>
> *But that touches borderline on the sexual aspect of it.*
>
> Yes. Um … I think I just find – part of the liberation from wearing

clothes is the liberation of not paying attention to other people in that way! It's almost like reverting to childhood where it wouldn't bother you.

Can you really do that though?

I don't know that you can really do it, but there is an aspect of that.

I suppose when people say 'I'm a naturist' or 'I'm a nudist', it is natural. Our sexuality is natural.

Yes. Um … [Silence] I … I prefer to stay away … I suppose I prefer to stay away from that aspect, you know? Ah … less, find it less complicated to get involved in and um … you notice something and, you know … if it was … if it was, um … if you really followed it up it would, you would be going down a particular road. So you say, 'Right, I don't want to go there!'
(Liam, 68)

It is clear that before attending a naturist beach, a person involved must make a conscious choice of intentions for being there, and then in the process learn the technicalities – the rules and ways of dealing with embarrassing aspects of their own bodies.

Okay, well what I'm trying to get at is [something] that you are probably familiar with: they talk about naturism and are trying to get new members and they always emphasise the fact that naturism is completely non-sexual and non-erotic.

I would agree with that.

You would agree with that? You really think you can separate sexuality from being nude.

Not completely, no. You can't completely separate it but I think that you can decide, OK, I'm looking at another naked person – male or female – and I could be interested in looking and saying oh that's interesting or nice or whatever. I think that would be a juvenile thing and I'd say 'come on, this is not proper nudism, you're just amusing yourself' or whatever!

So which one is not proper nudism?

If you were deciding that you were going to be voyeuristic about socialising with somebody else. (Phil, 76)

All the above excerpts show us how, in the transition from the initiation to the established stage, naturists learn to look at a body not necessarily in some completely new way, but more to switch off or silence that part of their consciousness that is responsible for acting upon the sexual impulses.

There is that element in Ireland about sexuality and things like that. A lot of those, particularly if they are sort of 30 and 40, a lot of it has to do with religion and this inculcated thing about naked, that it's bad to be naked, you know? So they would go … and I have to say, I would say it in front of him, I think there is an element of voyeurism in Phil's interest in naturism. He likes looking at naked ladies and I suppose that's what men do. He says that's what makes the world go around. I said, 'Really now, you're verging on voyeurism' and he said, 'That's what naturism is – to see and be seen …' I said, 'Well that's not how I see it.' (Maria, 72)

The important issue is whether people actually do look at each other while naked or not, and to what extent it is motivated by sexual curiosity:

Well, you always … a girl looks at a girl and there is always that sort of – it's no different than two women arriving into a wedding and one looks at the others' dress to see who is wearing the best dress and … I always say, the girls look at the girls.

So what about when you look at other women ... why do you look?

It's natural. Yeah. It's eh … it's … it's a single most compelling urge that we have is to procreate and eh … and whether it's a design of nature or not but a guy has to look at a girl and find her attractive and vice versa. So, em … you're not going to get over that urge even if you're walking down the beach naked. But in saying that … Em … we don't go walking down the beach just to look at women. You know what I mean?

You're not trying to make it obvious anyway!

No. (Luke, 48)

More significantly, here we have a very good example of informalisation or 'third-nature behaviour'. Luke admits to looking at other women, says that one cannot get over this urge, and yet he is able to have enough self-restraint not to show any signs of sexual arousal. Can we say that it would not have been the case, 100 years ago, in the light of the theory of civilising processes? Down the centuries, nudity was not necessarily a sexual trigger for a sexual act. It was not until the nineteenth or twentieth centuries that the naked human body became sexualised to the extent of triggering immediate sexual arousal. If we take into account what Edward Shorter argues in his book *Written in the Flesh: History of Desire* (2005), the way we make love today, or what he calls 'total body sex', is a modern invention. Finding the breasts or other parts of the body titillating during sexual intercourse seems to be a modern phenomenon. It shows yet again that it is a much more complex issue than we might think.

If someone was good looking?

I certainly appreciate it to be honest with you! Yeah … but er … I don't think I'd get aroused or anything like that. No I don't … I don't … er …

Only because of the moment that you know you'd be seen or is it because you ...

I just don't think it's …

... it would kind of be obvious that you'd be aroused so you'd stop yourself from doing that somehow?

No … er … I'd say intimacy is something different, isn't it? It's touch, it's something that's shared … it's er … I … I don't think that sex is a bad thing either [laughter] like, you know? But it's not something I'd … I don't think I'd be one of those people that'd feel they should do it outside on the beach with other people around there, or anything like that, you know? So it's just the situation doesn't … it doesn't really arise, you know? But I notice people walking down the beach and they are good looking and would have a good body, of course I would yeah … yeah … I would … freely … you know … I suppose kind of admit that. But

> I would probably do the same … if they were in the swimsuit as well like, you know? (Brian, 38)

The problem of looking at other people's naked bodies is yet another example of third-nature behaviour. Is it always sexual, though? Is it possible that we look, because we are curious by nature, and we compare, admire and very often simply 'see through' other people's naked bodies? We tend to do the same when they are dressed too, and for very similar if not quite the same reasons – to compare, admire, mock and so on:

> It's funny, I tend not to be really conscious of other people, unless of course they make me feel uncomfortable and they are just staring or something. It's something Luke has said to me; he said when you walk on the naturist beach the men look at the women and the women look at the women. The women are checking other women out.
>
> *Have you noticed that yourself?*
>
> I tend not to. I tend to be away in a world of my own and I don't tend to pay a huge amount of attention to people. The odd time I will. Luke would give me a poke and say, 'Have a look at her …' [Laughs] Or you're walking up and down the beach looking at women's breasts — false, false, real, false [Laughs]. (Lisa, 41)

Or:

> *Is it more of a challenge to figure someone out?*
>
> I don't know why, it's just … I don't look at … I mean Phil looks at every part of every body. He could describe to you the ladies …
>
> *Why are you not looking at any parts?*
>
> I don't know. I just don't look at people's parts when I'm naturist. I mean, I don't gaze at faces fixedly but it wouldn't be a big thing with me to know if they'd big boobs or small boobs or whether they had a large penis or a small penis or whatever.
>
> *Do you notice people looking at you then?*

> Not really, no. No. I kind of feel, as I said, they would look and look away because I'm rather large. (Maria, 72)

'Inspectionism' is what Howard C. Warren (1933) called curiosity regarding normally concealed parts of people's bodies, and he also believed that it is an utterly exhibitionist trait. As much as I am fond of the term 'inspectionism', I do not subscribe to Warren's naïve rationale: that once what he calls the 'shock-response' disappears there is no room for curiosity or inspectionism, and the naked human body gains the character of being uniformly bland or uninteresting. It is wishful thinking on Warren's part that makes him want to believe that because everyone in the gathering 'shares' their nudity, and as a rule the experience is supposed to be deprived of its sexual elements, this means that the human body in all its forms becomes somewhat uninteresting and that looking at other naked people is a sign of exhibitionism. I recognise his wish to believe this is the case, because I experienced the same infatuation with the idea when I first started to attend naturist meetings. Now I see more clearly that such a convenient form of denial is sometimes needed in order to ease into the situation better. It too is part of the process of becoming a naturist.

What my study shows, especially the interviews, is that 'inspectionism' is not necessarily a negative aspect of naturist practice, but more a realistic one. What we can gather from all the accounts quoted above from the participants – the fact that people look at each other's private parts in their own discreet ways – might over time give it the character of a mere everyday comparison of people that they do anyway. How many times do we find ourselves noticing or staring at other people's hair, teeth or changes in complexion, without really classifying it as voyeuristic in any way? The question is, then, whether it is possible ever to look at what used to be considered taboo and see it without any sentiment.

3.7 The conflict of identity

One of the most striking aspects that surfaced during my study of naturists in Ireland was how they perceived themselves, or, more precisely, how they identified themselves as a group. It is hard to call them a 'movement' as such, especially now. But there is a lot more to be said about their sense of identity and the reasoning behind it. When I first started asking about the terminology used by nudists, little did I know that there would be such great discrepancies among terms such as 'naturism', 'nudism' and 'exhibitionism'. I used to think that there must be some kind of philosophical differences between the choices of these affiliations, but this seems to be less of a philosophical than a geographical issue. It turns out that the European branch of naturism prefers the term 'naturism' to 'nudism', and the opposite is the case in American branches. Moreover, both

groups tend to use the other term (nudism for Europe, and naturism for the US) to describe the more frowned upon 'version' of their practice – exhibitionism. Here are some of the accounts I came across in my interviews:

> I prefer the term naturism. I was thinking about this the other day, why do I like it more than nude. I think because nude has, for me, a connotation of erotic pictures and things like that – pornography more than anything else. Whereas naturism seems that you are a part of nature which is why I prefer the word. Some people use nudism. (Maria, 72)

And:

> What I've sort of gathered over the years is that the two terms are used in Britain and in America in opposite ways.
>
> *Are they?*
>
> That's my impression. In Britain the nudist is the more extreme form, if you like. The sort of person who would prefer to turn on the heating rather than put some clothes on. In America that tends to be a naturist. Naturist tends to be used for that more extreme form. (Liam, 68)

Or a slightly more detailed description of the differences between the two:

> No I would, I would put those down as nudism. Obviously naturism would be, sort of, more the enjoyment of being naked but at the same time there is elements of the other two. Like I'm not, sort of, pure, very puristic, there is elements. It would be wrong to think there wasn't elements of, sort of, let's say, how can I say it? Let's say … appreciation of the human body and also too there has to be, some … there is always still some element of, let's say sexual intrigue and desire. Even as naturist. That … It's not … let's say it's not actively promoted whereas in the other … with, sort of, nudism it could easily be promoted more. Yeah, yeah, yeah. What I'm trying to distinguish, sort of, let's say, naturism as enjoying being nude. Nearly like living a normal life, the other, you know … you can make industries of both of the other aspects,

> you know, that's potentially sort of … the arts is an industry of itself and sort of, em … let's say … obviously there is a sex industry and there's a p-pornography industry as well that feeds on the sex industry. I-I-If eh … it's … eh … I'm tying myself up in knots here. [Laughs] (Greg, 53)

The way Greg tried to explain how he understands and defines both nudism and naturism left him not only slightly bewildered, but also nervous about spelling out that he does not seem to believe in the complete separation of nudity from sex. He is aware that being open about it might cause more nervousness on the part of his fellow members of the club, who openly proclaim the complete separation between the two. Does it make him an exhibitionist? Not in the sense they understand it, simply because a line is drawn between acknowledgement of something as sexually appealing, or potentially sexually appealing, and never actively pursuing any form of sexual tension release.

> *How do they define exhibitionism then?*
>
> There is the vast bulk of people who, we all like to think of ourselves as being in the main bulk of people, who will leave your apartment in the morning, you go naked, if you come into the restaurant or into a bar you will, it's just a standard holiday but without clothes, then there is the exhibitionists who are at the other end of it.
>
> *Who are the exhibitionists?*
>
> The exhibitionists will mainly try and do something to catch your attention. They mainly want you to look at them.
>
> *Like what?*
>
> Em … such as body piercings. You'll have either women with large nipple rings or other body jewellery or tattoos or something like that and these are the people who would also be more prone to touching each other in public.
>
> *Sexually you mean?*
>
> Yes.
>
> *Oh right.*

> No I don't mean, it won't be very overt but it could be something as simple as a guy reaching over and grabbing his girlfriend's boob and saying, 'Here! Get me a drink!' Or something like that. Whereas we wouldn't necessarily – I would never touch Lisa in that way, in public. So there are different types of people who go naturist on the beaches. (Luke, 48)

There is a clear-cut distancing of naturists from the so-called exhibitionists here, which mainly means dismissing all sexual aspects of the naked body by one group and the opposite by the other. Here Luke continues with some examples of how it works in practice:

> There is … there is people who will go to the beach for the sexual part of it and assume that just because you've got people who are naked there is going to be a swingers' attitude to it, or a sexual attitude to it. Yes. Em … If you want to walk around – I mean, Cap d'Agde was, again there are unwritten rules in Cap d'Agde. The beach is the beach and we've been on the beach, ten thousand people on the beach all enjoying the sun. In the dunes is where people will have sex openly. People will sit there and watch them. So if you don't want to see that you don't go into the dunes. That's just the unwritten rule. If you look at any particular type of fetish you'll find it up there. You'll find guys walking around in complete rubber suits with just their penis hanging out. Em … There was one group of women there one time, all dressed in the studded leather biker gear but the boobs are hanging out and instead of wearing trousers its only like a bikini brief and one of them had … now these women were probably about 50 years of age and one of them had, like, a 20 year-old guy on a dog chain. He was walking around on his hands and knees. And he wasn't allowed to sit on the chair. (Luke, 48)

The group dynamic is curious here too: naturists tend to compare themselves with what is considered the most shocking group. Hence their almost moralising tone when they discuss exhibitionism. Even though they themselves would be most likely labelled exhibitionists by the broader society, they are able to neutralise the label by contrasting themselves with (in this case) those people who come to naturist sites and flaunt their sexuality through sexually explicit behaviour and 'dress codes'. These two groups, even though in the same area, manage easily to separate themselves from each other, and the whole infrastructure manages to cater for everyone's needs. Putting it in more theoretical terms, it shows

how society as an 'organic' structure deals with 'abnormal' or unusual forms of identity or behaviour. It is 'safer' to keep them separated and congregated in a specially designated space, where they are not a threat to the rest of the society, than to practise what they do among people in general. The important thing that needs mentioning here is that once they enter the 'abnormal section', they can freely move back to the 'normal section' if they choose to play 'by the rules' again. They are no longer stigmatised and vilified as dangerous.

As we can see, exhibitionists belong to an outsider group within the naked communities; at least that is how it is perceived and understood by the naturists in this study. Where does this leave us in terms of placing naturist practice in a mimetic context?

3.8 The transparency issue

One of the ways of interpreting the issue of transparency among the Irish naturist community is by looking at how important it was to them to keep their practice secret, or to share it only with selected and trusted people.

We can look at this as the most obvious symptom of protecting one's privacy and reputation within the broader community. I would expect the secrecy and levels of apprehension to be more apparent when practising naturism in Ireland than elsewhere, because Irish naturists would not like to be judged for practising naturism by people who were opinion-formers within their communities and their work environment:

> *Like if you bumped into somebody ... let's say, you were at the beach in Ireland and you ran into someone from work, who is actually dressed ...*
>
> Yeah! That would be uncomfortable, especially I mean … especially in my profession … er … that's a big problem, 'cos I wouldn't like … anything to be found on the internet or people to know that type of interest, because that could interfere with my record or my professional … image, you know? Er … it could be quite damaging, so … I wouldn't like that at all! Ahm, people from work as well … yeah … you wouldn't like people talking or anything like that, do you know? (Brian, 38)

Is it possible, though, that protecting their own privacy and reputation is only one side of this coin? Is it possible that the secrecy surrounding naturist practice in Ireland makes the whole experience more thrilling and more appealing?

Perhaps Ireland in its cultural transition is still in the process of embracing this unusual type of pastime and accepting various aspects of human body that were blanked out by the Catholic Church through decades of Irish history. We cannot ignore one important fact here, though, that the reason for the decline of interest in naturism in Ireland as much as in the rest of the western world is that it is no longer considered shocking or innovative, and naturists thus lack the sense of 'mission' that marked them one hundred years ago – or in the 1960s in the case of Ireland.

3.9 Gendered aspects of naturism

It is hard to ignore the gendered aspects of naturism when studying it – in other words, the differences experienced by naturist men and women. As noted when reporting my observations in Club Nautica, it is men who seem to be initially more attracted to naturism than women, and it also seems to fall to them to convince their female partners to join or at least give it a try. One of the most significant findings from my research is that men are still considered the main threat among naturists:

> Er … for people who are undressed … er … I think the … people are very wary of single naked males, you know? In a … in a … or maybe that's just my perception, but I kind of believe and I know like that the kind of organisations in Ireland, the INA would be quite … I think they accept everybody like, but from what I understand of Club Nautica they look for couples or they take single females or that type of thing, but they would be wary of … er … males coming on their own and that type of thing, you know? Especially if they're married, I think that's … that's kind of the exclusionary kind of factor it feels at times, you know?
>
> *Mm ...*
>
> … And certainly as well, it's from talking to people on websites and that type of thing, you know? You know, they look at your profile and that type of thing, and if it doesn't add up like you know, if you're not a family man or that type of thing, it's a shared thing, then people are wary … and I suppose on the internet as well you do get a lot of people who … who probably … you do hear about it that, you know, people … I don't know … get some sexual … enjoyment out of it or something like that. It's a …

> they're not part of … of it … but they use it for their own purposes or whatever, I don't know like, you know? So … Unfortunately you kind of get the sense, you get tired, tired with the same bunch all the time like, you know? I suppose that, in a way, would keep me away from the community in Ireland a bit like, you know? (Brian, 38)

It is usually men who break the rules and cross boundaries in the naturist world, but not only men, as we already know from respondent Luke's account. Yet it is almost inherent among men, even if they have no intention of breaking any rules, to become self-conscious about how they might be perceived, especially when they are attending without a female companion to dispel the tensions. It is as if they become 'predatory males'. It is also the reason why Irish naturist organisations like Club Nautica have very strict rules about not accepting single male members.

Once again we could look at this aspect of naturist practice in a different light. Yes, the differences in experiencing naturism can be quite varied, and the presence of strict rules emphasises that point very clearly. Yet again, if we were to look at it in a broader theoretical perspective, the body taboo, or more exactly the *naked* body taboo, is at its strongest only in the *intersex*[13] or heterosexual version of it. In order to try and sum up all the thrill-seeking aspects of practising naturism, especially in the case of the more established stage of its practice, we could easily add the thrill of being seen naked by members of the opposite sex when no sexual connotations are allowed. By applying Wouters's concept of third-nature behaviour, it can be said that, through the development of third-nature habitus, it is possible to attempt to return to first-nature behaviour, without ever really losing self-control over basic drives. It is the attempt itself that provides a thrill, without ever having to break away from the self-regulating second nature.

3.10 Conclusion

What the findings in this chapter have shown us is that the practice of social nudity has proved to be a particularly rich topic for sociological enquiry. What we have learned so far is that the process of becoming a naturist is far more complex than has been assumed by many earlier sociologists and psychologists. We have seen that in order to enjoy naturism, a person needs not only to shed the feelings of embarrassment and shame, and to learn to control sexual urges, but

13 The term *intersex taboo* was coined by Howard C. Warren in his article in 1933.

also to learn how to enjoy it in spite of these. Since I am approaching this from a processual stance, I would now like to move on to discuss broader theoretical and historical problems concerning nakedness.

4 The sociogenesis of nudism

This chapter is concerned with the development of nud*ism* or natur*ism*, as a movement – or, more neutrally, a popular pastime – as opposed to the broader question of nakedness, which is the subject of subsequent chapters. It will deal first with the modern origins of naturism in nineteenth-century Germany, but then glance back to ancient Greece. The reason for this reversal of chronological order is that the apparent ease of nakedness in Ancient Greece, and especially the image of the naked Greek athlete, was a major influence on German naturism.

Norbert Elias always stressed that it is generally impossible and even pointless to try to pinpoint the exact moment in time when certain processes begin to emerge, and that is also true of the problem of shame and nakedness. We can try to outline the more outstanding changes in attitudes towards nudity and the way our behaviour towards it keeps on being transformed, but we shall never be able to find an actual zero-point when it all began. This seems to be the case even when trying to write about the narrower topic of the sociogenesis of modern nudism in Germany. Hence it is important to examine the ancient Greeks and their embracing of the naked human body, proclaimed by some historians as the first nudists of the western world (Fagan, 1999), long before the arrival of German *Nacktkultur*. Even then, we must not undermine the scope and complexity of the social processes that needed to take place for nakedness to come to be perceived in this way and not another. Even the meaning of the word 'naked' went through a major transformation, often referring to various stages of undress, and not necessarily identical with the meaning it carries for us today. This in itself makes one wonder what 'true nakedness' actually meant to our ancestors, which parts of the body needed to be uncovered for the body to be considered naked, and whose gaze had to be avoided in order not to make a person feel vulnerable.

4.1 'Nature' in naturism

'Nature' as a concept, how we relate to it and understand it today, is something that I could not escape in my study of nudity and the history of naturism. The concept will be examined to a greater extent in the following chapter, yet we cannot escape referring to it here. One of the commonest pro-naturist arguments

B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozesstheorie 12,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-15984-9_4

is that we are born naked, or 'as nature intended', so why should we alter something that is natural to us? The way the word 'natural' has evolved, and has a place in our language today that is almost synonymous with something 'good', 'pure' and 'right', is interesting and contradictory in itself – especially when judged through a long-term perspective on the problem of nakedness. As Elias argued in his investigation of civilising processes, what Europeans had been doing through a long period of development was trying to distance themselves from the most natural and *animalic* elements of their being. They were thus trying to separate and transform the 'wilderness' that lies in their animal past, so to speak, through the control of their most basic emotions and physical drives. The questions that need to be tackled here are why certain aspects of being part of the natural world are more welcome than others, and more importantly how we manage to keep what is natural from becoming 'wild' or 'beastly' again. These are the problems that arise when discussing 'naturism' as a way of people being closer to nature, but without it letting us lose our 'civilised' face and become animals again. Before we answer these questions, I should first like to take a closer look at the case of what we might in Eliasian terms call 'a controlled return to or release of nature', the rise of 'free body culture' (*Freikörperkultur* or FKK),[14] better known as nudism and naturism. What became evident to me in the course of my investigation into naturism is that it is not an accident that the origins of naturism as a movement lie especially in Germany.

I have spent quite a lot of time trying to make sense of why it has been possible for some Europeans to commit themselves to an activity that at first glance seems to run quite counter to the trend of development traced by Elias in his theory of civilising processes. An answer requires us to introduce the theory of informalisation. It becomes clear why we are able finally to relax some of our constraints in a controlled way. But the problem posed by this theory lies precisely in one of the elements of this puzzle, which connects the explanation of why in one period Germans decided to 'heal' their society through nudity with the people from whom the idea came in the distant past. The problem of nudity among the ancient Greeks became significant for me, because, as most critics of Eliasian theory would immediately rush to conclude, is it not the case that the practice of recreational nudity by the ancient Greeks proves that the theories both of civilising processes and of informalisation are invalid? In order to explore this question, let us begin by taking a look at the historic and social circumstances in which social nudity first occurred and then spread across Western Europe.

14 The Deutscher Verband für Freikörperkultur is the name of one of the main naturist organisations in Germany.

4.2 The naturist club: a precursor

Some of the historians who have sought to document the circumstances of the rise of nudism indicate Germany as the starting point towards the end of the nineteenth century. But other sources show that the first semi-formal nudist club was established in India by several trailblazing British gentlemen in Matheran, near the Tulsi Lake in Mumbai, which was part of British India at the time. According to the *Mumbai Mirror* (2010), the so-called Fellowship of the Naked Trust (FNT) consisted of just four members – the founder, philosopher and gay activist Edward Carpenter, C. E. G. Crawford, and Andrew and Kellogg Calderwood, two brothers who were ironically sons of a missionary. It looks like a strictly gentlemen-only club, as would have been quite standard in Victorian times, but rumour had it that there was one woman who expressed her interest in joining the FNT at the time, but, for reasons about which we can only speculate now, she never did.

The correspondence between Crawford and Carpenter gives us an interesting insight to their practice:

> Andrew Calderwood and I were up at Matheran having two days' holiday to spend naked from breakfast to evening. But that was only by shutting up tight in our room … Being indoors at our FNT meetings does not of course employ quite the same shutting up as it does in England. The room where we have 'met' in this house is upstairs, lofty and spacious, and full of windows. In June, Andrew Calderwood and I had a grand day. We went away to a bungalow in the Tulsi Lake without servants and spent from dinner time Saturday till 5 p.m. Sunday in nature's garb. Servants are the great difficulty, because they are everywhere. At Tulsi, where we were quite isolated, we were able to stroll about on the verandah and round the house. I am writing this in 'uniform' and we have retired to a secluded room for the purpose of spending a few hours so. (Private correspondence, 1892)[15]

The Fellowship of the Naked Trust sadly did not last very long – only until its members were dispersed owing to various professional circumstances. One thing to be learned from the above correspondence is that Crawford and Carpenter mention the existence of nudist clubs in Vienna and Munich around the same time. Although there seems to be no other evidence to prove it, this brings us back to Germany and to believe that the locus of the naked movement does belong there.

15 Fragment of one of four letters of private correspondence between Crawford and Carpenter, copies of which were acquired by and published in the *Mumbai Mirror*, 25 April 2010.

4.3 Naked sun salutations and the 'purification' of German society

The rise of *Nacktkultur* in Germany was much less coincidental than may be thought. The political and social climate of German society towards the end of the nineteenth century was pervaded by the consequences of the recent changes it had undergone during the previous decades. The unification of the nation, booming industrialisation, urbanisation and the rapid growth of population in cities were some of the main transformations that the Germans underwent at the time, and these were processes of change that caused some levels of anxiety:

> Disappointingly, national unification had not brought unity along with it, but rather had magnified and intensified social tensions, many of which were pre-existing in German society before 1871. Centuries-old religious differences not only persisted, but also were exacerbated by Bismarck's attack on the Catholic minority during his *Kulturkampf* … Separated by religion, class and politics Germans had precious little that contributed to a sense of national belonging …The sense of dislocation wrought by such processes found expression in a number of reactionary intellectual and social movements … The nineteenth century was a dangerous one not only for the German nation, which despite all of its apparent progress and modernity was nonetheless perceived as being in a state of advanced decay by nudists and other cultural critics. (Ross, 2005: 2)

Norbert Elias (2013a: 49–134), discussing this same dislocated quality of German society after unification in 1871, emphasised a similar function for the more violent pastime of duelling. To be *satisfaktionsfähig* – to be recognised as having the social status to be worthy of challenging and being challenged to fight a duel – came to be a badge of membership of an emergent ruling stratum centred on the Kaiser. It had become a problem within the new German Empire that there were many local upper classes who could not be sure of their equivalents in other places. To be able to fight a duel became a badge that bore witness to one's membership in the elite (or at least high bourgeoisie) of one's home province.

In a similar way, Ross argues, the malaise of German society was counteracted by the *Lebensreform* (Life Reform) movement, which aimed to 'fix' German society through the repairing its bodies, souls and general morale through a return to 'nature', from which the Germans had been drastically separated by vast forces of capitalism and industrialisation. Richard Ungewitter, one of the early and more prominent propagators of the 'need to return to nature', made some observations of the Germans at the time:

> Men walk about with reddened, fixed, glassy eyes, bald heads, breathing only in gasps, with a sagging gut and spongy, flabby muscles, behind whom women, corseted marionettes, later in the greatest corpulence, waddle. (*Kultur und Nacktheit*, 1911: 1, quoted in Ross, 2005: 3)

Members of the new counter-cultural movements were trying to change, through disciplining their bodies, what they saw as the main social and political ailments. The *Lebensreform* comprehended various lesser ideologies – following vegetarian diets, exercising (often in the nude) in the fresh air surrounded by nature, 'taking the air' and sun baths, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco – which also took their place in medicine not only in Germany but also in other Western European countries like England and France. It may seem a little absurd to us today, looking from the perspective of a generation aware of the deadly consequences of UVA or UVB rays and skin cancer and the hole in the ozone layer (or its depletion), but over a hundred years ago many people saw the sun simply as a life-giving and healing force. As eccentric as they may have been in the eyes of many other people back in those days, their postulates of anti-urbanisation and leading healthy lifestyles closer to 'nature' are what made them what we would now call environmentalists (Clapham and Constable, 1982). Some argued that the problems of German society were the consequence of 'civilisation',[16] others that German society had become over-intellectualised and that the body–mind–soul connection had been lost; since the body was a 'mirror of the soul', until it was healed and the balance restored, a person could never feel whole (Ross, 2005). But, according to Clapham and Constable, it was not until the defeat in the Great War that the Germans really embraced all these postulates, and made more explicit the role that could be played in rebuilding their society by the integration of the old Greek cult of the strong healthy body into Germanic culture.

After the First World War, with the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic disputed, the great inflation of 1922, the onset of the Depression, mass unemployment and widespread poverty, many Germans were disgruntled. Large numbers of Germans chose to follow the new philosophy of naturism, which brought hope of rehabilitation. However, these groups and movements, which initially rejected any involvement in politics, became vulnerable to political influences and became an easy target for the Hitler Youth. Hitler's regime was also seeking – but in a more literal and sinister way – to rebuild and cleanse the 'Nordic race' (Clapham and Constable, 1982). Even though the nudist movement was developing quite strongly, it was initially banned by the Nazis in 1933 – until they realised the common ground it offered towards building some sort of 'racial utopia'. After that, nudism became Nazified as the *Deutsche Leibeszucht* (German Body Cultivation) movement (Ross, 2005).

It is quite obvious, however, that the only way that it was possible for the early nudists to be treated more seriously, or noticed at all for that matter, was to introduce their ideology under the umbrella of medicine – heliotherapy, natural

16 The word is not being used here in Elias's sense of 'civilisation'; here it is being understood as 'progress' and 'advancement'.

healing, air baths and so on. That was achieved by a sociologist from Dresden, Heinrich Pudor, who, after publishing his book *The Cult of the Nude* towards the end of nineteenth century, was acclaimed the 'father of nudism'.

Can nudism in Germany – and consequently nudism in Europe more widely – be regarded as a 'social movement'? That depends on how a 'social movement' is defined. I would like to argue here that, if nudism were ever to be considered a social movement, it could only be so considered in its early German phases, up to the years after the end of the Second World War. In the case of Irish naturism, I should say it was never a movement, but rather part of the much bigger processes of sexual revolution and informalisation that swept across the western world during the twentieth century. But for the moment, I would like to stay with German *Nacktheit* a while longer. Ross provides the most detailed and comprehensive analysis of the history of German nudism:

> Ideologically and structurally, nudism existed on a kind of continuum from its murky nineteenth-century origins to its de-ideologisation after the Second World War. Nevertheless, three periods of growth can be discerned in pre-1945 nudism: the Independent Phase lasting from its likely origins in the 1890s to 1918, the Popular Phase from 1919 to 1933, and the State Phase from 1933 to 1945. (Nudism in the post-1945 era might be best termed the Normal Phase, when it is an accepted, widely practised leisure-time activity). (2005: 16)

In one of his last books, Charles Tilly traced how social movements grew from eighteenth-century Europe eventually to fuel popular protests and other currents of opinion all over the world (Tilly and Wood, 2009). I should like to examine certain aspects of German nudism in the light of his explanations of the use of the term 'social movement'. Tilly was wise to avoid providing a definitive and clear-cut definition of social movement, and instead to focus on what history has taught us about how they originate and operate:

> major shifts in the array of means by which ordinary people made collective claims on others – their contentious repertoires – occurred in those regions between 1750 and 1850; that despite considerable differences in timing from regime to regime, in each regime the shifts clustered together; and that within the cluster emerged a distinctive combination of campaigns, performances, and displays. Participants and observers alike eventually began calling that new form of politics a 'movement'. Why not pin down that change? Despite the current tendency to call everything from fads to established interest groups 'movements', the emergence, transformation, and survival of that new, distinctive political form deserved historical attention (Tilly and Woods, 2009: ix).

More simply, a social movement, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, is a 'loosely organised but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically

either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values' (*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2015). This definition fits the description of the first three stages of the development of nudism in Germany mentioned by Ross above.

Tilly and Wood (2009) stipulate that social movements should combine three fundamental prerequisites or claims: programme, identity and standing. Judging by the scale and ways in which German *Nacktheit* developed, all of the three elements seem to have been fulfilled here. In its initial phase, it had a determined programme of healing the German nation through keeping bodies healthy, fit and beautiful, in order to eliminate the 'decay' spread by vast industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism. As for identity, Tilly and Wood argue that a social movement needs to fulfil the 'WUNC' principles – *worthiness, unity, numbers, commitment*. Again, this can be seen in the German case in the growth of nudist clubs and leagues during the Popular Phase. Then in the State Phase their levels of commitment and legitimacy were given standing by leading nationalists as an important racially aware ideology, sealing its political standing among the German population.

It was only in its last phase, which we could argue persists to this day, that nudism lost its most fundamental characteristics and became more a form of leisure or pastime than a movement with a reform agenda. And I would argue that nudism in its Normal Phase has blended in as a part of the much broader processes that were already unfolding in Western Europe, the processes of informalisation, and the so-called sexual revolution, emancipation of women and gay rights, and in the case of Ireland, growing secularisation.

4.4 Nationalism, respectability and the rise of nudism

In order to understand the meaning and timing of the rise of nudism in Germany, we need to look in more detail at the social situation among the Germans in the nineteenth century. I should like to focus now on the connection between the rise of nudism and ancient Greece, on why Greece was such a strong influence over Germany at the time, and on why this influence was crucial to the German reformers. According to Chytry (1989) and Marchand (1996), the aesthetic and philosophical connection between the two stretches back to the eighteenth century when writers like Schiller, Goethe, Herder and especially Winckelmann made the cultural legacy of ancient Greece central to the classicism and humanism of the German Enlightenment. Philhellenism was promoted by Winckelmann, who admired the Greeks for their genius, freedom and close association with nature:

> these wise artists behaved like good gardeners, who graft different shoots of the finest sorts onto one branch; as a bee drinks from many flowers, likewise [the Greek] concept of beauty was not reducible to individual, particular beauties… but [Greek artists] sought the beautiful in uniting many beautiful forms [*Körpern*]. They purified their images of all personal characteristics, which would divert our minds from the truly beautiful (Winckelmann, 1764: 155, quoted by Marchand, 1996: 11–12).

But it was not his vision of beautifully bronzed, healthy and unclad bodies that had a direct influence on the rise of nudism in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, Mosse (1982) argues that even though this seed was planted in the eighteenth century, it matured in the nineteenth century, or, as he refers to it, 'the nervous age'. His argument here gives us an opportunity to understand the way attitudes towards sexuality changed in the period, and by extension also affected the timing and reception of *Nacktkultur*. Mosse investigated the relationship between respectability and nationalism in Europe, tracing it through historical processes dating as far back as the eighteenth century. He argues that it was around the time of the French Revolution that many European nations began to be more conscious of themselves and their own ideals. Following the French Revolution, a religious revival was accompanied by the rise of pious, respectable and hard-working middle classes, who blamed the debauched aristocracy for all moral ills of the society. For the first time, strict control over sexuality became the main means for rebuilding the nation.

Mosse concludes that even today there is a very close link between nationalism and respectability, and it lies in mutual support for maintaining the 'distinctions between normal and abnormal, health and sickness (1982: 242). It is important to stress that during the period of the rise of *Nacktkultur*, sexual permissiveness and homoeroticism were perceived as a disease of the nation. What is interesting here is that just as in the case of Ancient Greece, the main focus for respectability was on the context of male sexuality among the Germans. Yet as much as staying healthy and fit was important for the national spirit, the homoerotic side of the Greek legacy was removed, or rather the symbolic ideal of Greek male beauty may have undergone a sort of castration in its revived version. The reasons underlying these changes, argues Mosse, were the uncertainty brought upon the Germans during industrialisation and the developing 'fear of modernity and fear of the speed of time, of a brave new world which constantly threatened to escape control' (1982: 223). As Mosse argues, aesthetics played an important role in politics at the time:

> The visual was of prime importance in national self-representation, providing the symbols which concretised national myths and aspirations. The vast majority of Europeans were 'people without books'; the use of visual means to influence and control the masses was therefore of the utmost importance, affecting both the projection

> of the national image and the preoccupation of respectability with personal appearance and behaviour. With the help of Greek models in the national stereotype, the nervous age was controlled and disciplined (1982: 223).

With this came the establishment of norms for normal and abnormal sexual behaviour such as masturbation and homosexuality. The Greek symbol of the body which once stood for beauty, power and virility now represented the manifestation of self-control and chastity. The sensuality once admired among eighteenth-century writers and poets was coming to be viewed with suspicion and considered a threat to order in the nation. The rise of science was also providing the need for and means of compartmentalisation and classification in so many spheres of life, including the private sphere of human sexuality. Michel Foucault refers to it as *scientia sexualis*:

> The essential features of this sexuality are not the expression of a representation that is more or less distorted by ideology, or of a misunderstanding caused by taboos; they correspond to the functional requirements of a discourse that must produce its truths. Situated at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity, where certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another (the listening technique, the postulate of causality, the principle of latency, the rule of interpretation, the imperative of medicalisation), sexuality was defined as being 'by nature': a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalising interventions. (Foucault, 1978: 68)

Before people like Freud, Ellis or Flügel declared the importance of sexuality for humans, medical doctors such as Iwan Bloch and Alois Geigel had campaigned against the dangers of masturbation, homosexuality and other sexual deviances which, according to them, were encouraged by the secret 'jungles of cities' (Mosse, 1982). Sensuality needed to be replaced by sensibility and, after Darwinism made its impact in the middle of the nineteenth century, terms like 'degeneration' and 'the importance of human inheritance' had become part of the new discourse of nationalism. Consequently, that put homosexuality in opposition to 'survival of the fittest', which only added to the hardship of those involved.

Mosse argues that it was not until the *fin de siècle* that bourgeois youth rebelled against these the hypocritical mores of their parents and decided to rediscover the human body with all its forbidden fruits. He also argues that this rift between the old and the new was not just about breaking all the sexual rules, but rather a sign of longing for something genuine and natural. Yet, although the first nudist movements in Germany also arose around the turn of the century, they strangely did not bear any characteristics of this type of rebellion against sexual conventions and norms. On the contrary, the reasons behind nudism were not to

shock or mock the old mores of their parents, but rather to heal and rebuild, which was evident in their self-restraint and control over sexual drives, or what Freud would refer to as sublimation. From our perspective today, nudism may seem to be something bold, informalised and permissive; but its ideology scarcely seems so when contrasted with the rationale of the debauched youth of the *fin de siècle*. Nudism at that time may have played a 'normalising' role in the further 'improvement' of the nation, in view of the moral panics that had arisen both about homosexuality and about gender roles, which also seemed to be under threat from the rise of feminist movements. Mosse says that this emphasis on manliness was linked to the concept of 'degeneration', which was a medical term for the destruction of both men and women through physical and moral 'poison'. This concept, first advanced by Bénédict Augustin Morel in 1857, referred to 'physical infection through disease or alcohol, linked to moral failing, and [this] degeneracy was largely caused by lack of restraint due to the exhaustion of the nervous system' (Mosse, 1982: 229). In no time, 'degeneration' also came to include the lack of sexual restraint. Could it be possible that, in order to deal with all the maladies of the German nation and bring some sense of control and 'normality' to a disease-ridden society, returning to the 'natural' state of being would remind men and women of the 'natural order of things'? Could it be hoped that once both men and women socialised naked and openly with each other, there would be mutual attraction only between men and women; and that despite the social vagaries, the physicality and biology of human bodies and how they differ should be the only factor deciding roles in a society? Some elements of this idea can be found in Maurice Parmelee's book from 1929, where he remarks on the ways in which gymnosophy affects the sexes:

> In the first place, it removes the artificial barrier of dress and renders visible the natural sex differences, thus destroying once and for all the possibility of deception so far as the form and external appearance of the body is concerned. A higher standard of sincerity and frankness at once becomes possible between the sexes. In the second place, gymnosophy helps to destroy the notion that sex is something peculiarly mysterious, especially in women … But sex is no more mysterious and inexplicable than anything else. (1929 [2012]: 75–6)

We could refer to this as a necessary and healthy 'inspectionism', which may have been expected to help the degenerated German nation. Of course, this is purely speculation but, if it were the case, it would fit in nicely with the programme of healing the nation through sunshine and air on bare skin.

4.5 The wisdom of the naked[17]

When reading about early nudism in Germany and its postulates, it is hard not to make a connection with the ancient Greeks, whom some historians consider 'early nudists' anyway. Examining ancient Greek history through the lens of the theory of civilising processes brings up some especially interesting conclusions.

The most obvious connection between the two is not really about *how* the Germans resurrected the ancient tradition of public nudity, but more about *why*. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, morale in German society was in decline; the continuous military defeats on the battlefield had resulted in 'decomposing' structures and the mentality of the German *Volk*. Or so it was felt by some. When it came to rehabilitating what had been destroyed or had deteriorated in the havoc wrought by the Industrial Revolution, it may come as no surprise that in seeking to resuscitate the German spirit, some had turned to the ideology of the ancient Greeks in order to achieve that. As we now know, having been taught a difficult lesson in world history by the wars of the twentieth century, one direct link between Germany and ancient Greece was the ethos of superiority felt by Germans and Greeks over other nations.

Even though historians and archaeologists still cannot establish the exact timeline of the rise of nakedness among the Greeks, that does not interfere with the message Greek writers conveyed:

> It is not long since it seemed shameful and laughable to the Greeks, as it still does to the barbarians, for men to be seen naked, and when first the Cretans and then the Lacedaemonians began to engage in athletics, it was open to the sophisticates of that time that to make sport of these things … but when experience showed it was better to strip and reveal all, then that which had appeared laughable yielded to what appeared best to reason. (Plato, *Republic*, 5, 452a)

This was the moment in history when nudity was interpreted as a manifestation of the Greek sense of superiority, extending the gap between them and 'the barbarians' (meaning the rest of the world). Where it shocked and offended other nations, it filled ancient Greeks with pride and sense of a mission (Arieti, 1975; Bonfante, 1989; Mouratidis, 1985). This direct connection to nineteenth-century Germany and its sprouting nudist movement is only one part of the story. What this passage also shows, from the more sociological angle, is that there are clear indications here that the ancient Greeks – or at least their prehistoric ancestors – were not always susceptible to this acceptance of full nakedness; and, moreover, it indicates processes of transition towards a more distanced or rather 'controlled' attitude to the naked body. Were it not that this rationale for the nude

17 Teoderescu and Preda (2014) referring to their explanation of the term 'gymnosophy'.

athlete almost exclusively involved male nudity, and men of certain age, it would be tempting to argue that it represented a case of a strong informalising process taking place in a period far earlier than that studied by Wouters or Elias. Even subject to that reservation, this does suggest that what occurred may possibly have been a very early example of an 'informalising spurt'. Elias never claimed that civilising processes were a force of a unilinear and straight-line character. He does, however, refer to levels of everyday violence in Ancient Greece that were quite high on both an individual and a social level compared with Western European societies in the medieval and early modern periods. This, according to Elias, gives sufficient grounds to infer that the Greeks' controls over the more basic emotions, such as violence, characteristic of more advanced stages of civilising processes, cannot be placed in the same category as for instance those found in sixteenth-century English or French societies. Wouters (2015), however, does address the possibility of informalising processes taking place in the distant past, long before the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries on which his theory was originally based.

I would now like to return to the more pressing issue of understanding what lies behind the Ancient Greek standard of naked male beauty, which may also provide more answers to the problem of informalisation.

Whether it was Orsippos or Acanthus the Lacedaemonian[18] who was the first man supposedly to fully expose his genitals during the victorious foot race (the Marathon) at the Ancient Greek Olympic Games, the ethos of the beautiful, nude male athlete was there to stay and it came to play a considerable role in Greek public and moral life. The vision of beautiful young naked athlete changed the meaning of nakedness from 'shameful', 'vulnerable and 'dishonourable', to 'proud' and 'powerful' (Bonfante, 1989). For the Greeks, the specific body regime known as gymnosophy consisted not only of the practice of naked sport exercises such as wrestling, running, throwing the javelin or boxing, but also of a healthy lifestyle – including a good diet to prevent weight gain – to make life more harmonious (Teodorescu and Preda, 2014). It is yet another direct link to German *Freikörperkultur* members, for whom looking after their bodies through naked exercises and an appropriate vegetarian diet remained at the centre of their practice.

Was the athletes' nudity so very new to the Greeks of that time? Bonfante (1989) argues that in as much as the classical Greeks introduced the word *gymnos* for completely naked, instead of *nudus*, symbolising some level of but not necessarily complete nakedness, nudity had always been present in the religious and magical rituals of their predecessors. The importance and the survival of

18 The sources provide different accounts of who was actually the first to run fully naked during the race at the 15th Olympiad in 720 BC.

nudity in Greek athletics strongly depended on the support of the heroic and religious tradition, argues Mouratidis:

> In order to answer this question, one should consider another aspect of Greek life, rather unique in Greek lands, the hero cult, which was connected with games. Greek heroes and gods proudly displayed their physical energy and demanded the same thing from their devotees. The presence of Heracles at Olympia was of prime importance for the survival of the custom of nudity in Greek athletics because he was, by tradition, a nude hero and a nude warrior-athlete *par excellence* whose nudity was imitated by the athletes (1985: 231).

This prehistoric 'warrior-athlete' ethos was, according to Mouratidis, a direct link to the later nude athlete, who through games and competitions (later seen at the Olympiad), serves a purpose of preparation for the war. 'In 520 BC the armed race was introduced at Olympia, which can partly be explained as a reminiscence of the warrior-athlete', contends Mouratidis (1985: 213), and the contestants were wearing nothing apart from helmets and greaves, and they carried a shield. This represented the moment when nudity started to represent something more sacred and heroic, rather than just something shameful, wretched and miserable, as it was often represented in the Bible (Bonfante, 1989). So we should not think of the nude athletic competitions as just another form of pastime, because winning these contests was important not just for the victor, but brought fame and glory to their families and cities (Arieti, 1975: 435).

Bonfante discusses the meaning and prevalence of male athletes from another angle, which is that in Greek art from around seventh century BC, there was a huge rise of the *kouros*, a type of statue representing a standing, fully naked young man, which represented youth and served apotropaic purposes. Their phalluses were visible, which in many cultures, not only Greek, was seen as serving the purpose of fighting the evil forces that might come one's way. Even though these statues of *kouros*, or other representations of them, served various purposes, Bonfante argues that they appear to have been connected with the initiation ritual of young boys. Then she links the *kouros* with the prominence of Greek homosexual feelings about beautiful young men. What is interesting is the way their penises were represented: always a small-sized penis, as opposed to old men and slaves pictured with their long and large penises. It is important to stress the relevance of status here too, because this ideal of male beauty was also an aristocratic ideal.

The practice of so-called *kynodesmē*, which literally means a 'dog leash', involved tying a piece of string around the lips of a man's prepuce (Greek: *akroposthion*), either in a bow or lifting the penis upwards and tying the remaining part of the string around a man's waist or thigh (Hodges, 2001). This peculiar custom, as it seems to us today, was mainly practised between 520 and 510 BC

by young athletes, but the statue of the poet Anacreon is also displaying *kynodesmē*. Hodges argues that the main purpose of it is to protect male dignity, so that the glans of the man's penis is not visible, signifying his modesty and restraint, as opposed to a 'permanent state of lewdness' (2001: 388). For the Ancient Greeks who valued and practised the power of mind over body, this manifests a rather prominent form of social constraint from an Eliasian point of view. I dare say it was a constraint even more extreme than the corset worn by women centuries later. It is easy to imagine that this practice must have led to some controversy between the Greeks and the communities of the time which practised circumcision. This quotation from Herodotus represents the level of puzzlement and disapproval of the Greek people towards (in this case) Egyptian priests who also, along with Hebrews, Colchians, Ethiopians, Syrians, Phoenicians and Macrones, practised circumcision:

> Because they are exceedingly religious, more so than any other people in the world, they have the following customs. Everyone, without any exceptions, scrubs clean the bronze cup he uses for drinking every day. The linen cloaks they wear are always freshly washed; this is something they are very particular about. Their concern for cleanliness also explains why they practise circumcision, since they value cleanliness more than comeliness (Herodotus, II, 37).

The Greeks considered the display of the glans appropriate only during intimate acts of sexual intercourse, and exposure of it except in this case was considered rude and highly indecent. In contrast, the fact that modern nudists do not need any props to maintain their dignity intact is a possible sign of the internalisation of the rules and mores of appropriateness, a sign of self-constraint on their part. It needs also to be mentioned that the acceptance of complete nakedness among the ancient Greeks was mostly confined to men. Young women, as among the Spartans, were allowed to exercise naked but, unlike in the case of men, their maternal and familial roles stopped this practice from any further development (Bonfante, 1989). In fact, since female bodies were generally covered in clothes, their bodies were not as dark and tanned as those of their male counterparts; among the early Greeks this led to pale barbarian warriors being compared to women, and helped convince Greek warriors of barbarian weakness. It gave warriors additional encouragement during battles when they needed to picture the barbarians as women.

4.6 The back garden revolution? The story of Irish naturism

It was three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon on Loughshinney pier near Rush in north County Dublin in 1966, when a group of five strangers met for the first

time. Even though they knew nothing about each other, it was no coincidence that they all happened to be there at the same time. It was the Central Council of British Naturism (CCBN), originally under the name of British Sun Bathing Association, who had organised the meeting of all their Irish members, which from this point onwards went down in history as the first meeting of what was to become the Irish Naturist Association. They introduced themselves to each other only by their first names, and it was clear to everyone there that it would be considered highly inappropriate to even try to pry for more information. 'The only people who knew the person's second name were the secretary, the treasurer or the chairperson' recalls Hugh, a 71-year-old who is one of the oldest members of the INA and happened to be one of the five people who met that day on Loughshinney pier and who in some way charted the fate of naturism in Ireland. 'Now, in hindsight it was madness, but that was the norm at the time', says Hugh, 'people were so much afraid of anybody finding out' he continues, while trying to find old photographs of the early club members from that time:

> It was very secretive at the time. Basically instead of organising a meeting in a hotel, which you would normally do today and probably circulate, people were afraid of identifying what you were going to do. He obviously circulated the people who were on his list in Ireland to meet at the pier in Loughshinney on a Sunday after dinner at three o'clock. I forget at the time, I probably had a scooter, you know the little scooters? A Vespa? One of those type of things. It was the identifying feature that if people pulled up, they could see this … where the people got together. Now three people turned up. (Hugh, 71)

Hugh was speaking in the middle of the Irish winter, yet his skin was tanned. Like most Irish naturists today, he spends most of his nude holidays abroad in places like Montalivet or Cap d'Agde. That is also where most of the naturist stories start for Irish people, not only owing to the poor weather conditions, but also because Ireland is the only EU country where naturism is technically illegal. He tells me that back in the 1960s, though, travel was mainly to Yugoslavia, Corsica or Greece.

He told me the story of the early days of naturism in Ireland. The new group struggled to figure out how to acquire a P.O. Box number for their newly established organisation; they found out through David Norris, who is one of the most prominent gay rights activists in the country and today an independent Senator.

The original small group of pioneering nudists consisted mainly of wealthy middle-class members, such as: the owner of a popular old Irish pub on the south side of Dublin; a Trinity College professor of mathematics – Paul Wallace and his wife Martha, who came from one the most prominent Irish families, whose company name and logo would be recognised by every Irish person – and several other members whose professions were not disclosed to me. As Hugh described

it, when asked to compare the naturism of today to that of the early days, it is a 'less elitist group now', with more 'ordinary' people joining, and lacks the 'stuffiness' and the 'formality' of naturism in the 1960s. The early members of the INA were described by other senior members I interviewed as 'very West Brit',[19] and they were all known to enjoy naturist holidays in various resorts in Europe and around the world, which was quite unusual for the majority of Irish population at the time. Most of the meetings took place in their private homes, where they could enjoy their own swimming pool or sauna – yet another unusual sign of affluence for Irish standards in that period:

> We would go to the sauna and they would be talking about, in the days when we had a tent and we used to go to Kerry for our holidays, they would be talking about camping in Corsica and whatever. It was a very middle-class thing in those days and also very discreet. People only talked by their first names and you were never supposed to say that you were a naturist or whatever. I mean, this was Ireland in the 1970s. You know? It would have been fairly frowned upon. They were a very disparate group of people but quite different to the people that you would meet at the swims now. (Maria, 72)

This notion of naturism being more middle-class orientated was not limited to the Irish case. Going back to the rise of nudism in Germany and Britain, it was the bourgeoisie who felt the need to improve their standards and ways of living within their societies, and one of the means of doing that was 'returning to nature'. Since both German and British naturist cultures were 40 to 50 years ahead, it is clear that Irish naturism needed to hit the ground running from the moment it first began, and therefore it also lacked the more natural diffusion between social classes. It seems evident here that naturist practices were initially more exclusively practices of the relatively affluent layers of Irish society.

It was not easy for naturism to develop during the 1960s and 1970s, since even magazines like *Playboy* were not legally available for sale in Ireland until late 1980s (Ferriter, 2009). The intriguing connection between pornography and naturism comes through in *Health and Efficiency* – a British naturist magazine, which gained a bad reputation among Irish naturists, partly because it became popular among the 'textile' (non-naturist) section of population:

> There are lots of pictures of naked girls in it and pictures of naturist men as well … People would regard it as not really a true naturist magazine as such but more, I suppose, titillation of naked people and things like that. People who aren't naturists buy it for that reason … well you see in Ireland there'd be very little, in other countries there's probably a lot of that kind of magazines and things like that around, but

19 In the Republic of Ireland, 'West Brit' is a term for an Irish person who is perceived as being too Anglophile in culture or politics.

> in Ireland there would have been absolutely very little. You couldn't buy *Playboy* here for years and years. So *H&E* would have been the only magazine where if you were interested in looking at naked ladies or naked men *H&E* was the only magazine. (Maria, 72)

But the *H&E* magazine's bad reputation did not reflect its popularity, for instance, in Britain. As the *Guardian* reported:

> Britain and America were quick to catch on, although Germany, with an estimated 3 million nudists by the 1930s, was always the leading nudist nation. In Britain, *H&E* was aimed, then as now, at the middle-classes; doctors and solicitors are said to be the best-represented professions. Intellectuals keen on nude sunbathing or swimming included Shaw, Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Graham Bell. (*Guardian*, 12 June 1999)

Since Irish naturism did not exist at the time, as my respondent Hugh mentioned Irish links had to be made via British naturist organisations, such as the British Sun Bathing Association or the Central Council of British Naturism. In fact it probably took quite a long time before the early Irish naturists disclosed this kind of information to each other, since they operated on a first-name basis, and anonymity was crucial to them. This points to the importance of context: it is easier to display one's naked body in front of people whom we know little about; contrary to what might be expected, it makes people less 'exposed'. Their other identity was left outside the naturist environment. In order to recruit new members, advertisements were placed in the *British Naturism* magazine at the time.

Official naturist clubs in Ireland today, in the Dublin, Limerick and Cork areas, are part of the Irish Naturist Association (INA), which in turn is recognised by the International Naturist Federation (INF). Even though the INA was established in 1965, it was not until the 1981 that the first naturist swim club, Club Nautica, opened in Dublin. Club Nautica remains active today – as described in chapter 2 above – and continues its fortnightly swims either in public facilities which are rented out exclusively for them for an hour, or in a private facility in one of the hotels. I have been told that one of the obstacles to finding an appropriate venue for their meetings is not so much fear of 'disrepute' on the part of the management of these venues, but rather that most of the swimming pools are attached to neighbouring gyms, with only a glass wall separating them. This makes it hard for both hotel management and naturist members to maintain privacy.

Judging by the contents of an old brochure, it was a family-friendly club, and so they were quite selective about accepting aspiring members. The brochure entitled 'Dare to go Bare' from 1981, with a drawing of a leopard-print bra hanging from one of the letters, was designed to reach out to the sceptics and, with

friendly cartoon drawings of happy-looking, bare and 'crotchless' characters, to help the reader to gain various sorts of information about naturism. The family and sex-free aspects were among the most clearly stressed points in the brochure: 'degenerates, voyeurs, exhibitionists and other "sick" people are not welcome' it says under the 'eligibility' section. In this way, they were trying to break away from negative portrayals and judgements of Irish naturism, and from potential compartmentalisation under the label of 'sexual deviancy'. This was followed by information on the careful screening process for potential members, which mainly included couples and families; in order to keep the gender balance, the club 'accepted a quota of single men', which was not the case for single women. Single men, on the other hand, were advised to come along with a 'female relative' or friend, if interested in joining the club. Further, it provides helpful information on how to understand naturism and stresses the level of acceptance of all shapes and sizes, implying that true equality comes with shedding one's clothes:

> When we take off our clothing, we also take off any phony postures and status symbols of the everyday world. Without artificial adornment, the wife of a clerk is the social equal of a managing director, and many people find this the most rewarding part of naturism. (INA, 1981)

Despite the no doubt unintended offence to housewives, it takes more than just stripping off to hide social status and class and other elements of social distinction among naturists. One obvious indicator of such social distinctions can be the type and number of holidays a person takes, or it may also simply be their political views and affiliations.

The leaflet then moves on to the most common fears and questions about naturism, such as how to deal with the fear of being publicly naked for the first time, which for men includes reassurance about their 'sexual reactions', and for women the ways of dealing with 'certain times when nudity is somewhat inconvenient'. An interesting aspect of the perception of children in the naturist context appeared, which is an indicator of a social change in this respect that happened between then and now. For most people today, including naturists, the spreading moral panic concerning paedophilia has affected the levels of protection given to children from strangers approaching them or photographing them. This has also extended into naturist circles, and wary parents feel more nervous about their children running around naked on the beach. In the brochure circulated by the INA, however, the main concern for the parents of the children who were raised as naturists was not their safety as much as the fact, as it states, that 'never in the history of organised naturism worldwide, as far as we know, has a child raised as a naturist been convicted of a sex crime'. This not only indicates the clearly defensive attitude of Irish naturism, but is also a response to the rhetoric directly linking nakedness with obscenity and sexual crime.

No 'naturist boom' occurred in Ireland, and people's interest developed gradually, reaching a high point of 301 INA members in 1995. Most of them joined in order to acquire the INF passport, allowing them to gain easier access to naturist resorts around Europe in places like France or eventually Spain.[20] A lot of Irish people who used to go on package holidays abroad in the 1980s, where they came across naturism for the first time, would come back to Ireland and seek out information and express their interest through the INA. It is hard to calculate the exact numbers of naturists in Ireland (or anywhere in the world for that matter). Many people today do not need to become members of any official club in order to partake in and enjoy naturism. The development of the infrastructure, including low-budget Irish airlines, not only opened up new possibilities and locations for aspiring Irish naturists, but allowed them to keep their practice secret from the prying eyes of neighbours or relatives. Even though attitudes towards sex and nakedness have changed and become more open, many Irish people still prefer to keep their naturist pastime to themselves:

> Most of the Irish fellas would be meeting each other in the pubs at night and they make a big secret about not letting anybody else know they are there. You meet Irish people and obviously they are there for six months and they would tell you, 'Oh I met so and so from Ballina!' Or 'I met a couple from Wexford!' but they don't want anybody to know they are there. They make it a big secret, even today. I know people in camper vans on Cap d'Agde campsite, the one registration that I have seen remarkably is Tipperary North. TN … but on site in Cap d'Agde there is about four different vehicles with TN, Tipperary North. The couple that you met, that I met yesterday evening, they're there for six months. They're a Tipperary registered car. There are three camper vans that I have seen from the same area. There are four thousand sites – housed, individual sites. A, B, C, D, E, F … A camper van here in this alley, you'd have a camper van here in this alley, a camper van here in this alley. This family or this group don't want to meet these people, or they don't want to miss this group. Now when they are on the beach they wouldn't know who anybody is. It's only when you walk past a camper van and you see them sitting at the table that then you identify them when they are out wearing their clothes. If you met them on the beach without speaking you wouldn't know what nationality they are. There'd be one from Thurles, one from Cavan … they don't want anybody to know. It's stupid but that's … Even yet today there are people who are afraid of their life in case somebody sees them out of context. (Hugh, 71)

In September 2014, Ireland hosted the 34th International Naturist Congress, at the Lough Allen Hotel in County Leitrim, where fewer than 100 naturist enthusiasts from around the world participated in the event. Putting it in the broader

20 It was not until the death of Franco in the late 1980s that Spain opened up to naturist tourism in places such as Almeria or Cartagena.

perspective of world naturism, the numbers seem rather unimpressive in comparison with the millions of people around the world who practise it today. This only goes to show that the future of naturism does not necessarily lie in the hands of its organisations and clubs, but simply belongs to those who practise it independently.

The naturist congress attracted considerable media attention in Ireland, but every summer some news source tends to report on Irish naturism. The attitudes and contents of the Irish press about Irish naturism over the years have had more of a tongue-and-cheek than an informative character, with headlines and content filled with predictable puns and rhymes, such as 'dare to go bare', 'the naked truth' or 'things looking up for Irish naturism'. The photos that are often used to add to the supposed 'spiciness' of the character of the articles are generally acquired from non-Irish sources. If they are of Irish origin, they usually feature naked silhouettes of people with their backs turned to the camera. Although those in charge of Irish naturist organisations welcome any form of promotion in the Irish media, not all practising naturists approve of the content and representations it involves:

> I always find those kind of things quite uncomfortable, when it's in the paper, cause I feel it's ... it's still ... it's making it's something ...you know, startling or, or ... it's in a way that ... you know, I think a lot of what's written it's meant to get a reaction from people and that type of thing, so it misrepresents it in a way, you know? (Brian (38)

In one of the more informative and thorough articles from *The Irish Times* in August 1981, the author Jeananne Crowley several times calls naturist 'naturalists', with an evident touch of sarcasm and scepticism: 'at each turn a new vista assaults the already aching gaze, clobbering another taboo for six' (1981: 22). My naturist sources informed me that after this issue was published, it was met with a large public outcry from disgruntled readers. Even though over 20 years have passed, the Irish press still treats naturism with a dose of sensationalism, which is visible in longer and shorter articles on the topic every year during the summer. Even though sex and nudity do not shock Irish people as much as they used to a few decades ago, they still remain objects of public scrutiny and interest.

Despite their numerous efforts to legalise naturism and the INA's attempts to change public exposure laws which prevent it from claiming any public parts of Irish beaches, the authorities remain unmoved by their pleas. They tend, however, to turn a blind eye to any naturist gatherings as long as they do not cause offence to any other members of the public.

The central problem of Irish naturism was its timing, because from the moment it arrived in Ireland it was in a sense already doomed by the success of the

naturist movement spreading across continental Europe 30 to 40 years earlier. Irish naturists were forced to jump on a train that was already in motion, which deprived early naturists in Ireland of momentum and possibly a more solid foundation, with the result that it never truly became a movement. When the German 'freedom of the body' movement (*Freikörperkultur*) had spread all over Europe, especially to Britain, Scandinavia, France and Spain and towards the United States by the early 1930s, it was not until 1965 that we could pinpoint the arrival of naturism in Ireland. Owing to the timing, level of involvement, programme (or rather lack of it) and the air of offering the broader Irish public only restricted access, Irish naturism never really became a social movement as such. From its beginnings it was a way for some Irish people to express their newly regained rights of freedom, catching up with the rest of the western world, or a sort of symbolic 'stretching of the legs' after the decades of Catholic subjugation of the free mind, body and spirit. Apart from German nudism, none of the nudist organisations in other European countries has managed to mobilise itself enough to represent a strong membership or a common programme, nor ever managed to create a joint international collective to represent the supposed movement; the International Naturist Federation was created too late in time, and represented an already post-ideological section of nudism, orientated mainly towards tourism and naturism as a type of leisure. As became very clear to me during my interviews and other interactions with Irish naturists, most of the members or naturist enthusiasts completely dismissed or rejected any philosophical or ideological basis for their practice. It was more a semi-radical expression of choice and of exercising their right of being able to do it:

> I don't see it as something that I am a part of. I am … I am a naturist by virtue of the fact that when I go somewhere hot and I sit on the beach I don't wear clothes and that to me is the end-all and be-all of it. I don't see it as a movement; I don't see it as a group of people striving to, you know, live as one with nature. I don't go in for all that sort of stuff. It's just got to do with me sitting on a beach with no clothes on – or getting up in the morning from an apartment and walking on to the balcony with no clothes on and not having anybody give out to me. That's all I see it as. (Luke, 48)

Some of the naturists I came across during my fieldwork do not identify themselves as part of a naturist movement, nor feel that naturism is a movement as such. Just like Luke, quoted here, they are not trying to prove anything to anyone, nor trying to change the world through the practice of naturism; it is an end in itself for them. This would also explain why the *organised* form of naturism in Ireland does not appeal to many naturists, and so it is hard even to try to estimate the percentage of the Irish population that is or has been involved in naturism. Among the actual club members that I came across, however, a certain sense of pride does exist when they talk about their practice – or rather a *false* sense of

mission that they need to stay together and try to recruit new members in order for the organisation to survive. Most of those people belong to the category who remember and experienced the Ireland of old, before its emancipation from the conventional suffocation practised by the Catholic Church across many public and private institutions at the time. For them, it is not about trying to convert the whole world to naturism, but more about making the point – by exercising their prerogative – of being modern, independent and part of western society. Today, since nudity is not as shocking as it would have been 30 or 40 years ago, they have become victims of their own success. It is no longer considered something new and radical, so most young Irish people do not feel they have to participate in it, and moreover, they do not need to join a club in order to enjoy naturism, because most of them try it while abroad on holidays. I also think that unlike what used to be the case in Ireland back in 1960s, today they do not need to be the part of a naturist club in order to avoid the disapproval of the rest of the society; they do not need the embracing reassurance of other club members that what they choose as recreation is 'normal', as if by belonging they can avoid the harsh judgement of outsiders.

I noted during my interaction with Club Nautica members that when they reminisced about naturist times past, they often say that their children were always part of their practice too, especially during the holidays. What struck me, however, was that even though they were raised in naturist families their children do not seem to practise naturism themselves. This would seem somewhat to support the point about the timing and the generational problem. Perhaps it is either because they do not see the point of it any more, since this freedom of being in charge of their own bodies was never taken away from them, or because they do not see it as anything as radical as it used to be a generation ago. Or both. The young people of Ireland, especially those born during 1980s and after, represent the 'informalised generation' of the society.

There is one other way to shed light on whether Irish naturism is or is not a social movement, and that is by comparing it with another group which potentially comes the closest to a similar level of stigmatisation in Irish society, or at least carries the same high level of sensitivity – that is, gay people. As one of the respondents quoted above mentions, back in the 1960s when the INA were trying to organise themselves, it was the gay activist and now Senator David Norris who provided instructions for obtaining a Post Office Box address for the organisation. In the light of the constitutional referendum in the Republic, on 22 May 2015, which approved the legalisation of same-sex marriage, and when the rights of gay people were finally acknowledged by the 62 per cent of those who voted, it is difficult to imagine that naturists and gay people in Ireland were ever under the same shadow of the Catholic Church. Just to name the few main characteristics of Irish gay rights movement makes the contrast with the Irish naturist tradi-

tion obvious: the Irish LGBT organisations always had a clear programme, stayed connected to the international network and, most of all, their main propagators and activists remained prominently visible to the public despite the risk of hateful backlash coming from what was once the majority of Irish people. Most Irish naturists up to today remain very private about their practice, often hiding it from their families, friends and colleagues, and most of them prefer to spend their naturist holidays abroad in the comfort of guaranteed sunshine and anonymity. While the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) was not officially founded until 1974, activists such as David Norris and Edmund Lynch were already active in the field of finding a way to be officially recognised as a movement during the 1960s (Ryan, 2006). Ryan says that through their recognition as a movement, they were 'directly challenging the construction of nationalist sexuality as exclusively heterosexual and the relegation of homosexuality to a marginal other in Irish society' (2006: 89). No such open attempts were ever made by naturist organisations in Ireland.

4.7 Informalisation in the Irish civilising process

While countries like Germany, France and Britain were undergoing a crucial transformation in the aftermath of the French Revolution and trying to deal with the havoc brought by ongoing industrialisation, Irish participation in this common European *Zeitgeist* was interrupted by the Famine. It resulted in the deaths of over one million people and the emigration of over two million during the years of 1846–55 (Ferriter, 2009: 17). This disaster was very much in line with kind of population catastrophe predicted by Thomas Malthus early in the nineteenth century (Malthus, 1806). Across Western Europe, Malthus's work led to calls for moral restraint, but Ireland – owing to its colonial status and its still dealing with the post-famine devastation – remained outside the loop of such discourses. The relationship between nationalism and respectability, as argued by Mosse, was also evident in the case of Ireland. Inglis (1998a) emphasises the main characteristic that made Ireland outstanding among other Western European societies at the time: its exceptional levels of adherence to the Catholic Church. He argues that the peculiarity of the Church's influence over Irish people and state came about through the dominance of so-called 'simple faith', meaning the astoundingly uncritical attitude of Irish people towards the extent of the influence the Church had held over most institutions within the state. Inglis maintains that:

> The high level of adherence to the rules and regulations of the Church among the Irish Catholics has been maintained by means of a vast organisation – of both physi-

> cal capital and personnel – that was developed in the nineteenth century. It was within this institutional network of churches, schools, hospitals, and homes that Irish Catholics became disciplined to the rules and regulations of the Church. It was through the dedicated work of priests, nuns, and brothers that the ability to control the moral discourse and practice of the Irish people was first established. It was this care and supervision which laid the basis for, and maintained, institutional adherence. (1998a: 39)

As Inglis (1998a; 1997) argues, as much as we recognise the role of the Catholic Church in controlling Irish sexuality, especially after the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the fact that Ireland was under the influence of British culture and Victorian standards also had an immense impact on Irish sexual morality and behaviour. The implementing of external controls over sexuality took place during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century and slowly became internalised. The extreme protection and separation of children from sexuality happened gradually through, first, complete lack of sexual education, and then even more extreme forms of segregation of the sexes in most spheres of their lives. Even though it was the legion of Irish priests who implemented these changes and prohibitions, a similar rhetoric was also present in the protection of children in Victorian Protestant Britain (Inglis, 1998a). Sexual love was to be confined to married life only, but even then with an emphasis on removing the sensual side of it. 'Sexual love is about self-denial and surrender to one's spouse … and anything outside the pure intentions of married sexual love is a threat to the natural order of things and can lead to social and moral disease and decay' (Inglis, 1998a: 25).

This type of reasoning would be very familiar to nineteenth-century Germans, with their 'moral war' on homosexuality, here pushed to further extremes by the leadership of Catholic Church and its 'moral monopoly' over Irish people. In order to maintain this control over sexuality, it was not long before attention shifted towards the body itself:

> Innocence was a virtue which was protected through modesty and purity. The naked body was a source of sin. Having glossed facts of life, the Irish priest mentioned previously went on to talk of modesty. 'Animals do not wear clothes; but we must wear clothes, not only to keep us warm, but also because it would be a sin to walk about without clothes' (An Irish Priest, *Quid Vobis Videtur* (1923: 46). The child is told that if he sees his father naked and does not turn his eyes away and takes pleasure in looking, he is committing a sin of impurity. (Inglis, 1998a: 26)

This is a somewhat more elaborate version of the biblical story of drunken and naked Noah, and the sinful act committed by his son Ham who, trying to cover his father's dignity, managed accidently to see his penis, which made him sinful in the eyes of God. This case of extreme formalisation of anything that could

possibly be connected to sexuality eventually resulted in the internalisation of these controls and, as Inglis indicates, over time to the segregation of boys and girls in all public arenas; it resulted in 'embodied social practices in the home, schools, churches, pubs and dance-halls' (1998a: 30). This transformation was so strong that it has been noted in anthropological studies from the 1960s by Messenger (1969), Brody (1973) and Scheper-Hughes (2001 [1979]). The latter described some more distant communities in rural Ireland as 'sexually flat' or the 'most sexually naïve of the world's societies'.

It was not a coincidence that organised naturism first appeared in Ireland during the 1960s, the period when the iron influence of the Catholic Church's dominance over the Irish body and soul was starting to be challenged. It happened mainly through the influence of the media, and through the lessening of rigorous control over the content of books and films that infiltrated Irish society (Inglis, 1998a), despite the censoring efforts of Archbishop McQuaid[21] and his 'omnivorous examination of social activities, including the theatre, as well as the horrors he sought to prevent entering the country, such as modern magazines, advertisements for underarm deodorants etc.' (Cullen and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2013: 4). This sort of control over Irish people was monopolised by the Church in many, if not most, aspects of their lives, notably through its power over schools, universities, hospitals and health provision, and directly and indirectly over many professions and career opportunities. Some sources argue that in the context of Irish social history, these transformations were also subject to the influence of the women's movement. For example, Connolly (2002; 2005) contends that the role of women's groups in the post-Independence history of the Irish state is often overlooked, and that they operated as significant agents of both social and political change at the time.

According to Foucault[22] there is always some sort of resistance to power, even if it needs to be more integrated and simultaneous to give some basis for a revolution or transgression, which did not happen in Ireland until mid-twentieth-century Ireland (Inglis, 2005):

> Foucault reminds us that although sex was denied in much of modern Irish life, it presided everywhere else in its absence. It was in the bedrooms and bathrooms of every Irish home. It was present in every strategy of separation and supervision of girls from boys. It pervaded the pubs among the bachelor drinking groups. It was in every shy, awkward look, speech and touch of Irish men and women (Inglis, 1998a: 16).

21 John Charles McQuaid (1895–1973), Catholic Archbishop of Dublin 1940–72.

22 See especially Foucault, 1978 and 1988.

This again was part of even broader processes of sexualisation and eroticisation of the body that swept across the Western world, and as a side-effect of the processes of formalisation (Wouters, 2010). The Irish civilising process had finally reached the more informalising stage, which manifests itself in greater levels of sexual and bodily freedom, such as in the rise of naturist organisations in Ireland in the 1960s.

Undoubtedly, as Inglis confirms, the greatest influence over secularisation and simultaneously over informalising processes was the rise of media to challenge the authority of Catholic Church. It became most evident during the turbulent times when scandals about numerous molestations practised by the Church's representatives in Irish society came to light. This in turn triggered a debate and increasingly strong criticisms of Catholic institutions. Unarguably, the 'moral monopoly' of the Church has been broken irreversibly.

5 Natural bodies? Nakedness, eroticisation and shame

What is the relationship between the way we conceptualise 'nature' and the way we see and perceive naked bodies today? This question is obviously posed by the very term natur*ism*.

Bell and Holliday, in their essay about nudists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, refer to 'bodies in nature', and the careful 'negotiation of discourses of nature, human nature, the natural body and the natural landscape' (2000: 127). However, Bell and Holliday fail to take into account that this type of relationship and negotiation about 'nature' and 'human nature' is not just something characteristic of the period they were studying. Nor is it a matter only of 'discourses' and 'negotiation'. It is rather the result of a much broader long-term process of changes in norms and standards, and the many stages of negotiation between 'human nature' and 'nature'. I would like to argue here, in the light of Elias's theory of civilising processes, that civilising processes have had a direct effect on how we are affected by the sight of the naked body today – including the way we are ashamed by and of it, and its sexually arousing effects. They also shaped how these two elements were a direct product of the 'demonising'[23] of the human body with its biological functions; and nudity became a symbolic extension of that. In other words, the nakedness of the human body became sexualised and erotic as an *incidental* part of the long-term process of the development of shaming mechanisms in western societies. Or, more simply, by being taught to feel ashamed of and by our bodies, we 'accidentally' learned to see them as more erotic and sexually stimulating than ever before in our history and social development. The more we were hiding our bodies, the more inquisitive, obsessed and transfixed we became in the process of doing it.

The complexity of the argument I am trying to make corresponds to the complexity of these processes. There is no exact answer to the question of when the trend towards seeing the naked body as 'immodest' began; just as, according to Elias, there are no zero-points in civilising processes. What can be observed, however, are *changes* over time in attitudes towards nakedness, and rising of levels of shame and modesty connected with it. Most of the data and evidence

23 Quite literally on many occasions across the centuries, especially in the case of female genitalia, which were represented as dangerous and deceitful to men, notably in the case of the myth of the 'vagina dentata' (Williams, 1999; Miles, 1989; Ziolkowski, 1998).

B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozesstheorie 12,
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gathered by historians point in the direction of the demise of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations and the rise of Christianity all over Europe. That being said, it would be wrong to assume that, before that, there were no inhibitions whatsoever linked to everyday nakedness. The safest way of avoiding any misunderstandings is to say that nudity was less of a concern to people in the earlier stages of development. In fact, some argue that it was through the development of the civilising process that Europeans became gradually more and more inhibited about it, until a peak was reached during Victorian times in Western Europe. An even more extreme peak can be seen among today's fundamentalist Muslims. To avoid confusion, it must be stressed that these processes of 'tabooisation' of naked or almost-naked bodies were not developing at the same pace or at the same time in all societies.

5.1 'Human' versus 'nature'

Keith Thomas, in his book *Man and the Natural World*, provides numerous examples of how in early modern England 'we find anxiety, latent or explicit, about any form of behaviour which threatened to transgress the fragile boundaries between man and the animal creation. … Nakedness was bestial, for clothes, like cooking, were a distinctively human attribute' (1984: 38). Even though his emphasis is on England, Thomas – in a similar way to Elias – captures the universal connection for all western societies: the urge to distinguish the human from the animal. Just like Elias, he turns to the teachings of Erasmus who, in order to stress the importance of self-control in a society, juxtaposed 'proper manners' to the behaviour of various animals:

> Don't smack your lips, like a horse, he warned; don't swallow your meat without chewing, like a stork; don't gnaw the bones, like a dog; don't lick the dish, like a cat. … don't shake your hair like a colt; don't neigh when you laugh, like a horse, or show your teeth, like a dog; don't move your whole body when speaking, like a wagtail; don't speak through your nose: 'It is a property of crows and elephants.' (Thomas, 1984: 37)

This distancing of humans from their beastly past or the 'raw' natural state of being, even if purely conventional, was the basis for Elias's theory of the civilising process. The biological, physical and unpredictable sides of humans were carefully either eliminated or, in the case of necessary bodily functions, simply hidden behind the social scenes. Even though these processes were mostly unconscious, a certain sense of propriety and 'quality' was expected of people to maintain or widen the gap between humans and the beasts – which are symbolically representing 'nature' here. Through the advance of technology, such as the

domestication of fire, this gap widened irreversibly. The relationship of humans and their natural habitat changed dramatically when they reached 'ecological dominance' – to the point where it became possible to speak of the so-called 'anthroposphere' having been created (Goudsblom, 1992). The relationship between human beings and 'nature' is one of the underlying themes of Elias's *On the Process of Civilisation*. When Elias discusses the the fifteenth-century drawings in *Das Mittelalterliche Hausbuch* (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 199–209),[24] he was attempting to demonstrate how people did not always perceive 'nature' around them in the romantic way we tend to look at it these days. In fact people tended to live *in defiance of* nature and take it for granted as a utility to them. But at the same time, they were already undergoing a process of removing the 'distasteful' aspects of nature, and the gap between them and the rest of the natural world was becoming wider.

We can see a clear separation of 'nature' from 'culture'. The more complex and interdependent our societies have become, the more distant we felt to the natural world around us:

> And then, as the network of roads became, like social interdependence in general, more dense; as robber-knights and beasts of prey slowly disappeared; as forest and field ceased to be the scene of unbridled passions, of the savage pursuit of man and beast, of wild joy and wild fear, and as they were moulded by intertwining peaceful activities, the production of goods, trade and transport – so then, to pacified people, a correspondingly pacified nature became visible, and in a new way. (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 461)

We need to ask some questions about how we tend to perceive and conceptualise 'nature' today. In my study of naturism in Ireland, it was striking how an organisation that carries 'nature' in its own title tends to consider one thing as natural, with all the good connotations of the word, and on the other hand, to have such strict rules against other, blatantly 'natural' aspects of human body. This drew attention to how quickly in the broader society of today, the idea of the word 'natural' was adopted as a synonym for something unquestionably 'pure' and 'good'. But what about diseases, then? They are 'natural' occurrences too, after all. We make sure our fruit and vegetables are 'organic', that the pills or cosmetics we use are 'natural' and not synthetic. My yoga teacher once told me that 'nature grounds people' when they are in distress. So how do we decide what is 'good natural' and what is 'bad natural'? Do we consider ourselves as part of the natural system? Or have we removed ourselves from it through the process of

24 The 14 drawings to which Elias refers are reproduced in plates between pages 202 and 203 in the Collected Works edition of *On the Process of Civilisation*. For a critical discussion of Elias's use of the plates, see Patrick Murphy (2015).

civilisation and gaining 'ecological dominance' (Goudsblom, 1992)? And lastly, what actually constitutes 'nature' for us today?

Over time, during the processes of the civilising of western societies, it was not only our attitude to nature that became more tamed, the concept of landscape also appeared. Elias wrote two essays (2006 [1921]; 2009a [1986]) dedicated to the way we see and understand nature. He reminds us that it was not until the Renaissance that Western Europeans started to consider nature from the aesthetic viewpoint. He argues that 'it was actually this consciousness of the self as sharply cut off within its own fate, standing opposed to every other self and to the whole world, as if separated from them by an abyss, which first converted nature into landscape' (Elias, 2006 [1921]: 7). Looking at the natural world around us today, there is very little left that has not yet been tamed and reconstructed by human touch. We control the space, and we control and select the species that dwell within it. I would go as far as to say that through the creation of reservoirs, safaris and zoos, we tend to experience a form of 'mimetic excitement' from it. So fundamentally the concept of nature as we perceive and admire it today is 'civilised'; and if anything natural is 'uncivilised', it is considered dangerous and inhospitable to us.

The human body has been subdued through a range of restraints, regimentation and controls to separate it from its animalic past. On the basis of observations from my fieldwork and my study of naturist movement in general, I would like to use Elias's conceptualisation of our seeing nature as 'landscape', and adapt it to the human body as well. My argument is that through the processes of the taming of our bodies, nature in a way becomes external to us, as if we are no longer part of it. Through the control over our passions and natural impulses, our bodies became as pacified as the landscape around us. Elias refers to this as part of the processes of formalisation, when stricter controls and restraints slowly become part of people's habitus and so-called 'second nature', where inhibitions are no longer part of our conscious decision-making process.

Based on the theory of formalisation is the theory developed and perfected by Elias's student, Cas Wouters, who showed how 'informalising' trends have emerged as a counterpoint to formalisation.[25] He argues that this does *not* mean that the *overall* civilising process has simply gone into reverse. Nevertheless, in some aspects of behaviour, earlier prohibitions have disappeared. In describing the developing processes of formalisation taking place in the late medieval period, Elias (2012a [1939]: 89) quoted Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*:

25 Wouters has summarised his findings over several decades of research (in the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA) in two books (2004; 2007). Controversy over the theory of informalisation has also extended over several decades, and it is summarised in Wouters and Mennell (2015).

> Thingis whilom used ben now leyd a syde …
> Thingis somtyme alowed is now repreuid
> (Caxton, 1868 [*c*.1477]: p. 45, v. 64)

In contrast, Wouters notes that in the course of the last century, the opposite has often been the case: 'things that were forbidden before are allowed again'. Elements of both processes, formalisation and informalisation, will prove helpful in explaining the gist of my argument about why we are embarrassed by our naked bodies today.

The way we consider nakedness today is both a direct and an indirect product of processes of formalisation. Attempts to *de*sexualise bodies, to make people see them in ways they did not see them before, resulted in the process of eroticisation of naked human flesh. As Wouters explains:

> This process culminated in the Victorian lust-dominated sexuality and a complementary (romantic) love or relationship-dominated sexuality for women. The Victorians romanticised and idealised love, but their ideal of love was as passionate as it was exalted and desexualised, with a rather depersonalised sexuality as a drawback and outlet for the man's 'raging hormones' behind the scenes of social life. Developments went in the direction of a desexualisation of love and a 'desensualisation of sex' (Seidman, 1991), defining sexual intercourse increasingly as his 'right' and her 'marital duty', quite often accompanied by his inability to feel lust for the woman he loved. (2010: 727)

5.2 'Innate' emotions and 'master' emotions?

Intuitively, this changeability of human emotions may seem to run counter to common-sense assumptions about something eternal called 'human nature'. But, from historical evidence – not just that gathered by Elias for his famous study, but also from more recent work in the burgeoning field of the history of emotions, notably the work of Peter and Carol Stearns (1986, 1989, 1994) – we know that the emotional make-up of human beings changes in the course of history and social development. Prominent among the driving forces in processes of change in the organisation and patterning of people's emotions, behaviour and manners is *shame*. Thomas Scheff has considered shame to be 'the master emotion' (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991). As Goudsblom (2015) contends, however, Scheff exaggerates the fundamental value of drawing up lists of 'basic emotions'. Goudsblom points out that fear is a much stronger emotion than shame, and much more basic (if we use that terminology). Besides, shame is a type of fear, and more importantly it is an 'exclusively social emotion', a claim that we cannot make for fear in general, which is experienced by animals too.

How do we know that shame is an entirely social emotion? One of the greatest mysteries spanning sociology, psychology and biology is the intriguing phenomenon of blushing. It is intriguing because it tends to send contradictory messages, whether one is looking at it from a biological, sociological or social psychological point of view. I suggest that the answer lies somewhere in the intersection of all three disciplines. Charles Darwin in his classic book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), addresses the curious case of blushing from his naturalist stance:

> Blushing is the most peculiar and the most human of all expressions. Monkeys redden from passion, but it would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to make us believe that any animal could blush. The reddening of the face from a blush is due to the relaxation of the muscular coats of the small arteries, by which the capillaries become filled with blood; and this depends on the proper vaso-motor centre being affected. No doubt if there be at the same time much mental agitation, the general circulation will be affected; but it is not due to the action of the heart that the network of minute vessels covering the face becomes under a sense of shame gorged with blood. We can cause laughing by tickling the skin, weeping or frowning by a blow, trembling from the fear of pain, and so forth; but we cannot cause a blush, as Dr. Burgess[26] remarks, by any physical means – that is by any action on the body. It is the mind which must be affected. *Blushing is not only involuntary; but the wish to restrain it, by leading to self-attention, actually increases the tendency* [my emphasis] (1872: 310–11).

In order to see an even broader picture, let us also look at Goudsblom's remarks on the act of blushing:

> On the one hand, their gestures convey that they do not want to be seen any more, they make themselves small, they bow to the ground, they hide their faces. But then, on the other hand, all these bodily gestures are made in a conspicuous manner; in expressing their shame people are not just trying to hide but are at the same time drawing attention to themselves. This is most evident in what is usually regarded as the surest sign of shame: blushing. (Blushing is a typical double-bind signal: look at me, and don't look at me.) (2015).

Darwin points to three examples of blushing being most prevalent among certain groups, based on the findings of various specialists and scholars at the time, which relate directly to Elias's notion of 'social constraints towards self-constraint' (2012a [1939]: 403–17). Darwin mentions

26 He is referring here to the work of Thomas Henry Burgess, *The Physiology or Mechanisms of Blushing* (1839).

1. that children are very prone to blushing, but not infants.
2. that apparently women tended to blush a lot more than men of his time (which, considering the Victorian rules of propriety, and that the risk of being diagnosed as hysterical was quite high, is not entirely surprising.)
3. lastly, the case of children who were born blind and who had in effect to be *taught* to blush: taught to be aware of being observed and, as he puts it, 'to impress this knowledge on their minds' (1872: 312) and 'increase their habit of self-attention'.

Then Darwin goes on to demonstrate that blushing tendencies are inherited, which is less relevant to our argument here, apart maybe from one important aspect: that Darwin is right about blushing being inherited, but only in terms of *how* we blush, but not *why* we blush. The reasons for our blushing episodes are strictly socially induced, or 'socially inherited' if we must, and, as already stressed above, 'it is the mind which must be affected' in order for it to take place. Keeping all this in mind, let us now move towards more sociological explanations.

For any sociologist familiar with figurational sociology, the cases mentioned by Darwin above – especially that of children blushing most readily – would come as no surprise. Why not? According to Elias (2012a [1939]), on the individual or psychogenetic level of civilising processes where the constraints and expectations of certain modes of behaviour towards an individual in a society are slowly converted into self-constraints, with the more 'animalic' drives and passions under greater control, this becomes a more reliable and 'predictable' element of the larger structure of society. Elias (2012a [1939]: 418–21) refers to it as 'increasing foresight'. In other words, to take the example of a blushing child mentioned by Darwin, we can see that when a child is born it is completely dependent on its parent(s) to survive; it would never make it on its own. Infancy is also probably the phase when a human being is closest to an animal, though socialising forces are already under way, and the infant's *sociogenesis* has begun: it is gradually learning how to control its 'raw' impulses and emotions, in order to fit in with the rest of the society it was born into. It learns how to communicate its needs to the mother or father, first by crying then gradually by learning the common language. It learns to control the physicality of its own body, by the timing and placing of bowel movements, urinating and even hunger. These are some of the most obvious examples of this process, but most of them take place on an unconscious level, and shame and embarrassment seem to play a major role. In the long term far deeper psychological changes occur (Mennell, 1998: 96), and what was once instilled during childhood will operate in the form of 'self-compulsion':

> The web of actions grows so complex and extensive, the effort required to behave 'correctly' within it becomes so great, that beside the individual's conscious self-control, an automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control is firmly established. This seeks to prevent offences to socially acceptable behaviour by a wall of deep-rooted fears … (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 406).

Let us now return to the problem of shame and blushing. It would appear that the phenomenon of blushing takes place when some sort of conflict or anomaly arises between a person's self-restraint and the foresight required in handling social situations. The element of surprise, the unexpected incident, whatever it may be, triggers deeply rooted psychological emotions over which we have little direct control. The mind alerts the body to this shock to the system, which is beyond a person's control. Hence the individual gets a double shock to the system – first when one experiences a reaction one did not predict from within oneself, and second of being ashamed of experiencing this uncontrollable manifestation of one's shame to the outside world. From this shock stem the gestures of signalling, 'Yes I am aware it is happening and am trying to deal with it, so do not pay any attention to me, it's a temporary "social malfunction".' In other words, one is experiencing an uncontrollable surge of feelings of shame in dealing with the unexpected. That is why it rarely happens to people of a certain age, mainly because very little surprises them: because they have already experienced a great variety of social situations that may have been more or less challenging to their 'superegos', and they have learned from each one of them. That is why it happens much more often to children, whose individual learning process is still adapting to various realities and the challenges of society.

Let us look at it from a different angle, keeping in mind the idea of 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls'. Contrary to what the majority of the 'textile' part of society might imagine, in the case of naturists blushing never takes place.[27] They seem to experience their 'mimetic excitement' in a cathartic, controlled and most of all predictable way. Even among the first-timers to public nudity, blushing is something that almost never happens. It is because they know what to expect when facing other naked people, and they are more consciously aware that they are being observed than is a child when confronted with its own social *faux pas*. In other words, the sensation of losing control of one's feelings is not controlled in the case of blushing, or rather when experiencing a certain manifestation of unexpected feelings of shame.

How do we know that blushing is due to very critical self-assessment? It can be demonstrated through the case of the blind children mention by Darwin.

27 It was never observed during my fieldwork, nor ever mentioned by naturists participating in the study who were asked to describe their first time of being seen naked in the naturist environment.

The main difference between them and the rest of the social world around them – that they were initially not prone to blushing – was the fact that they were not conscious that they were being observed. As Michel Foucault has shown in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), it is this sensation of the possibility of *always* being seen and observed that stops us from doing things that might be considered questionable by the rest of society. Between the Foucauldian *gaze* and Eliasian *psychogenesis*, the blind children quickly managed to adjust to the social world. We can conclude that blushing is a sign of uncontrollable and unexpected shame, and that shame is indeed a completely social construct, not found anywhere else in the natural world. Blushing can be considered as the evidence of how far we have distanced ourselves from the concept of 'nature' we constructed ourselves.

5.3 A short history of nudity in the West

In order to find supporting evidence for how our European ancestors saw the naked body and what meanings it carried for them, let us follow in the footsteps of Elias himself, on a journey through the past. I sifted through sources which could bring me closer to seeing nakedness through the eyes of people from various European religions, regions and times. In order to do that I searched through historical accounts, such as archaeological and historical sources, which focused on the everyday customs of people in western societies throughout the centuries. I paid particular attention to everyday practices such as bathing, sleeping and participating in sports, and also drew on literary or visual works of art, and on people's personal diaries.

One of the principal features of civilising processes is that many of the physiologically 'natural' elements of our being were gradually removed 'offstage', into the wings of the social scene. Between the Renaissance and the mid-twentieth century in Europe, it gradually came to be considered quite rude and vulgar, breaking basic rules of propriety and good taste, to flaunt or even mention any of the bodily functions in company. The 'human animal' side of us, which we have no choice but to accept as a condition of our existence, was pushed behind the social scenes, unless it needed to be brought up in front of one's physician. The way we came to see and experience our bodies, naked or clad, how our basic drives and bodily functions became strongly controlled and problematised, and finally how shameful feelings, embarrassment, guilt and finally disgust are the emotions that seem to always accompany them to some extent – all these are closely interconnected. How delicately and intrinsically are the perceptions of our bodies so contextualised that when they become slightly out of balance they shift from desire to disgust and *vice versa*. It becomes some-

what less surprising if we look at this problem from a purely anatomical point of view, and as Hudson puts it:

> This intimate relation of opposites is made all the more poignant by the comical confusion that exists, anatomically, between our excretory and reproductive functions. In the male, the organ which is the seat of sexual desire doubles as the one that passes liquid waste; in the female, the vagina is poised between the two excretory orifices, and is closely connected to each. Anatomically, we are like some extraordinary surrealistic pun. (Hudson, 1982: 10)

Can we really ever escape the natural physicality of our bodies then?

The first main question about nakedness, its historical prevalence, importance, and what it represented to European societies of the past is whether the evidence from historical sources dating as far as antiquity is in line with what the theory of civilising processes would lead one to expect. I shall seek to show how, through the processes of formalisation, western societies were gradually removing (or at least concealing behind the veil of manners and conventions) those elements of our social and biological being that connect us to the natural or 'animal' side of our being. Secondly, we need to be able to decide, or at times decipher, whether the examples of the depiction or mention of nudity we come across in historical sources or artefacts indicate that it actually had the same sexual connotations as it has today? I would like to show how the way we have been seeing and experiencing nudity during the past few centuries was just a side effect or by-product, first of processes of formalisation, then desexualisation and consequently re-sexualisation of our naked bodies. Holding all the above together is the rise of the role and importance of feelings of shame and embarrassment.

5.4 Nakedness and bathhouses in ancient Greece and Rome

If we were to imagine, from the perspective of our times, situations and instances when the human body might be visible to other people of the past in its full 'as nature intended' form, bathing rituals and routines would be one of the first that sprang to mind. When we think of bathing traditions, or more precisely *public* bathing traditions, those of ancient Rome and Greece seem the obvious starting points, given the great organisation and splendour they involved and the role they played in people's lives. The more I explored the details of this lavish practice, the more I noticed that it was not only people's social position that determined the use of the bathhouse, but also that the role and extent it played in people's lives was strongly influenced by their religious beliefs. Public bathhouses of late antiquity would, to a sociological eye, have been one of the best and richest sources of information. To see the mixture of classes, genders and religions

often under one roof must have been a tremendously rich source of data for any truly curious sociologist. I would like now to compare the changes within ancient Greek and Roman societies with those taking place and documented among Western European societies.

Putting together the two words 'nudity' and 'antiquity' almost immediately brings to mind ancient Greeks and the way they glorified the naked human body (mainly male) as a vessel of ultimate beauty. They bared their bodies out of choice and with pride, and looked down on their barbarian counterparts who were not able to appreciate this special kind of beauty. One of the peoples guilty of this was the ancient Romans, who embraced nudity with a little more caution; nonetheless it also played a big part in their everyday lives.

For most of us today, speaking from the perspective of possessing personal bathrooms, a space considered very private and intimate, the idea of public bathhouses where we share the space with other people, and enjoy it, might seem rather alien to us. But the 'philosophy' behind public bathhouses reached far beyond matters of mere personal hygiene; it was about purification both of one's body and one's soul; they were places where you went to be seen, mingle, relax, listen to music, gossip and even dine. Everybody who was somebody spent a considerable amount of time there during the week. That was true even though, in the light of Elias's theory, ablutions might be expected to be included among the functions that were gradually removed from the social scene. It might come to be regarded as something seen as too close to the natural self, and the naked body as not to be paraded around because it is too 'raw' in its form from the social control point of view. Indeed, the Jewish, Muslim and early Christian customers of the public bathhouses were growing more critical of that.

We must not forget that since the Roman Empire covered such a huge territory – much of Western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa – the Romans were sharing their baths with people of various beliefs. But it was not just the religious mores that indicated what was appropriate or not. To be seen naked and to openly and lavishly care for one's body was often an indicator of high status in the society, and being seen by someone of lower social standing did not seem to bother people all that much (Bonneville, 1998). Most of the historical sources (Hoss, 2005; Yegül, 1992; Kosso and Scott, 2009; Miles, 1989) strongly imply that this was quite normal in the Roman baths. Fagan (1999) speculates that the word *nudus*, which was used to describe their unclothed state, does not necessarily mean full nudity; some kind of wrap might have been worn around the hips or breasts. Moreover, several of these historians agree that many bathhouses allowed for mixed bathing too, although some suggest it would be a mistake to generalise too much about this, because the tolerance of mixed bathing in public bathhouses most likely varied across the regions and establishments (Fagan, 1999). In the same way, there were surely bathhouses popular for other whims

and needs of both body and soul, or to put it more directly to 'suit the tastes of both the prude and the pervert' (Ward, 1992). We need to keep this in mind when analysing sometimes contradictory accounts of the evidence of the prevalence of nudity in those times: both accounts may be true. For instance, sometimes the richer establishments would maintain separate rooms for men and women, but most of them would be more likely to assign different sexes to different times of the day; yet if we are to believe the accounts of Martial and Juvenal, it seems possible that mixed bathing became more popular in the second half of the first century AD (Yegül, 1992). Yegül reports, however, that in comparison with the Greeks, the Romans considered it inappropriate to exercise fully naked in the *palaestra*,[28] and special light tunics or other skimpy garments were worn. Hoss (2005), on the other hand, argues that men went naked in both the *palaestra* and the bath, and wearing a *subligar*, a type of loincloth for men and women, was optional and depended on one's preference. Despite what we might initially imagine, the author claims that it was not the Greeks who introduced mixed bathing (*balnea mixta*), but that it was gradually introduced by the Romans in the course of the first century AD, and that it remained prevalent until the late fourth century. Discussing attitudes towards nudity, and trying to grasp the meaning of it for the people of antiquity, becomes even more interesting when we take a closer look at the rules and symbolism of two groups who were sharing public bathhouses with the Romans at some point, namely Jewish and (later) Muslim people.

5.5 Nudity in Judaism

Understanding the prohibitions of Christianity towards nudity, and more broadly understanding the development of various patterns of shame and embarrassment towards nakedness, requires a long-term view and needs to move beyond the usual dichotomy of 'allowed' or 'forbidden'. I would like to show how the patterns of shame that veil the human body, which we often consider to have started from the Middle Ages onwards, have their foundations in much older traditions.

The group who were slowest to become convinced about the Roman public baths (only in the late second century AD) was the Jewish population of the Roman Empire. While scholars are still debating the reasons for such late acceptance of Roman-style baths, what we do know is that before it happened Jewish people would bathe in natural waters or basins of water in the privacy of their

28 The *palaestra* was a special room, part of the whole bathing establishment, where both men and women enjoyed exercise before indulging in their ablutions.

own homes (Hoss, 2005). It was the strict Jewish legislation of the 'Second Temple Period' that prevented it from happening sooner.

Judaism, being the oldest monotheistic religion in Europe, is a valuable source of information for us about the symbolism and attitudes towards the body and its different parts. The specificity of which parts of the body may or may not be uncovered, and in front of whom, is astonishing at times. Hoss (2005) provides the most detailed and comprehensive account of all the intricate details of bathing by the Jewish population in antiquity, and I shall base all the following information on her expertise.

First, even though it was Roman influence that persuaded the Jewish population to become interested in public baths, mixed bathing of men and women was never acceptable to them – unless it were a man with his wife, most likely in the privacy of their own home. It was also more common for women to bathe naked with each other in the public baths than it was for men, unless they were less pious than the majority of them at the time. But the rules become even more complex from here. The naked human body was considered shameful according to the Tanach,[29] but not exactly for the same reasons it would be today. It was a symbol of poverty and state of vulnerability that was often used for shaming people:

> Somebody who is naked is at least ridiculous in Judaism; at worst he or she loses his or her 'honour'. Seeing the nakedness of social superiors (e.g. Ham seeing the nakedness of his father Noah) is a humiliation for the superior and a forbidden, punishable act for the inferior. Wearing a garment meant 'having a status and standing in the world', and being naked meant none of that. (Hoss, 2005: 12)

Bonfante (1989) says that Jewish rules and prohibitions towards naked bodies were created in opposition to the Greek 'shameless' standards towards nakedness, which from the sociocultural point of view makes sense: a monotheistic religious tradition was being built in opposition to polytheistic, or simply pagan, Greece. But it is not as simple as that, because the range of cultural and religious meanings in the Judaic tradition at that time is often staggering in its complexity. As Satlow (1997) argues, it was not just shameful to expose one's naked body, it was also a question of *how* the body was exposed and *in front of whom*. In order to try and simplify what is already very complex – and the reasoning not always logical – it is best to address male and female nudity in Judaism separately. Male nudity was seen as offensive in relation to the sacred and to the hierarchical context which also derived from the order of men to God himself; the prohibitions towards female nakedness were constructed mainly in relation to men, and had little to do with the sacred (Satlow, 1997).

29 The *Tanach* or *Tanakh* is the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

Whatever the questions about the level of nudity in the Roman baths – whether the genital area was covered with a piece of clothing or not – the concept of nakedness in Judaism is focused almost exclusively on the genitalia, meaning exposure of the penis in the case of men. Since a Jewish man has, according to rabbinic teachings, the ability to create a special 'holy space' everywhere by uttering God's name, it was crucial that it did not happen in any scenario where a man's penis was exposed. During neither urinating nor bathing was he ever allowed to recite *Shema*[30] or to mention God's name (Satlow, 1997). Nakedness was also seen as connected with social hierarchy, and so no kings, priests or fathers should ever be seen naked by someone of lower social status, because it might cause a loss of respect towards them;[31] 'male nakedness was thus limited to a specific area – the genital organs – and in relation to God understood as immortality, while in relation to other men it was a statement about social status' (Hoss, 2005: 13). But there are sources showing that once outside the sacred space it was not so unusual to see people naked:

> A. If one was standing naked in the field, or while doing his work, he covers himself with stubble, straw, or anything at all, and then recites [the *Shema*], even though they say that it is not praiseworthy for a man to stand naked.
> B. For when God created Adam, he did not create him naked, as it is written, 'When I clothed [him] in clouds, swaddled [him] in dense clouds' [Job 38: 9] (whole passage quoted by Satlow, 1997: 436).

One might speculate here that, even though rabbinic traditions and teachings did not treat nakedness outside the sacred space as a good thing, it might have taken some time for these teachings to be assimilated into everyday life. It was also the case with public bathhouses, where many accounts suggest that bathing nude was quite common among Jewish people, but that it was not without its strict rules:

> It is taught: If one enters the bathhouse, it is permitted at a place, where people are dressed, to speak [the *Shema*] and pray [the *Sh'mone 'Esre*]; and it is unnecessary to say that one offers the greeting. One [there] puts on *tefillin*, and it is unnecessary to say that one does not have to put them off. In a place, where most people are commonly naked, one does not offer the greeting, and it is unnecessary to say [that one cannot] recite [the *Shema* there] and pray [the *Sh'mone 'Esre*]. And one puts off the *tefillin* and it is unnecessary to say that one does not put them on. [In a place, where] a part [of the visitors is] naked and part is dressed, one offers the greeting, but one does not recite [the *Shema*] nor prays [the *Sh'mone 'Esre*]. One [there] does not put

30 *Shema* is a Jewish liturgical prayer traditionally recited daily in the morning and the evening.
31 This was the direct opposite of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European conventions described by Elias.

> the *tefillin* off and does not put them on. And one does not wear them, until one leaves the area of the bathhouse (Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai in Hoss, 2005: 75).

And even if a Jew takes off all his clothing, including the *tefillin*, he still has his circumcision to remind him of his faith and his commands (Hoss, 2005).

Female nakedness, on the other hand, according to Satlow, is not understood in similar terms to that of men. It was not offensive to God, nor was it related to any statement of social status. It was, though, understood solely in relation to female propriety and female influence on men, since women's nakedness arouses sexual passion in men. 'The rabbis frequently exhort (rather than prohibit outright with a legal ruling) men not to look at women in any state of dress or undress, for fear that they will be led into sexual misconduct' (Satlow, 1997: 440–1). It was even more the case with looking at a woman's genitals, which would be equivalent to having sexual intercourse with her.

5.6 Nudity in Islam

Since both Islam and Christianity originated from the Judaic tradition, it comes as no surprise – at least, on the basis purely of my comparisons of attitudes to nudity among these three religions – to see the level of strictness towards nakedness among Muslims and Christians.

The more radical bodily restrictions that we first saw among the pious Hebrews are also visible among the early Muslims, and there is a late echo in the stricter forms of Islam today. Yet the *hammam* (the Islamic bathhouse) – remains the closest surviving equivalent to the Roman baths today. It has been said that 'while medieval Westerners were espousing the principle of "going unwashed" (*alousia*) to prove the dominance of the soul over corporeal weakness, Islamic civilisation was adhering to the public bathing habits of the ancients and preserving them for the modern age' (Fagan, 1999: 3). This is true, though more in terms of architecture and functionality in the rules of the bath. The rules of Islam clearly state that 'total nudity is very strongly advised against, even when one is "alone"; this is because absolute solitude does not exist in a world in which we share existence with the djinns and angels' (Bouhdiba, 2012: 38). According to Cuffel (2009), however, when Muslims first arrived in the former regions of Byzantine Empire, such as Iberia or Italy, they were repelled by nude bathing in the public bathhouses. Usāmah ibn Munqidh (1095–1188), in his autobiography, expresses the horror of coming across crusading settlers and their lack of good manners in the bathhouse, when he describes the case of the Frank who pulls off the apron of one of the Muslim bathhouse keepers, and, amused by his lack of pubic hair, he demands the same 'service' for him and his wife (Cuffel, 2009).

The impertinent Frank broke several rules of the *hammam* that day: first he removed the apron of the proprietor, who like every man attending baths is obliged to wear it, and then he demanded a very intimate service of removing his wife's pubic hair, violating the segregation rule of the *hammam*. But as Hillenbrand (1999) informs us, it was quite normal for Muslim literature of the time to mock European Christians as 'sexually perverse'. That is only one side of the Muslim rules for using bathhouses, because, especially in the case of female nudity, it was not just because of modesty and the corporeality of the female body that veiling was required, but also because of a risk of heresy. The fear was that since Muslim women had to share baths with women of other religions (*dhimmi*), they might adopt some of the non-Muslim practices. Some, like Ibn al-Hājj, were concerned that if Muslim women were to be seen naked by *dhimmi*, especially if they viewed their genitals, the Muslim women would reach 'the state of humiliation' (Cuffel, 2009). But as Cuffel also contends, not all Islamic moralisers were as concerned with their women's genitals being on display, but more with the fact that they were adopting new practices from their Jewish, Christian or pagan female co-bathers. What then of the early European Christians' modesty?

5.7 Early Christianity and the naked body

When groups of various beliefs share the same space, they tend to demonise one another. Just as Muslims perceived Christians as sexual perverts, Christians in turn claimed that Muslim people must be 'religiously as well as physiologically inferior' and that was why they 'bathed frequently because they stank in contrast to baptised Christians' (Cuffel, 2009: 182). The Christians, similarly to the Hebrews, were more pragmatic about their use of bathhouses. They believed in segregation of men and women, and did not approve of pagan practices such as those taking place in the *gymnasion* – nude exercise, in other words. For Christians, bathing was not supposed to be 'pleasurable', but more about being healthy (Hoss, 2005). Over time, this became overshadowed by more extreme attitudes towards hygiene, especially the practice of *alousia* – or ascetic abstinence from bathing.

One of the most important facts that needs to be stated here first is that nakedness in itself was not, despite what we might imagine today, the central issue or concern for those initially pointing the moralising finger. With the rise of Christianity especially, what became more important was that it was the body that corrupted the human soul, hence it had to be concealed. Miles, in her book on the role of the female nakedness and its religious meaning in the Christian west (1991), describes the early stages of this transition and how contradictory they were at times. She discusses the practices of early Christian baptism, when

the role of the naked body was crucial to the ritual itself. It is an example of what the author believes is fundamental to understanding how changes in ideas and practices began to take place: she argues that it is not changes in ideas that precede changes in the practice of rituals, but quite the opposite:

> Historians have often assumed that people of the past acted in certain ways because they held certain ideas; they have then proceeded to identify and examine those ideas while neglecting the practices related to them. The literature of Christian devotion, however, reveals that most historical people thought it obvious that changed ideas follow, rather than precede, changed behaviour. The aim of religious practices was thus not to 'act out' previously held ideas or beliefs, but to realise – to make real – in a person's body the strong experience that, together with the religious community's interpretation of that experience, produced a counter-cultural religious self. (Miles, 1991: 24)[32]

Among other things, one reason why the presence and inclusion of nakedness in the religious rituals of people of that time may seem more experimental and confusing to us now. It is important to stress here that there was no single moment in time when all human nakedness was immediately banned from the lives of the early Christians. It took time, observation and careful reasoning to reach the end point of eliminating nudity altogether not only from the public scene, but also – as we can remember from more recent events in our Christian past – even from private areas of our lives. In Victorian times, many English people bathed rarely and only when wearing a special gown, because seeing even one's own naked body was considered indecent and dangerous. We can find more examples of that among the Puritans or, less than a century ago, among devout Irish Catholics. Even though it was a very long process that resulted in such strict separation from our bodies, it most certainly was not a linear one: there were larger or smaller shifts towards more or less radical attitudes to nudity, together with an even more complex network of contexts involving nudity. That was also the case with the early Christians and their baptism rituals, where nudity was initially perceived as a symbol of religious subjectivity, or more precisely: 'the naked body was no longer object, but subject' (Miles, 1991: 25). Even though ancient Romans looked down at Greek openness to nudity in their social life, it does not mean that there was no place for it in their non-public social lives. Despite their disdain for the Greek nude practice of gymnastics or other sports, such as wrestling, most of the gladiatorial spectacles contained nudity on the part of participating wrestlers as well. It was also the case with the classical arts and public baths. These signify already established meanings attached to the act of being

32 Miles thus takes what Goudsblom (2004) has called the 'Lucretian' stance, as opposed to the Western mainstream 'Augustinian' view. For further remarks on this, see chapter 6 below.

naked, from which early Christians drew in their ritual practices. We must not forget that even though they chose their own religious path, they were surrounded by their pagan counterparts who, as we may imagine now, led their everyday lives somewhat differently from the Christians. But they lived side by side with each other for a long time, and they shared many practices and views through the chains of interdependence that linked them. An example that shows just how some of the views of life evolved over time is the use of public bathhouses, often allowing mixed bathing, to which Christian reaction can be best summed up by St Jerome, who opposed virgins using the same baths as married women or eunuchs, and who declared that 'a clean body and a clean dress mean an unclean soul' (*Epistle* 107.II; NPN 6, 194). That does not necessarily mean that early Christians stopped attending public bathhouses overnight, but rather that the practice of bathing began slowly to withdraw the spectacle of naked flesh that would have been taken for granted before, and started to reduce the obviousness of its occurrence.

A scholar who embarks on a journey to discover the history behind our feelings of embarrassment towards nakedness and measuring the levels of obscenity which surrounded it might, according to Ziolkowski (1998), to a greater or lesser extent encounter a potential risk of projecting the moral orientations of our time on to the works of artists or authors of antiquity or the Middle Ages. As he argues, we tend to assume that the Middle Ages were all about 'monks clad in dark and dank wool robes, that they permitted neither themselves nor others any frivolity and exercised the strictest censorship on artistic creation' (1998: 11). It is an especially useful warning when attempting to track down signs of shame and squeamishness in nude paintings or sculptures through the centuries. As art historian Waldemar Januszczak says, 'art never lies', but nevertheless we must also bear in mind that art does not always have to be representative or a reflection of the habits and rules of ordinary people. For instance, Bonneville (1998) argues that even until as late as the eve of the First World War, the only way to present nudity in art without causing shock and scandal was to present bathing scenes, and mainly those depicting mythological heroes, gods and goddesses.

5.8 'The art of choosing the right passions'[33]

Arousal in response to the sight of the naked human body is a *learned* form of titillation for us. Human sensuality has developed so much that it is difficult to 'rewind' the history of human desire and try to recapture the main processes that governed and directed it.

33 A phrase from Baron d'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1773).

The story is far from simple and instead of developing in one undeviatingly straight line, the process is jagged, which given the complexities of human societies can only be considered appropriate. There are, though, some larger trends and regularities that I would like to outline here, in the hope of reaching a better understanding of our historical relationship with nakedness.

The earliest reasonably substantial historical evidence takes us back once more to ancient Greece. In chapter 4, I discussed the male nude ideal, but now I want to return to the Greeks' more general attitudes towards naked human bodies.

Plato in the *Republic* (Book V, 452) advocated Greek openness to mixed exercise of naked boys and girls, and reflected upon those who considered it immoral and ridiculous; their attitude represented nothing more than 'unripe fruit plucked from the tree of knowledge'. Two features are striking here. The first is that the ease of Greeks towards nakedness, did not, despite the moralising judgement of others, result in some incessant and unrestrained feast of sexual desires or sexual violence. The second feature is that the awareness and maturity of thought displayed here by Plato represents the higher level of reflection corresponding directly to Wouters's conception of informalisation. The 'ripe fruit' can be interpreted as the lack of confidence in one's self-restraint or control over one's own drives, because there are greater experiences to be had here. So it may be asked here whether the ancient Greeks had it all figured out thousands of years ago and, if so, how did it all go wrong? This type of thinking represents quite a classic trap for our conceptualising the course of development in the narrow terms of 'progress', against which Elias warned us when constructing the theory of civilising processes. Elias would also be cautious about placing ancient Greeks high on a developmental pedestal, because despite what may seem a rather 'civilised mentality', they were also very violent.

The Romans, as Ellis (1929) argues, lacked the Greek finesse or refinement towards nudity, and reduced it to 'licentious indulgence', even when they enjoyed it on stage or in the arenas during gladiatorial fights. In that sense, even though it may seem quite contradictory, they 'were yet in reality laying the foundation of Christian morality' (Ellis, 1929: 96). It is quite possible that the basis for the Christian aversion towards the 'flesh', be that naked or not, was not caused so much by its being seen as the fundamental source of evil and lust, but rather that it became a component of the Christian opposition to the pagan morality and practices they had witnessed. As Miles argues, the Christian 'association of the colosseum with "devil's pomp", most sharply characterised by the torture and execution of Christian martyrs, provided ample reasons for the rejection of that arena' (1991: 29); and public nakedness was by extension associated with such secular customs, hence its rejection by Christian moralists. She also argues that it would be wrong to assume that the initial reasoning underlying Christian

baptism, and the nudity that was part of the ritual, was an extension of the secular public nakedness to which the Christians were already accustomed. Miles maintains that the context developed by early Christians for the naked body during baptism was far removed from its secular meanings. It became a symbol of religious *subjectivity*, contrary to secular notions of the body being an *object*. The new meanings of Christian nakedness were 'informed by the sense that a human body, because of its intimate connection with the soul, should not be casually or carelessly exposed; … bodies are the site and naked bodies the symbol of religious subjectivity' (1991: 30). In the Eastern empire, the Syrian bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote (around AD 428) that:

> You draw therefore near to the holy baptism and before all you take off your garments. As in the beginning when Adam was naked and was in nothing ashamed of himself, but after having broken the commandment and become mortal, he found himself in need of an outer covering (Miles, 1991: 33).

It is somewhat easier to understand now how Christian wariness about the human body snowballed into its ascetic and 'evil' meaning, for which Christianity is known. The Church 'was passionately eager to fight against what it called "the flesh", and thus fell into the error of confusing the subjective question of sexual desire with the objective spectacle of the naked form' (Ellis, 1929: 96). As multiple historical accounts demonstrate, Christian moralists could preach to their hearts' content, but changes of behaviour and mentality across European societies continued over long periods, centuries in fact.

In her book on the history of bathing in Europe, Bonneville (1998) presents many examples from all over medieval Europe where public bathhouses were booming, and with them the presence of the naked body.

How this happened, the author explains, was that during the first Crusades, the Westerners became so amazed with the levels of sophistication of the Oriental bathing experience that bathhouses began to mushroom all over Europe and even Asia. Bonneville presents illustrations from old manuscripts by Valerius Maximus illuminated for the Duke of Burgundy in 1470, where we can see people of both sexes bathing naked together, enjoying their festive setting of food, wine and music (1998: 34–5). According to German custom depicted in Albrecht Dürer's prints (*The Men's Bath* and *The Women's Bath*) or in miniatures from Konrad Kyeser's manuscript *Bellifortis* (*c.*1405), a manual of military technology, it was quite usual to see people heading naked to the baths. A little later, when standards relating to nudity became stricter, people were covered with a sheet or a long shirt (Bonneville, 1998). In fact the author also argues that in Germany public baths were generally mixed or merely separated with some sort of flimsy partition. Over time, owing to the spread of plague and syphilis, and with the reassertion of the Church's injunctions against the supposed immorality

of these establishments, bathhouses began to disappear from France, England and Germany.

During the Renaissance the sight of the naked body began gradually to become less common, and so did ease at being seen naked by other people (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 158–66). It also meant that the habit of the full body wash became quite rare too:

> Since being clean and tidy is no more than a matter of the appropriateness of a person’s clothes … we must, if we wish to be clean and tidy, suit our clothes to our size, condition and age. The law that we must indispensably observe, if we wish to be clean and tidy, is the law of fashion (Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1677).

With the Enlightenment, and the growing influence of such figures as Rousseau, Voltaire and Locke, European societies returned to ‘nature’ again, and things like exercising, fresh air and bathing made a comeback. Yet the body remained largely hidden from the view of others until the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the Victorian English took propriety and the concealment of their bodies a little more seriously than other Western Europeans:

> There is perhaps no race of people in the world who evince so great a disregard of personal cleanliness as the English, and at the same time, no nation that piques itself so much upon the possession of that quality. This is a bold assertion, and one not likely to be relished by the multitude, but, unhappily, its boldness is only exceeded by its truth. It is a fact, I think, that will hardly admit of contradiction, that a large proportion of the population of this country, never submitted themselves to an entire personal ablution in their lives, and many an octogenarian has sunk into his grave with the accumulated dirt of eighty years upon his skin, and yet were he charged with uncleanliness, would indignantly repel the assertion, and would endeavour to prove the purity of his person, by instancing the cleansing his face and hands several times daily, this he considers extreme cleanliness, and secures a reputation for the most scrupulous neatness. A medical writer, who advocates cleanliness with much earnestness, speaking of the neglect of it in this country, says, ‘some disgusting economists of both time and water, reduced ablution to a habit of washing the face and hands, leaving the clothing to hide whatever dirt might accumulate on the rest of the body, and as though enamoured of its ingenuity, their descendants have never abandoned the same filthy and unwholesome practice’. (Mahomed, 1843: 24–5)

As Ellis (1929) contends, the constant struggle to make the naked body disappear completely was finally won, with the rather controversial result that Horatio Mahomed reports above, after travelling the world to examine bathing practices. For the first time in history too, it was less a case of religious attitudes that claimed the immorality of human flesh, but rather this matter being a question of

etiquette, so that nakedness was indecent and repugnant rather than 'sinful'. This had another consequence, to which I turn next.

5.9 The titillating naked body

How did nakedness became sexual and erotic to us, and can we still claim that it is a 'natural' reaction? Once more there are no easy and definite answers to this question. In studying nakedness, the best historical evidence sometimes comes more from indirect than direct sources. Thus, in order to see if nakedness really was always erotic to people over the centuries, I looked for the ways in which people had sex with each other. Shorter's (2005) concept of 'total body sex' helped to fill the gaps in my evidence collected so far. By using this theory together with Elias's and Wouters's theories on formalisation and desexualisation processes, I should like to argue that the erotic and sexual attractiveness of the naked body to us, with its stimulating effects on our sex drive, is learned; and furthermore, it is a side effect of the process of separating the 'beastly' or 'animalic' side of us.

Shorter describes the desire for and nature of sexual activities up to nineteenth century, both in the matter of quality and quantity. He argues that male desire for the sexual act was always a constant, but that the *quality* of the sexual activity was not. He provides evidence that 'for the vast majority of men before the end of the nineteenth century, sexual actions and fantasies were limited to intercourse in the missionary position' (Shorter, 2005: 28). He argues that even in the most 'libertine' cases of sexual exploits, it was more about the 'positionology' rather than 'zoneology' of sexual intercourse. He brings up the at times quite intimate confessions found in the diaries of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), Chief Secretary to the Admiralty, Member of Parliament, and man about town in Restoration London, who does not seem to show much interest during the sexual act in anything but his own penis. To be blunt on the matter, there is no breast stimulation, oral sex on either side, or any kind of foreplay. What this shows for my argument concerning nudity is that nakedness was not the arousing force for the sexual act, which might come as a shock to us today. The main focus was on the genital regions, and the sensuality (somewhat short in duration as it might be!) was focused on the act of the intercourse itself. Quite astonishingly, what stirred the man's desire at the time was the woman's face, 'with the rest of the body being either a mystery or a matter of uninterest' (Shorter, 2005: 33). Shorter brings up a story of Casanova who, during an opera in Paris in 1750, is engaged in a conversation in the royal box:

> 'Which one of the two actresses do you think is more beautiful?'
> 'That one,' replies Casanova.
> 'She has ugly legs!'
> 'One can't see them, Monsieur, and anyway, in assessing the beauty of a woman the first thing I ignore are the legs'.

Shorter argues here that it was not until the end of the twentieth century that there occurred what he calls *total body sex*. The concept refers to sexual attention to new bodily zones that place greater emphasis on the sensual aspects of the sexual act, such as the introduction of foreplay or oral and anal sex. The problem with Shorter's theory lies not in its pointing out the more informalised levels of sexual enjoyment, but rather in his false assumption that the sexual drive is fuelled by biology and that it is 'steady, unidirectional, and irreversible drive' (2005: 167). As I shall now argue, that is not necessarily the case.

5.10 The pudenda agenda: between scopophilia and 'bushwhacking'

It is almost impossible to discuss the problem of pubic hair among naturists and how we comprehend 'nature' today, without including the role and 'position' of the genitalia in the discussion. Central to the problem, involving the notions of nature, nakedness and shame, lie the genitals. We all know and understand their anatomical functions and their importance for the continuation of the human species, or putting it more poetically as Courbet did in the title of his famous painting of the view between a woman's legs: *L'Origine du monde* (*The origin of the world*, 1866).

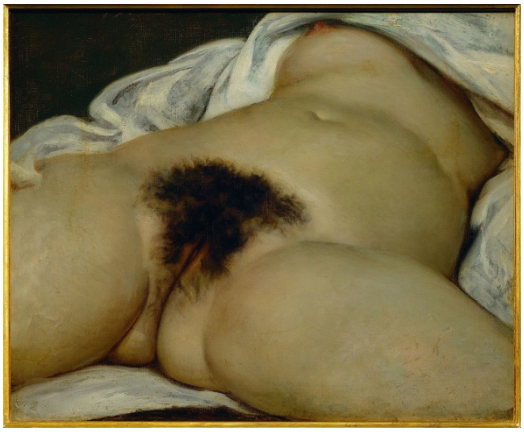

Figure 1: Gustave Courbet, 'L'Origine du monde', 1866

Zoologists such as Desmond Morris argue that:

> The fact that the human female (unlike female monkeys) gives no clear signal to the male when she is ovulating also means that the majority of copulations are not procreative but instead serve to further tighten the emotional bind. When human beings make love they *literally* make love. (2004: 205)

During the course of civilising processes, we have slowly moved towards greater control over our animalic side. What was unpredictable and impulsive became more tamed and restrained. The case of nakedness is curious because it came symbolically to represent the animalic danger of which humans were once capable, the danger of the 'human animal'. We can refer to the sexual violence of the past to rectify our faulty conceptualisation of nudity. Underlying sexual violence in the past, especially in the Middle Ages, was that it happened because the perpetrators could get away with it, and because they did not consider it a crime or immoral. The social constraints and, by extension, the self-restraints over sexual drives were relatively weak, possibly because the drives were triggered by the sight of a woman's 'physical proximity' or availability to a man, not by a naked woman *per se*. Nevertheless, sexual violence against women, was a reality. Was the sexual trigger for intercourse provoked by the sight of, not so much of female nakedness – which, as we have seen, was not always erotic – but of the female genitals, and by the hormonal surge that makes men randy in the first place? The documented history on sexual violence towards women reports not only its prevalence, but also how eroticised, sanitised or even prettified it was in the so called 'heroic rape' imagery of medieval times (Wolfthal, 1993). These reports of rape were never directly addressed by Elias in his *On the Process of Civilisation*, but he does argue that state-formation processes involving the monopolisation of the means of violence led to diminishing levels of personal or everyday violence. Elias mainly refers to rape in the context of the aggressiveness and cruelty of medieval warfare (2012a [1939]: 187, 189, 272, 274). The implication with regard to nakedness and shame is that none of these violent sexual acts were triggered by the visual stimulation of the naked human body. Wouters (1997) confirms this point in his critique of Duerr's *Der erotische Leib* (1997), where he addresses Duerr's assumption that breasts were always erotic, because nipple stimulation releases a certain hormone that increases women's sexual excitement. Duerr also supposed that for men they are erotic because the cleavage reminds them of buttocks; Wouters refers to this proposition as the 'inverted Rue d'Amour'. Duerr supposed that this went back to female primates who wanted to make their sexual relations more intimate, and seemingly used their breasts to turn male attention away from the buttocks, or *coitus a tergo*, towards what we know today as the 'missionary position'. One might argue that it could hardly have been the case, because female breasts do not actually resemble

buttocks (referring here only to the similar type of cleavage between the two), until they are bound and hoisted up by the corset or bra. Since we do not have any kind of actual evidence on the primal sources for sexual titillation, we may add to the speculations here and advance the most theoretically parsimonious hypothesis: that men find breasts erotic simply because they are one of the two main anatomical differences between them and the opposite sex. Moreover, many historical sources do not support the rationale of the 'inverted Rue d'Amour', since erotic interest towards breasts was never quite as great as it has been since the end of nineteenth century (Shorter, 2005; Yalom, 1997; Lindquist, 2012). As in the cases of Pepys or Casanova, men in early modern Europe did not care much about female nudity for sexual arousal, as long as the female companion displayed 'agreeable features' altogether, like her 'pretty face'. We could speculate that nudity during sexual acts was more convenient 'for easier access' towards penetration than for visual stimulation of the senses, or more about the tactile experience of it rather than the visual.

To return to our argument about genitalia and pubic hair, we need to establish not so much *when* but *how* nakedness became first shameful then erotic *and* shameful. The human body has always been and always will be sexual, as it is the natural imperative and prerogative of any living creature of the animal kingdom seeking to survive. What becomes of this drive during the long-term processes of development may affect the ways we see or execute this right, but it cannot change its existence. The origins of nakedness being both shameful and erotic lie somewhere within the long-term processes of human development or, to be more precise, between processes of formalisation and informalisation, desexualisation and sexualisation, which can result in either the rise of shaming mechanisms or eroticisation of the body. Wouters argues against the recent 'moral panics' about the sexualisation of society at the end of twentieth and early in the twenty-first century, which puts it mainly in a negative light as some sort of 'outside force, quite often presented as operative only upon others, not upon oneself' (2010: 726). In his argument he refers to authors such as Attwood (2009) and Durham (2008), who blame the more relaxed and open attitude towards human sex on the 'pornification' of western culture through the media. It is not that he dismisses the role the media play in this as a convenient tool of distribution, but rather that he disagrees with the rationale of thinking that the processes of sexualisation happened *to us*, rather than came from *within us*:

> [like] such processes as individualisation and informalisation, sexualisation is one encompassing social *and* psychic process, not some outside social force invading the individual's body and soul (Wouters, 2010: 726).

How can this be applied to the problem of nakedness? Historical data gathered by many historians indicate that the genitals, as far as our knowledge stretches today, always carried certain meanings, which ranged from obvious symbols of virility and fertility to darker, more sinister and dangerous meanings (Jolly, 2012), or were shrouded by a powerful taboo, especially in the case of women's genitals (Ford, 1998). The occurrence of carvings of women with extremely exaggerated vaginas found mainly in medieval Ireland – the sheela-na-gigs – often presented with special emphasis 'by hands holding the vulva apart … the face may be menacing or noncommittal … [with] little indication of head hair or breasts' (Ford, 1998: 177).

Figures 2 and 3: Two typical sheela-na-gigs

Historians and archaeologists seem unable to reach a consensus on the true meaning of sheela-na-gigs, with interpretations ranging from obscene images representing an Irish pagan past to that of apotropaic value (Ford, 1998; Kelly, 1996). The same level of obscenity and disgust may be found in the old Judaic tradition in relation to the display of the male penis. Rabbinic disgust and disapproval are based on the offensiveness of nakedness to the sancta, and since according to their beliefs God is omnipresent, a man cannot be seen 'naked of commandments', thus the practice of male circumcision protects him from 'absolute' nakedness (Satlow, 1997). But it has also been known that, among the ancient Egyptians and Greeks, phallic statues, *kouros*, were believed to have protective powers against the evils of the world. It is not my intention to list all the occurrences and examples of 'shameful' behaviour and feelings about the display

of the genitals, because it is safe to assume that most, if not all, cultures assign some meaning to them and their display. Wouters speaks of the processes of sexualisation that have been gradually integrated back into everyday life since the last decades of the nineteenth century, and nudity along with them. Even though Wouters focuses his theory on this relatively recent period of time, it does not mean that this process has not been repeated in the course of human development. As Elias has shown, changes in standards of behaviour began to take place from the Middle Ages onwards, including those regarding sexuality, referred to by Wouters as *desexualisation*. As these processes are believed to have taken place, it would also lead us to assume that human behaviour must have been more openly sexualised, or more characteristic of 'first-nature' behaviour, which corresponds to the needs and affects that we share with the rest of the animal kingdom (Wouters, 2011). This would not necessarily be true in the case of ancient Greeks, who, despite their legendary knack for violence (Elias, 2102a [1939]), also displayed forms of self-restraint more characteristic of 'third-nature' behaviour when it came to their enjoyment of the naked form. It would, however, be wrong to assume that any of these processes take place simultaneously or develop to the same extent in all societies.

Examining the case of nakedness, with its mixture of both shameful and erotic feelings, teaches us about various degrees or stages these long-term processes can achieve or develop. Despite the fact that we were once more 'wildly' unrestrained in terms of our sexual 'appetite', the level of sexualisation of the naked body was never as highly developed in its form as it has been during the past hundred years. To support this claim I would like to return to Shorter's (2005) concept of 'total body sex', in which he claims that it was not until the twentieth century that we began to make love with more careful attention to foreplay, discovering new erogenous zones of both the male and the female body. The *pudendum*, the term of Latin origin which signifies genital (mainly female) region, derives from the Latin for 'to be ashamed'.

What about modern rather anatomical and highly erotic representations of genitals in pornography today?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *scopophilia* or *scoptophilia*, which refers to 'sexual pleasure derived chiefly from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity', is a term first used in the 1920s. It derives from the Greek word *skopein*, meaning 'to look at'. The twentieth century saw the rise of pornography on a scale that had never been recorded before. The development of visual technology and later also the rise of the Internet have undoubtedly helped the process of sexualisation and, most importantly, eroticisation of the naked body. As Wouters contends, after the Victorian 'desexualisation of love' followed by 'desensualisation of sex' (Seidman, 1991), from the

early decades of the twentieth century there was a gradual unravelling. Quite the reverse processes have taken place: the 'sexualisation of love' evident particularly in the case of women, and in turn an 'eroticisation and sensualisation of sex' for men (Wouters, 2010: 727).

The changes in the meanings of nudity, and their relationship with the conceptualisation of nature, can also be traced through the history of attitudes towards pubic hair. The problem of pubic hair came to my attention during the time spent with the naturists in Dublin. Most of them – both men and women – tended to treat their pubic hair to some extent. This shows the level of 'evolution' of the naturist philosophy – especially since they insist on referring to themselves as 'naturists' – away from the original identification with nature and what is natural about human body, pubic hair included. Taking into consideration the widespread cultural trend not only of the practice of the hair removal, but also open discussions about it by celebrities,[34] it is difficult to ignore how this is affecting modern naturists as well. One might speculate, though, from the Goffmanian perspective, whether this trend among the nudists is not connected to some form of 'extending' levels of nakedness, beyond the stripping off of clothes, to disclosing even more and possibly drawing attention to the extent of it. This is when opinions among naturists become more pronounced. As was evident during my interviews, all of them took a very strong position against exhibitionism, which according to them is based on the need to attract attention to their nudity not only through explicit behaviour, but also by means of piercings in the genital regions or so-called 'cock rings'. Judging by this, it seems that nakedness for naturists is about the 'ordinariness' of it, and the moment the context is 'polluted' with additional ornamentation it becomes more exhibitionistic, erotic and obscene. Pubic hair removal, to a partial or full extent, is problematic because the meanings it conveys and roles it plays can be very contrasting. There are voices (Smolak and Murnen, 2011; Ramsey et al., 2009; Cokal, 2007) who make the connection between the rise of popularity of pubic hair removal with the increased use of Internet pornography where a 'hairless' pubis seems to be the norm. This opens up a new level of argument for us.

Historically we have seen some evidence of this practice among the Egyptians, Muslims through the rules of Sharia laws (Ramsey et al., 2009) and the Greeks, which indicates some level of hostility to it already. Kilmer (1982) puts the theory of genital phobia among the classical Greeks to the test and shows that genital depilation was expected of Greek women at least to some extent. Interestingly enough, he shows that only 'ladies' were expected to treat their pubic hair through various practices such as plucking or singeing. Prostitutes, on the other

34 During recent years, celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Cameron Diaz were reported publicly discussing their removal of pubic hair.

hand, were forbidden this practice, which would suggest that a hairy pubis signified the less appealing if not dangerous side to depilation. Kilmer also provides further evidence for my analogy between our relationship with nature and with our bodies, treating them both as landscapes; Kilmer says that the ancient Greeks expected 'a garden, not a jungle' (1982: 106). Jolly (2012) argues that the problem with the attempts to analyse the meanings of body hair is that such meanings tend to be very much contextualised and often contradictory. The negative meanings that surrounded the hairy pubis during antiquity, were also confirmed by Galen:

> While body hair for men thus signifies maturity, virility, and courage, for women different associations apply. Women, too cold and wet by nature to effect such transformation regarding their excess moistures except in their 'privates' and their highest and thus hottest area – that is, pubic and head hair – instead discharge their dangerous superfluities monthly. (Jolly, 2012: 185)

But Jolly demonstrates that these differences did not only involve the gendered aspects of seeing pubic hair – there are also some differences between the pagan and Christian representations. While female pubic hair retained its negative associations, for men she uses examples of representations of Christ in Italian art up to the late Middle Ages, where pubic hair was supposed to emphasise Christ's humanity. Artistically, though, owing to the influences of both Greek and Roman art, the late medieval and Renaissance artists were encouraged to omit the representation of pubic hair on women; Jolly argues that this may have been the result of the 'preferences of men returning from the Crusades – that is, from Eastern harems – for Muslim women did indeed remove body hair' (2012: 190).

Is pubic hair the last bastion of what is left of our animalic past then? John Berger makes the point, while commenting on Bronzino's *Allegory of Time and Love* (*c.*1545), that often women's bodies (mainly nude depictions) were positioned in the picture in a way that appealed to a man's sexuality as a viewer, and one of the means of achieving that was through removal of all hair on her body:

> It has nothing to do with her sexuality. Here and in the European tradition generally, the convention of not painting the hair on a woman's body helps towards the same end. Hair is associated with sexual power, with passion. The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimised so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly of such passion (2009: 49).

Figure 4: Agnolo di Cosimo, called Bronzino (1503–72) *An Allegory of Time and Love* (alternative titles *Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time*, *An Allegory of Venus and Cupid* and *A Triumph of Venus*)

As Cokal (2007) argues, the representations and also the meanings of the pudendum have developed from its bare and featureless form once mainly dominant in arts to the introduction of the hairy pubis in the pornographic images from the nineteenth century, and then towards the more dominant trend of the 'principle of maximum visibility' (Williams, 1999) in the contents of pornography: the practice of complete pubic hair removal which allowed for full visibility of the vulva. Even though none of these can be considered directly representative of the state of the pudenda of the average person at the time, it is important to take into consideration the process of changing meanings of pubic hair. This could also prove to be quite useful in the process of 'untangling' the problem of pubic hair and our relationships with it as a part of the broader problem we have with the naturalness of our bodies.

Cokal contends that there is a strong connection between the rise of the concepts and culture of hygiene and cleanliness, especially through the development of germ theory, and the way we perceive bodily hair. She says that 'if we label hair as dirty, we can gain control of our bodies and our sexuality by removing it' (2007: 149). In turn this makes nakedness and lust cleaner and, most importantly, more controlled. This has had an influence on pornography as well,

where the hard-core images of both male and female genitals are presented in a more 'anatomical' and almost clinical way, where the tufts of pubic hair no longer leave anything to the imagination. Biologically speaking, pubic hair serves the role of a natural protective barrier keeping the vaginal regions infection free (Morris, 2004); the self-care culture, however, which exploded during the course of twentieth century, enforces the rationale of the porn industries that keeping this particular region hairless is a sign of good hygiene (Cokal, 2007; Herzog, 2015). Never in the history of human nakedness have we previously reached this level of exposure of the genitals, which through the processes of informalisation became widespread among the general population. It is also a reflection of moving towards 'total body sex' practices, including the spread of oral sex among other forms of sexual titillation, which signifies that levels of repugnance towards this bodily area have fallen. Now both the visual and the tactile characteristics and presentation of the genitals have reached levels of equal importance in the process of the eroticisation of the naked human body.

5.11 Conclusion

As outlined above, a number of trends indicate the distancing of humans from nature, and changes in the way it is conceptualised. The study of naturism and of other historical changes regarding nakedness points to the fact that, during the long-term processes of shifting physical and animalic aspects towards more shameful and thus more controlled behaviour, the gap between humans and beasts has widened. I used Elias's concept of landscape to indicate how this separation applied to the treatment of naked bodies. As a result, it appears that, through the extensive processes of formalisation, sociogenesis and psychogenesis and the rise of shameful feelings towards the naked body, we have managed to move most of the inconvenient aspects of our 'natural bodies' behind the social scenes. The case of blushing, as an involuntary physical reaction to the experience of shame, is one piece of evidence of the level of internalisation of these standards of behaviour, and how the feelings of modesty can be easily and falsely assumed to be a natural impulse. The case of genital phobia, and the levels of repugnance that relate to it, are yet another example of this process of distancing from our animalic side. So too is the problem of pubic hair, which was initially perceived as evidence, especially in the case of women, of dangerous and unrestrained sexual urges, while removing it is part of the 'landscaping process' of demonstrating self-restraint and new standards of moral and bodily hygiene.

6 Nakedness as a theoretical problem

Many existing theories and concepts can be useful in the study of nudity, and for understanding the feelings and modes of behaviour associated with it. In this chapter I shall outline, explain and critically assess them, highlighting their limitations and offering possible alternatives for their theoretical shortcomings.

The theories of Norbert Elias lie at the core of my study, but I shall also provide a critical overview of the usefulness of the works of Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Cas Wouters. I shall first focus on embarrassment and the naked body on a micro level of human interactions. I shall then attempt to offer an explanation for why nakedness is shrouded in a variety of taboos. Finally, problems of embarrassment and shame associated with nudity will be placed in a long-term perspective, and I shall try to explain current attitudes to it. Above all, my intention is to bring together micro and macro perspectives, in order to present a more coherent and sociological view of nakedness.

6.1 Norbert Elias and civilising processes

It is important to stress that when it comes to theorising the problem of nakedness, this book and my interest in nudity were inspired by Elias's most famous work *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a [1939]), where he advanced an argument about changing standards of behaviour and feeling in western societies. He developed his theory on the basis of changes in manners which he observed in numerous etiquette books – and to a lesser extent in other literature and works of art – dating as far back as the Middle Ages. Elias detected changes of behaviour across the timeline of several centuries, changes in standards of what he called 'outward bodily propriety', including those concerning manners in the bedroom, at the table, and topics such as defecation, urination, spitting or noseblowing. He also discussed the handling of dressing and undressing, which sparked my interest and curiosity with regard to nakedness from a long-term perspective. This showed me how much we tend to overestimate how 'natural' are the standards of dealing with nudity and the associated feelings of shame and embarrassment. That is why I discovered that studying the most extreme form of nudity – naturism – would provide an insight into how we manage shameful and embarrassing feelings related to our bodies.

B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozesstheorie 12,
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Elias's theory of the civilising process encompasses the history of human emotions, and specifically those of shame and embarrassment. The astonishing thing is how he turns the most mundane and banal elements of human everyday life, which have frequently been either dismissed or taken for granted by both sociologists and historians, into a more universal theory of 'the wiring' behind how societies operate. Or, in other words, 'in the jargon of the trade, it is at once and inseparably a *micro*sociological and a *macro*sociological theory' (Mennell, 1998: 94). Instead of following the general trend among sociologists towards studying humans and their social lives one fragment or piece of the puzzle at a time, which can result in a very narrow vision of the world, Elias provides a broad perspective on the human world. That is why, even though he began by identifying historical changes in people's behaviour and their emotions, he related these to much broader processes of state formation, urbanisation and economic development (Krieken, 1998).

Elias was certainly right that standards concerning the unclothed body are – along with eating, urination and defecation, nose-blowing, and spitting – central to matters of 'outward bodily propriety'. He chose to study them because these were matters that had to be handled by all human beings at all times and places, and every known society has had some rules concerning them. The main differences arise in the various levels of taboos about them. Whatever society a baby is born into, in whatever period of history, it has to attain the adult standard, to learn the rules then prevailing in its society; these prevailing standards may change from generation to generation. That was why Elias found 'standards of outward bodily propriety' to be especially good markers of social changes.

Although some human groups described by anthropologists in the past have gone unclothed or practically so, most have not. The open display of the genitals, in particular, is not unknown, but it is quite unusual especially in complex modern societies. Where it happens, it happens in very specific contexts – sexual relations most obviously, but otherwise in very restricted groups. This was the case with the Dublin-based naturist swim club – Club Nautica, where I conducted my fieldwork.

Elias was studying manners and changing patterns of behaviour only in Western Europe, but over a period of several centuries. Although his remarks are insightful and suggestive, they do not pretend to be an exhaustive, worldwide treatment of the subject and they raise many further questions of interest to the social scientist.

Some of the main difficulties in understanding societies and the individuals of which they are composed, and consequently in understanding Elias's theory, arise from the way in which we habitually conceptualise our social world. Elias (2012b [1970]: 106–23) argues that the problem starts with the linguistic tendencies of our languages, which tend to relate and conceptualise the world surround-

ing us in static terms. He draws upon the 'Sapir–Whorf hypothesis' (Whorf, 1956) to illustrate the limitations of 'Standard Average European' traditions of speech and how they affect our understanding of reality.

> Our languages are constructed in such a way that we can often only express constant movement or constant change in ways which imply that it has the character of an isolated object at rest, and then, almost as an afterthought, adding a verb which expresses the fact that the thing with this character is now changing. For example, standing by a river we see the perpetual flowing of the water. But to grasp it conceptually, and to communicate it to others, we do not think and say, 'Look at the perpetual flowing of the water'; we say, 'Look how fast the river is flowing.' We say, 'the wind is blowing', as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point in time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow. This reduction of processes to static conditions, which we shall call 'process-reduction' for short, appears self-explanatory to people who have grown up with such languages. (2012b [1970]: 106–7)

This line of thinking is directly related to the gap between the process sociology of Norbert Elias and all the sociological traditions that tend to separate structure from agency, 'the actor' and his 'activity', or, more importantly, the 'individual' from 'society', as if one could exist without the other (Elias, 2012b [1970]). Elias views this tendency to resist seeing the human individual as itself a process is directly connected to our fears of mortality (Dunning and Hughes (2013: 51). Taking all this into consideration from the point of view of this research, the only way to fully grasp the problem of nudity and the way we tend to conceptualise the embarrassment about it in western societies, is through the long-term analysis of the changes of attitudes that have taken place throughout the centuries.

Central to Elias's theory are expanding 'webs of interdependence',[35] which continue to grow denser and larger depending on the size of the society in question, as part of an ongoing process. Elias observed these chains of interdependence throughout the European history, and how the unconscious and unplanned 'intermeshing' of people's actions through the interconnections in power struggles shapes the developing structures of societies as a whole. How it happens, Elias explains through describing processes of *psychogenesis* and *sociogenesis*.

35 Elias objected to and avoided the use of the term 'interaction', because it implies that people tend to act, behave and most importantly influence each other only when face-to-face (Mennell, 1998: 94–5).

6.2 From psychogenesis to sociogenesis

Elias's theory of civilising processes is concerned with the connections between, on the one hand, long-term changes in everyday manners and feelings and, on the other hand, equally long-term trends in the development of social structures and power ratios. In other words, it is concerned with connections between what are by sociological convention called the 'micro' and the 'macro' levels, between processes of habitus- and conscience-formation and processes such as the increasing division of labour, state formation and the monopolisation of the means of violence.

The leading question – both for sociologists and for laypeople – remains what was the driving force behind the changes in manners, feelings or habitus that Elias called 'the process of civilisation'. A very common assumption – again for academic sociologists, historians and philosophers and for laypeople – is that it was driven by the expansion and role of religion in people's lives, the growing and eventually dominant role of church. That may appear particularly plausible in the case of changing attitudes to nakedness, given that the churches seem to have been obsessed with sex, especially in the last couple of centuries. But Elias does not accept this as an explanation, at least not as a predominant factor. He remarks that

> Religion, the belief in the punishing or rewarding omnipotence of God, never has in itself a 'civilising' or affect-subduing effect. On the contrary, religion is always exactly as 'civilised' as the society or class which upholds it. (2012a [1939]: 195)

That is not to deny that religious *organisations* have often played their part in the power struggles that are bound up with civilising processes; indeed we have already noted how fearful of the power of the Roman Catholic Church early naturists in Ireland were. But Elias contends that religious *belief* or religious *ideas* are not a significant driving force. Goudsblom (2004) has elaborated on this point, distinguishing between the 'Augustinian' mainstream view – the stress on religious belief that runs in the western intellectual mainstream from St Augustine of Hippo to Max Weber – and the 'Lucretian' view expressed by Elias in the quotation above.

Another 'common-sense' assumption, which seems obvious to us today, is that an increasingly keen dedication to hygiene must have driven people to change their habits regarding eating, spitting, blowing their noses, and going to the toilet. But Elias argued that this had little to do with the behaviour of our European ancestors in the Middle Ages. Medical opinion regarding hygiene appears to have *followed* rather than guided changes in the social standards regarding these matters.

Elias introduced the terms 'psychogenesis' and 'sociogenesis' to explain the connections between intricate processes taking place in the human psyche over time. The larger the society, the denser and more complex are the chains of interdependence in which people are enmeshed. As people gradually become more and more interdependent, their emotional structures are affected, as well as the ways in which they interact with people in their societies or communities. These changes were meticulously demonstrated by Elias. They take place first on the conscious level – people initially have to *think* about following new rules, and then increasingly they pass to the habitual, unconscious level in the subsequent stage of the same, larger process. Elias also argues that because everyone is interdependent within some web or network, it does not necessarily mean that everyone is *equally* interdependent. When one side is more dependent on the other side for whatever they need than the other side is on them, this in effect conditions their power chances within a society (Mennell, 1998: 95). Then again, the more unequal the power ratios, the greater the pressure placed on the individual to act in a more constrained manner in order not to jeopardise his or her chances of achieving a goal. Elias documented processes through which during the Renaissance external constraints (*Fremdzwänge*) were visibly transformed into self-constraints (*Selbstzwänge*). Elias writes:

> The child and adolescent would never learn to control their behaviour without the fears instilled by other people. Without the lever of these human-made fears, the young human animal would never become an adult deserving the name of a human being, any more than someone's humanity matures fully if life denies him or her sufficient joy and pleasure. The fears which grown-ups consciously or unconsciously induce in the child are precipitated in him or her and henceforth reproduce themselves more or less automatically … No society can survive without a channelling of individual drives and affects, without a very specific control of individual behaviour. No such control is possible unless people exert constraints on one another, and all constraint is converted in the person on whom it is imposed into fear of one kind or another (2012a [1939]: 486).

Elias is arguing that, initially, pressures and fears are passed on to people within a community or society, which makes them external constraints, but eventually through the process of socialisation they become so deeply ingrained that they become an unconscious part of the human 'superego'; in other words, they turn into self-constraints. Elias also expresses the same idea through using the concept of 'habitus', which he defines very simply as 'second nature' – what is so deeply habituated that, although it has been learned, is felt to be innate and 'natural'. Over time, spanning the length of civilising processes, these changes are gradually ingrained into human psyche.

6.3 Elias and the problem of nakedness

> He coming to the house of Ocane [Donnell O Cahan, Irish lord of part of modern County Londonderry], a great lord among them, was met at the door with sixteen women, all naked, excepting their loose mantles; whereof eight or ten were fair and two seemed very Nymphs. With which strange sight his eyes being dazzled, they led him into the house, and there sitting down by the fire, with crossed legs like tailors, and so low as could not but offend chaste eyes, desired him to sit down with them. Soon after, Ocane, the Lord of the Country, came in all naked except a loose mantle and shoes, which he put off as soon as he came in, and, entertaining the Baron after his best manner in the Latin tongue, desired him to put off his apparel, which he thought to be a burden to him, and to sit naked by the fire with this naked company. But the Baron, when he came to himself after some astonishment at this strange sight, professed that he was so inflamed therewith as for shame he durst not put off his apparel. (Fynes Moryson, 1735 [1617])

This passage from Fynes Moryson's book dating back to his time in Ireland in 1601 tells the story of a Bohemian nobleman, the Baron of Dohna, who during his travels in Britain and Ireland visited the Earl of Tyrone in Ulster. It needs to be noted here that Moryson, who was then a Secretary to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, often tended slightly to exaggerate his accounts, which is evident in the hostile prejudice towards the Irish, then at war with the English (Quinn, 1966). This is, however, one of the very few examples in the historical accounts of Ireland that may help us establish how people of the time regarded nudity. The same source also provides a much better-known account of witnessing of two young Irish maids in Cork, who removed all their heavy woollen clothes in order to grind oats for cakes (Moryson, 1735 [1617]). Clear signs of repugnance towards naked bodies are expressed here by Moryson, with the girls 'striking off into the tub of meal such reliques thereof as stuck on their belly, thighs, and more unseemly parts' (Moryson, 1735 [1617]: 375). As Quinn argues, in this case it would most likely not have struck him as odd if an English miller had been flicking the flour off his clothes. The reason this account is being mentioned here is to make a connection to Elias's argument about the changes of manners throughout the centuries, which happened to accelerate around the time of Renaissance. Elias's account of changes of behaviour in dressing and undressing in the bedroom and in bathing practices demonstrates clearly the process of the growing distance between an individual and his or her body.

It is commonly believed that it is a matter of common sense to cover one's body, or, more to the point, not to parade naked in front of other people. More importantly it is also believed that the shame and repugnance that accompanies naked bodies is a 'natural' reaction, and that only 'savages' tend to be indifferent towards it. This is exactly what makes it so interesting from the sociological

point of view: how did we get to this conviction that made nakedness 'unnatural' and made the feelings of embarrassment and shame associated with it 'natural' and 'normal'? These attitudes have become a symbol of the 'civilised' world and 'civilised' societies. Very few people are aware that embarrassment and shame are actually the products of systematically developing new standards and thresholds of shame, and expanding self-control among western societies. Elias (2012a [1939]) provides an impressive account of how these changes came about and developed across the centuries.

It may be impossible to know whether nudity never caused embarrassment and shame in any context in medieval Europe or earlier. This kind of clear-cut generalisation is what I would like to avoid here. The truth is that the information we now have from historical records indicates that there were far less shameful feelings attached to it. The naked body, or still more certain parts of the human anatomy, may have been shrouded in a variety of false assumption, such as the vagina being cold and dangerous to men (Jolly, 2012), but as we have seen already in Shorter (2005), it was not until much later that we managed to eroticise human body as a whole. We know that the naked body was to be seen in everyday situations and contexts in a far less offensive way than it would have been regarded 400 years later or even today. This was the case in public bathhouses, people's homes or, as we know thanks to Moryson's graphic description, sometimes while doing chores. We find confirmation of this in Elias's writing:

> Nudity did not provoke reactions of shame. At night people slept nude, and if someone kept his shirt on, he was suspected of suffering from some physical deformity. In the *Roman de la Violette*, the servant girl is astonished to see her mistress going to bed in her chemise. The lady explains that she has a mark on her body. In the bathhouses, not only was general nudity the rule, but men and women were not segregated. A miniature from Breslau shows the bathers resting in couples beneath the arches; each couple, man and woman, is nude. Between them is a plank on which fruits and drinks are placed.[36] Thus a perfect ingenuousness regarding nudity. (Elias, 2013b [1974]: 176–7)

The point is that people wore clothes in order to protect their bodies from cold or other physical factors, and not because they were ashamed. The invisible, yet strikingly tangible, wall of discomfort and anxiety concerning people's naked bodies, and even more how they are perceived by other people, arose gradually according to Elias. He traced sometimes subtle and slow changes to behaviour through books of manners and literature, changes that at some point accelerate and leave a visible trail of long-term changes towards more self-restraint, higher

36 Elias is referring to a print that he found in Wilhelm Rudeck, *Geschichte der öffentliche Sittlichkeit* (1887), facing p. 16, reproduced here as Figure 5.

shame thresholds and the pushing of many physical aspects of the human being behind the scenes of social life.

Figure 5: The Breslau bath-house

Even though the process is not unilinear, as many opponents to the theory may argue, it is still a visible process of civilisation. Hence the symptoms of the naked body gradually becoming embarrassing, secret, often disgusting and eventually a taboo. Urination, defecation, and all the other bodily functions and urges were increasingly pushed further away into the wings of the social scene.

In order to show more clearly how changes like this took place, let us focus on an example that is more relevant to this study. The notion of nakedness was very rarely addressed directly in any of the historical accounts; to gain any in-

formation on the topic one must rely on sources concerned with other matters, which may leave us with an array of social clues. Sometimes it is helpful to read through the works discussing the conventions of bathing, sleeping or exercising, as was the case with the ancient Greeks. Among other examples of long-term habitual changes in western societies, explored by Elias in the pages of the *On the Process of Civilisation*, is how gradually the bedroom (and what goes on in the bedroom) becomes the most private and intimate space for people.[37] What we consider private today was most likely a public matter at some point; all the spheres of people's social life were out in the open, as if turned 'inside out'. The animalic features of human behaviour were much more visible and acceptable in everyday life. It may be hard for us to imagine that we would be expected to share a bed with a stranger at an inn, or to have the whole family sleeping in one room (or very often one bed too) either fully dressed or completely naked. It was a common practice – at least in Germany – for whole families to march down the streets towards the public baths, wearing absolutely nothing, and segregation between baths for men and women was a rare phenomenon too (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 161). Human nudity was taken for granted, and so common that it was almost invisible to the eyes of people who came across it every day. Elias provides a number of examples which today would be considered inappropriate, at the very least. He argues that there was so little inhibition concerning the human body, that we could compare it to the lack of inhibition of a small child today (2012a [1939]: 161). It was not until the sixteenth century that things began to take a more dramatic turn towards rising shame thresholds.

6.4 Theatrics, sweaty palms and the naked figuration: embarrassment in Goffman and Elias

Considering the problem of embarrassment and nudity within the broad historical perspective provided for us by Elias is one thing, but if we want to zoom in to the level of micro analysis of individuals experiencing discomfiture, then Erving Goffman is a theorist who can help us develop a better perspective on that.

It is almost impossible to consider the problem of embarrassment and nudity from a long-term perspective, both theoretically and empirically, without taking a closer look from a more micro perspective. Goffman focuses on detailed and close-up analysis of interaction among people, using terminology from ritual or the theatre. He uses terms such as 'impression management' or 'dramaturgical discipline' to decipher the social cues of everyday face-to-face interactions in

37 Elias does not claim 'that sexual activity was carried on in an unconcealed way in medieval Europe', as Giddens (1984: 129) alleges he does, but the circumstances of life suggest that copulation must often have been stumbled upon without traumatic embarrassment.

which embarrassment often plays a prominent part. His work stands in complete contrast to the writings of Elias, because of its narrow scope of explanation in the absence of any broader sociological theory. Although it is important to provide a 'sociological snapshot' of a situation, Gouldner (1971) describes Goffman as a 'sociologist of fleeting moments'. Further criticism is provided by Sennett:

> The static, historyless society of scenes in his books derives from his belief that in human affairs people seek always to establish a situation of equilibrium; they give and take with one another until they create enough stability to know what to expect by mutually balancing their actions; the balanced actions are the 'rules' of a given situation. The element of truth in the approach is lost because Goffman has no ear for, indeed no interest in, the forces of disorder, disruption, and change which might intervene in these arrangements. Here is a picture of society in which there are scenes but no plot. And since there is no plot in this sociology, no history, there are no characters in it, as the term has any meaning in the theatre, for their actions cause no change in the lives of his people; there are only endless adaptations. In Goffman's world, people behave but they do not have experience. (1976: 36)

However, despite the lack of historical context in the work of Goffman, his theory provides a number of useful tools for deciphering the more intrinsic cues of behaviour among naturists. It helps us to focus in close-up on the various contexts relating to embarrassment and nudity and, furthermore, not only on why embarrassment arises but also how exactly this happens.

There is something quite specific about the interaction dynamics of naturists as a group within their own setting. When I first entered the naturist domain and appeared naked in front of all the other people, it made me feel *embarrassed*, but when I was lying in bed later that night, I felt overcome with *shame* in the aftermath of my naturist experience. That is why it is crucial to look into the problem of conceptualising shame and embarrassment, since in everyday speech these two terms tend to be used interchangeably, which creates problems in the light of this study. Elias, in his extensive study of changes of behaviour in western societies in the long term, focuses mainly on feelings of shame, whereas Goffman focuses on embarrassment as a fleeting moment. Neither of them makes any direct connections between the two. We tend to understand and use 'shame' on an everyday basis to mean a heightened degree of embarrassment. The two terms are directly connected to each other, but the difference between them does not lie in the problem of the level of intensity of one over the other, but rather of how they are triggered. Kuzmics (1991) provides the only attempt to bring the two together. Yet, despite giving a detailed account of the conceptualisation of embarrassment by Elias and Goffman, he fails to acknowledge how it differs from shame. For him, embarrassment has always been shame, but shame that has to be routinely overcome, for which he found Goffman's observations of public

spheres and the contagiousness of shaming processes for others more useful than Elias's.[38]

Norbert Elias, in *On the Process of Civilisation* addresses the problem of embarrassment directly only once:

> This is an inseparable counterpart of shame. Just as shame arises when someone infringes the prohibitions of his own self and of society, embarrassment occurs when something outside the individual impinges on his danger zone, on forms of behaviour, objects, inclinations which have early on been invested with fear by his surroundings until this fear – in the manner of a conditioned reflex – is reproduced automatically in him on similar occasions. Embarrassment is displeasure or anxiety that arises when another person threatens to breach, or breaches, society's prohibitions represented by one's own superego. And these feelings too become more diverse and comprehensive as the danger zone by which the conduct of the original is regulated and moulded becomes more extensive and subtly differentiated, as the civilising of conduct advances further. (2012a [1939]: 460).

It is understandable that Elias chose to focus on the feelings of shame, which were more 'potent' through the visible changes that took place within people's ego–superego relations over the centuries, upon which he built his theory of civilising processes. But since Elias argues that, during these processes of sociogenesis tending towards psychogenesis, the external pressures are gradually internalised into self-constraint, does it mean that embarrassment predisposes shame? Kuzmics argues that it is impossible to be embarrassed without reference to others, or, as he puts it, it is 'always a relational predicate' (1991: 13). Naturally so is shame, but unlike embarrassment it seems to operate from within a person because it has already been internalised in the course of a civilising process, in contrast to embarrassment which is triggered externally by others and represents anxiety resulting from some kind of inadequacy during social interaction with others. It does not necessarily always have to turn into deeper feelings of shame. It will become clearer when we look at it in relation to the naturists in my study.

My findings led me to realise that becoming a naturist involves a learning process of managing one's basic drives and also, especially, of handling one's own feelings of embarrassment and then shame. Even though Elias's theory, which adopts an historical perspective, is valuable for understanding how it is possible for a group of people to enjoy their nakedness without satisfying their own most basic sexual instincts, we shall focus for a while on a smaller picture of how it works in practice. Is a discussion of the connection between embarrassment and shame just a chicken and egg argument? Can one exist without the

38 This point was made to me by Helmut Kuzmics (personal communication).

other? Since, in Freudian terms – which were also used by Elias – the superego controls the functions of ego, does this mean that embarrassment represents feelings arising from external constraint, and then consequently shameful emotions are directly linked to self-constraints? Can we allow ourselves to delve into this kind of simplification?

In more 'normal' or 'average' scenarios within our western societies, it is one of the biggest nightmares even to imagine being seen naked in public. A person faced with a situation like this would experience severe feelings of embarrassment accompanied by an urge to hide the most intimate areas of his or her body, accompanied by somatic symptoms like a racing heart, sweaty palms, possible trembling of hands, stuttering, dilated pupils and blushing (Goffman, 1967). That seems to us to be the reaction we should expect, and how we would imagine it to be in the first place. According to Goffman, during everyday interactions with other people a person tends to avoid situations that he or she may find potentially difficult to handle from the perspective of trying to stay at ease as much as possible. Even if it is not always possible, individuals are still expected to keep some sort of balance when that happens, or at least strive towards this kind of equilibrium. But what if a person is willingly seeking out situations where they would normally experience a severe form of discomfiture or humiliation? That is where the case of naturism is particularly useful in understanding the mechanisms behind embarrassment and shame. In a chapter on embarrassment, Goffman addressed the intensity of experiencing embarrassment:

> Some occasions of embarrassment seem to have an abrupt orgasmic character; a sudden introduction of the disturbing event is followed by an immediate peak in the experience of embarrassment and then by a slow return to the preceding ease, all phases being encompassed in the same encounter. A bad moment thus mars an otherwise euphoric situation. (1967: 100)

This passage helps me to develop an explanation for the mechanisms of handling embarrassment by naturists, especially in relation to the theory of informalisation. I shall elaborate on it towards the end of this chapter.

When a person enters a naturist environment for the first time – and was not in any way coerced to do so – the initial moments are characterised by the more or less extreme levels of anxiety that we refer to as embarrassment. But because there is no element of surprise and the person willingly chooses to participate in this 'risky' social situation, we can assume that the element of humiliation is eliminated. According to Goffman, the embarrassment does not arise from moral breaches, but rather from moral obligations to do with expectations of the individual's 'performance'. These require him or her to maintain composure, and if that is not in accordance with what is expected of the person, it is others who will project their disapproval.

In the light of Elias's theory, the difference between embarrassment and shame lies in the phase of the process of transgression when external social opinion comes into play. According to Elias, embarrassment is based on just a transgression of social opinion, which does not threaten the individual with the loss of love or respect of others; one can still recover from it through some form of retaliation. When it comes to shame, the transgression has already taken place and it is now not only part of the prevalent social opinion and expectation, but has already been internalised in the form of a person's superego – so now the constraint comes from within. Keeping all this in mind, let us turn to the topic of this study itself – the naturists.

When a naturist (or a person who wants to become a naturist) takes off his or her clothes within a naturist environment, it will be embarrassment that he or she experiences first – rather than shame, as we may wrongly assume. Embarrassment rather than shame comes about mainly because the person first chooses willingly to bare it all in front of other people, and second does so in front of other naked people. What the person experiences, then, is a feeling of embarrassment linked to the notion of breaking the rules internalised within the superego, but because there are only other naked people present, the element of negative judgement is removed. It is the fear of this type of negative judgement that triggers feelings of shame. However, if one were to expose oneself in a public place surrounded by 'textile' people, feelings of humiliation would be inevitable.

Let us take a look at another side of the problem. Because every nudist was raised and socialised within a society where exposing one's naked body in front of other people was considered wrong, provocative or even deviant, that person has already internalised these social prohibitions. In order to become a naturist then – or rather learn how to become a naturist – the active traits of superego need to be 'neutralised' to certain extent. It is a process during which a person first needs to move back from the shame threshold of seeing public nudity as taboo, to shifting the emotional balance towards seeing and feeling it as an external constraint again. It is as if ego overcomes or at least partially takes control over superego.

Perhaps it might be more useful to introduce the Eliasian concept of 'figuration', or, as I prefer to refer to it here, 'the naked figuration'. Elias introduced the concept of figuration in order to deal with the broader problem of understanding sociology within the human sciences, and in particular to use it as a more processual term than static concepts such as 'structure' and 'system' (Elias, 2012b [1970]: 123–8; 2009b: 1–3). People tend to see themselves as individuals, as one creature with its own unique set of characteristics, genetic codes and fingerprints specified by some awesome natural order that we do not always understand and sometimes prefer to ascribe to a mighty divine force. We think we have a choice of how we come to experience the world and live our lives, how to experience

pain, joy and love. If that were really the case, I would not be able to form a sentence like this in the first place, because there would be nothing we would have in common. We think we own our uniqueness and the choice to be unique and different, which always places us on the outside of any system there might be. If that were the case, we would never be able to live with each other in any type of community, and there would be no building up of knowledge nor of culture. There would be only destruction and no development of any kind. We would be reduced to the level of an animal, which does not look beyond the blind urge of procreation, and the competition to survive for the sake of it. What I am trying to achieve through this abstract, two-dimensional and almost apocalyptic vision of humanity, is to show that thinking that we are all unique and independent is probably the most unoriginal thing under the sun, since we all believe it independently of each other. This 'mode of self-experience' is not a human universal, but seems to have become much more marked from around the time of the Renaissance, first among some intellectual elites, and then more widely. It is, in fact, a product of the civilising process that accelerated at about that time. And it is not an accident that this mode of self-experience became embedded in mainstream western philosophy in the same period, notably through the writings of one such leading intellectual, namely René Descartes. The basic idea of Elias's concept of figuration is that we are all interdependent of each other and that we should never try to understand society as a whole through a polarity of 'individual' and 'society'. That is the way he was trying to encompass the problem of sociology, which tends to view individuals as separate entities, instead of looking into them as 'pluralities':

> When studying humankind, it is possible to shine the full glare of the spotlight first on discrete people and then on to figurations composed of many separate people. Even so, understanding of each other level of observation must suffer unless both are constantly considered. Contemporary usage would lead us to believe that the two distinct concepts, 'the individual' and 'society', denote two independently existing objects, whereas they really refer to two different but inseparable levels of the human world. (Elias, 2012b [1970]: 124).

Elias also argues that holding on to the vision of societies comprising individuals each of whom sees himself or herself as existing inside an individual closed-off box – or, as Elias refers to it, as an *homo clausus* – is one of the greatest defects of contemporary sociology. He prefers to see societies with their individuals as *hominines aperti*, because the networks of interdependence varying in their complexity – figurations – are in constant flux. As he further argues, the image of the of a human being as a 'closed personality' needs to be replaced with the image of 'open personality', who has some sort of level of relative but 'never absolute or total autonomy vis-à-vis other people' (2012a [1939]: 525).

We established that Elias saw figurations as networks or chains of interdependence among groups of people, ranging from very complex and extensive ones such as cities, societies and nations, to much smaller groups of dancers, football teams, families – or local groups of naturists. Elias emphasises that figurations are always in flux, constantly shifting and part of multiple processes. Mutually dependent individuals participate in and influence each other's lives both directly and indirectly, and, more importantly, also more unconsciously than consciously.

> since people are more or less dependent on each other first by nature and then through social learning, through education, socialisation and socially generated reciprocal needs, they exist, one might venture to say, only as pluralities, only in figurations. (2012a [1939]: 525).

In order to show how it works in detail, Elias uses the analogy of a figuration as a dance. But instead of summarising that, I would like to use the example of naturists to present the mechanisms of and within figurations.

To exist and survive as an organisation from its modern origins in Germany, naturism required a basic structure and a group of followers who believed in what they were trying to achieve. They needed each other to feel accepted and understood and to express a sense of having a common goal. But they also depended on each other in order not to be ostracised by the rest of the society. As we have seen in chapter 5, Mosse (1982) argued that the people who were soon be referred to as 'naturists' were directly responding to and dependent on the general way of life of a western society tangled up in the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. To put it in figurational terms, out of the much larger and more complex web of interdependence of German society originated a much smaller figuration of those who were tired of the fast, bureaucratic, capitalist routines that alienated the individual from the 'nature figuration', and who decided to find a way of reconnecting with nature again. That being said, it does not mean that starting an organisation which chose to reconnect with nature through shedding clothes, eating vegetarian or vegan food, abstaining from alcohol or drugs, and exercising naked in the sun magically separated its members from the rest of the society. This is what I refer to here as the 'naked figuration', since from its very beginning until the present, it has always been a part of the broader society that had conditioned participants to their existence in the first place. To put it more simply, people within the naked figuration needed at the end of the day to pack their bags, put on some clothes and get back to their day jobs, which allowed them to pay for the cars and bicycles in which they travelled to those distant destinations beyond the busy cities, where they managed to buy a patch of forested land, off the beaten track, where they would not be seen and where nobody would be alarmed by their nudity. They were also dependent on

gradually rising levels of acceptance of the naturist way of life, first among Germans and then European people more generally, who did not ostracise them for breaking the taboo.

The other side of the coin is that naturists established a quite strict set of rules of behaviour during their naked recreation. It is interesting that they never had to be very specific, and yet people understood from more general and broad social assumptions, first how to act so that everyone felt safe and respected, and second how to act so that their behaviour was not considered negatively by people from the 'textile figuration'. That was because, as much as they like to identify themselves with the naturist environment, they also need to identify with the 'textile' one and find a way to bring these two worlds together, to switch back and forth between two or more figurations.

But let us move to a micro view of this social setting and see how embarrassment is handled among the naturists in practice. Based on the findings from the previous chapter and the writings of Erving Goffman, we are able to illustrate the processes unfolding within the naturist group and how the problem of embarrassment and ease is managed on everyday basis.

How does it happen that where there is more than one person naked in a group, it brings a sense of ease from the undeniable shame in the first place? Goffman's theory of the team and their solidarity fits the situation quite well. What makes the case of naturists so fascinating and important in the study of embarrassment is the fact that these individuals willingly allow themselves to go against the clear social prohibitions and norms. This brings to mind Goffman's (1990a [1959]) concept of performance, and of the actor performing in such a way that he or she becomes both performer and audience, which allows the individual the necessary element of self-delusion that is experienced in accordance with set moral standards. And these standards are again in accordance with a certain reference group, which then creates a 'non-present audience to his activity':

> The individual may privately maintain standards of behaviour which he does not personally believe in, maintaining these standards because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards. In other words, an individual may be his own audience or may imagine an audience to be present. (In all of this we see the analytical difference between the concept of a team and that of an individual performer.) (1990a [1959]: 87).

Or in the case of the naturist setting, we could change and reverse the elements: if a person is 'performing' among his or her own group of naturists, in order to act within rules and moral standards prescribed by the naturist gathering, the 'non-present audience' may be imagined as being the actors within this realm. In order to maintain the 'dramaturgical loyalty' of the group, all naturists must

follow the same strict code (or as Goffman calls it 'dramaturgical discipline'), of respecting each other's privacy, body distances, and – most importantly – keeping the sexual side of their naked bodies outside the naturist environment. Or they must at least perform in a way that is believable for both actor and his or her audience:

> He must offer a show of intellectual and emotional involvement in the activity he is presenting, but must keep himself from actually being carried away by his own show lest this destroy his involvement in the task of putting on a successful performance. (1990a [1959]: 210)

This involves avoiding looking at other members' intimate body parts, keeping eye-contact during face-to-face interactions, not gawking or even showing visible signs of sexual arousal (especially in the case of men). In fact, there is another rule that applies here, which, even though it is also evident outside the naturist setting, becomes more visible here: when clothes come off, people are expected to behave nonchalantly about it. Goffman refers to this as a *civil inattention*:

> What seems to be involved is that one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen him), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design. In performing this courtesy the eyes of the looker may pass over the eyes of the other, but no 'recognition' is typically allowed. (1966: 84)

Goffman contends that this type of civil inattention is normally given to children or waiting staff in a restaurant, but it could also apply to naturists on the beach, where they need to treat fellow naturists with a type of withdrawn attention. They tend to acknowledge each other's presence if needed, but without exhibiting any particular extended attention, lest it cause offence or create controversy. So in practice it involves not paying too much attention to other people's bodies, especially the opposite sex, keeping appropriate distance and, most of all, trying to maintain eye contact if any interaction actually does take place.

Let us put the case of naturists in the wider social context, where, in accordance with Goffman's theory of stigma (1990b [1963]), there may be certain discrepancies between what is considered actors' real identity and a 'pretend' one. I am referring here to the notion of transparency, or lack of it, within the naturist world and the outside, 'textile', world they face on an everyday basis. From the findings from my interviews with Irish naturists, it seems that most of them prefer not to advertise their 'naked hobby' to colleagues, families, friends and neighbours, or at least to keep it to themselves until directly confronted about it.

Their hobby is what Goffman refers to as a status or prestige symbol; it is something that Irish naturists are afraid that they may lose, or that it may affect their respect in work or among their immediate community, and thus acquire a so-called 'stigma symbol'. In order to avoid it, naturist communities or individuals need to project the cues of self-constraint, and do so confidently, within their own communities in order to feel more accepted and non-stigmatised among the broader, 'textile' society. That is why such strict rules of separating the sexual nature of the naked human body apply among the community. If that were not the case, it is likely that these groups would become immediately marginalised by society, and would never stand a chance of acceptance and understanding. Goffman (1990b [1963]) writes about stigma from the perspective of someone already discredited in society and trying to rebuild a respect and acceptance that was once lost. However, we can observe in the example of naturist communities that such a person may gain control over potential stigma, and, through increasing foresight (Elias (2012a [1939]: 418–22), become able to take control over the way he or she is perceived. Such 'experimentations' are only possible because of the strong development of superego and ego, to use Freudian terms. Elias argues that the increasing foresight that is a product of sociogenesis and psychogenesis, through first increasing the 'psychologisation' (Elias, 2012a: 439–56) of people within chains of interdependence that are continually becoming denser and more extensive has the consequence of them tending to lose the spontaneity of their impulsive reactions. For the first time they are able to see themselves as interdependent with other people, and they gradually learn how to read their experiences and observations. It is 'a process of transition in mutual identification' (Mennell, 1998: 102), which is also connected to the processes of *rationalisation* that Elias argues are the result of a long-term change in personality structure which occur under pressure towards habitual foresight. Putting this less abstractly, for naturists what happens is that the terms and ways of experiencing naturist nakedness are negotiated on the psychic level: the degrees of their enjoyment of it, and how far they can stretch their practice before it breaks some of the more general rules of propriety. Hence the existence of their own standards and rules of behaviour plays the role of signalling an outward-directed 'reality principle', to put it once more in Freudian terms. In other words, thanks to these 'reality-oriented' principles, their practice is enjoyed in a controlled manner within the levels of 'mutually expected self-restraint' (Goudsblom, 2001).

It needs to be noted here is that speaking of bodies and self-control would probably, for most sociologists, be immediately associated with the work of Michel Foucault. Even though the Foucauldian panoptic perspective does not provide us with the same level of understanding and in-depth conceptualisation as that of Elias, it is worth referring to it here. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Foucault uses Bentham's conception of the Pan-

opticon as an analogy to stress the levels of 'invisible observation' which subjects individuals to a state of permanent surveillance, or at least to the permanent sense or possibility of being watched and punished if they do not conform to the expected norms of behaviour. Of course, in the extension of Bentham's incarceration system lies the broader analogy about the ways of disciplining the society as a whole, especially within institutions such as hospitals, offices or schools. The notion of the panoptic gaze can be easily adapted in relation to the rules and ways of conduct of naturists among themselves. In this case the surveillance might even be considered more extreme than normally, for two reasons. First of all, unlike in the case of general society, fellow naturists seem to be more vigilant towards any deviations from the expected norms of behaviour. And secondly, owing to the fact that, especially in the case of male naturists, what is considered the greatest violation is to show signs of sexual excitement, which cannot be hidden away from the watchful gaze of fellow enthusiasts of nude recreation. I am aware that Foucault refers to the panoptic gaze as a disciplinary regime that is exercised over people, and it is supposed to work only 'one-way'. It is hard to dismiss the significance of 'the gaze' in the case of naturism, and even if we were to apply this concept differently from the way Foucault used it, it is still worth elaborating upon. This is as far as this theory can be stretched here, but it does not provide us with anything new in relation to understanding the levels of self-restraint and the rules governing it.

6.5 Nakedness and its context

Despite the predominantly shameful or erotic sentiments with regard to the naked body in western societies, there are also instances and *contexts* which are designed or expected to minimise these feelings (see also chapter 7 below on the question of taboo). It is the case not only among naturists, but is also widely expected throughout various facets of medical services. These sentiments did not just happen to be stripped out of these contexts; people in them had to become predisposed to avoid such sentiments and to learn self-regulation and restraint. Useful light on how such contexts are generated is shed by Kenneth Clark (1956) and John Berger (2009 [1972]) in their conceptualisations of the nude in art.

Clark drew a well-known distinction between 'naked' and 'nude': to be naked was simply to be without clothes, but the nude is a form of art. A naked person may be the painter's starting point, but the nude is the end product: the nude is *a way of seeing* that the painting achieves. Berger agrees, although he argues that the way of seeing 'a nude' is not necessarily confined to art, but also applies to other visual forms, such as nude photographs, nude poses or nude gestures (2009 [1972]: 47). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the nude is al-

ways 'conventionalised' and that the conventions derive their authority from an artistic tradition. For sociological purposes, 'contexts' would seem a better term than 'conventions'. The more nudity became contextualised, the greater the variety of its meanings. Naturist philosophy and its interpretations by naturists emphasise that nakedness is about 'being oneself'. However, Clark's and Berger's thesis concerning the 'objectified nude' casts doubt on such a simple view. To be without one's clothes is not only *revealing* but also *displaying*. To put it more simply, one can be truly *naked* only when not surrounded by other people, because to be *nude* is to be seen by others. It also goes to show that from the moment an individual reveals his or her naked body to others, the power to control the context of their nakedness is lost to them, because the meaning of their state of undress lies in the eyes of the beholder. Consequently the degree of that power changes depending on whether the spectators themselves are also undressed at the time, which places them in the position of being both subject and object. Since the naked body is now predominantly related to being sexual, this to some extent explains the strict rules associated with the practice of naturism, and even then there is still room left for less specific instructions of 'behaving in a way that does not cause any offence to other members'. This in itself shows how hard it is to completely separate the naked and the nude in the naturist context, where despite attempts to regulate it, the 'way of seeing' still lies on the part of beholder.

6.6 The quest for nakedness

What we have discussed in this chapter so far is how nakedness and changing attitudes to it have developed in long-term perspective, and what the meaning is of these changes in sociological terms. What I would like to do now, though, is to provide a theoretical explanation for how it is actually possible to apply various contexts to nakedness, as in the case of naturists for instance. Many might still feel rather suspicious of naturist practice and of naturists as well, on the basis that since it involves nudity it must involve some hidden sexual agenda. In practice, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. As we know, Elias argued in his theory of the civilising processes about the rise of firmer controls over moods, drives and emotions through various levels of self-restraint, but in his later study of sport and leisure he provides an explanation for how some of these firm controls could be released in a controlled and 'safe' manner:

> While the routines of life in these societies, public or private, demand that people keep a fairly firm hold on their moods and drives, their affects and emotions, leisure occupations as a rule allow them to flow more freely in an imaginary setting special-

> ly created for these activities and in some ways reminiscent of non-leisure reality. While in the case of the latter the scope for manifestations of feeling is narrowed or confined to special compartments, leisure activities are designed to appeal to people's feelings directly and to arouse them, though in varying ways and degrees. While excitement is severely curbed in the pursuit of what one usually regards as the serious business of life – apart from sexual excitement which is more strictly confined to privacy – many leisure pursuits provide an imaginary setting which is meant to elicit excitement of some kind imitating that produced by real-life situations, yet without its dangers and risks. (Elias and Dunning, 2008: 25)

This model applies to the naked recreation of naturism rather perfectly. The enjoyment of it comes from the release of tensions and shameful feelings that are almost legendarily attached to the notion of being seen naked in public, but at the same time the sexual aspects are being kept on the 'leash of restraint'. Elias and Dunning refer to this type of controlled excitement as *mimetic*, because it is created out of the balanced tension release from imaginary contrasting emotions such as fear and pleasure, joy and sadness, or, as in the case of naturists, maintaining a balance between sexual tensions and enjoyment related to not letting them loose – or simply doing something they are not expected or 'supposed' to be doing.

But none of these leisure activities would be possible, especially in relation to naturism, if broader societal and developmental processes were not in place, such as the formalising ones which, as argued by Wouters (2007), towards the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth started to diminish and be counterbalanced by informalising ones. The foundation for the rise of theory of informalisation developed by Wouters was Elias's and Dunning's study of sport and violence where the notion of 'controlled decontrolling of restraints on emotions' (2008: 77) was first introduced. Using Wouters's concepts of 'second-nature' and 'third-nature' forms of behaviour, we shall be able to shed light on naturism with an additional level of complexity.

Wouters uses the basic rationale of Elias's theory in order to introduce the concept of 'second nature',[39] which relates to the 'conscience-dominated type of personality' (2011: 140) where the disciplining and controlling aspects gradually become part of personal habitus, or simply more automatic. Second-nature behaviour includes the deeply ingrained feelings of shame that surround most people's nakedness. What Wouters did, through the introduction of the concept of 'third-nature' behaviour, was to encompass all those types of behaviour that have begun to occur as part of informalising processes, meaning emancipation from some of the rigid controls, especially in the area of sexuality:

39 The concept of 'second-nature personality' and its connection with the notion of 'habitus' was introduced in chapter 1 above.

> this emancipation of emotion involves an attempt at reaching back to 'first nature' without losing any of the control that was provided by 'second nature'. Thus, the rise of a 'third-nature personality' demands and depends on an emancipation of 'first nature' as well as 'second nature' (Wouters, 2011: 153).

Again this shows another angle of theorising and understanding the mechanisms that allow for naturists to practise their nudity in a controlled manner without reducing their actions to purely sexual group activity. Even though the 'first nature' concept is crucial to understanding the other two, it exists purely theoretically, because every person after being born is instantly subjected to the forces of socialisation. It exists more in the form of irrational social 'fear of the slippery slope' (Wouters, 2011), in which people worry that one 'immoral' deed will provoke the collapse of a person's morality altogether. One of the best examples given by Wouters is the case of the corset, which was designed to keep a woman's morality, humours and emotions disciplined through physically disciplining her body. There is a correlation between the popular use of corsets and the lack of clothes among the nudists, which corresponds to the process of relying upon the standards of behaviour solidified during the development of the processes of formalisation, to become reliably automatic and allow for emancipation of certain rigid prohibitions.

6.7 Conclusion

What I have been arguing in this chapter is how relevant for understanding the problem of nakedness, and the shameful feelings that surround it, is the Eliasian long-term perspective on changing patterns of manners, feelings and standards of behaviour. While the long-term perspective is crucial for grasping the variety of contexts and meanings, I also introduced the 'micro' perspective in order to shed more light on the links between emotions of embarrassment and shame, and the mechanisms behind them. I achieved this through adding a Goffmanian theoretical angle, in order to grasp the ways of managing embarrassment during interactions, on more intrinsic and detailed levels.

I have tackled the problem of nakedness and its multiple contexts through the work of Berger and Clark, and finally used Elias and Dunning's theory of sport and leisure to explain how it is possible to engage in practising social nudity and achieve certain levels of thrill and satisfaction, without it resulting in indulgence of basic sexual urges.

7 Nakedness and the theory of taboo

In the course of researching naturism in Ireland, from the start I could not help wondering why certain aspects of nudity were more acceptable in some western societies than in others. It became apparent after studying nudity and shame that it is quite impossible to discuss the subject without mentioning the term 'taboo'. Human nakedness is shrouded in a variety of 'taboos' in the world today.

The term 'taboo' was first introduced into the English language in the eighteenth century by Captain James Cook. One should not think, however, that the notion did not exist before the term itself was introduced. We can safely assume that stronger or weaker restrictions of the kind have existed since the dawn of humanity. Taboos, understood as a range of prohibitions, restrictions, restraints and avoidances are the driving forces of civilising processes. As Elias argues, people tend to regulate their conduct towards each other through codes and sets of codes that are directed by fears and anxieties; and the deeper we look into historical processes, it is clear that in the course of them, these prohibitions are being constantly formed, transformed and re-formed (2012a [1939]: 458).

The shaming factor is one of the commonest social mechanisms for protecting the 'old' and 'familiar' against the 'new' and 'dangerous'. Among the most definite examples of it is the taboo against public nudity. Even though in most countries today it is still forbidden by law to appear naked in public, we tend to tolerate those who choose to enjoy social nudity, in places such as naturist beaches or naked saunas and swimming pools. If we take two extremes – Germany, where it all began, and Ireland, probably one of the last countries in the EU where practising nudism as a recreational movement is (technically) outlawed – we can see very clearly how taboos are being dropped. The process may vary in speed and duration, but will have a very similar final effect. In some circles in Germany it is considered odd if you oppose or refuse to participate in recreational nudity, while even in the case of Ireland – where the nudist movement was at first secretive – 50 years it was formed, the authorities seem to turn blind eye to it although the banning laws have still not been changed. Even among the broader, once extremely Catholic and conservative Irish society, it is perceived as something far less shocking than it used to be. Today's attitude is more about nudism being something 'silly' or trivial, but harmless, rather than dangerous and perverse as it would have been perceived in the past.

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7.1 Contexts of permitted nudity

Nudity in western society is generally considered a taboo to a greater or lesser extent. Even if it is tolerated, it is regulated by legal or social constraints, such as in the cases of pornography, naturism, nude art, or undressing at the doctor's surgery. Small children have also been regarded as a special case, although even this has been subject to a moral panic about child pornography. Needless to say, all these categories are distinguished by context, and by different extents to which the naked body may be disclosed. There is a complex web of often unspoken but visibly applied rules, which, depending on the context, allow for a specific way of manifesting one's nudity.

1 For most of us, what is generally considered the most basic and pure form of nudity is that of a small child, which is perceived as innocent and non-sexual. It is all right to undress or change small children in public without causing any public outrage and disgust, and it usually goes unnoticed. But it is important to note here, that even this kind of occurrence is slowly becoming regulated and frowned upon. Only two decades ago, the prominent British journalist and newsreader Julia Somerville was reported by a chemist to whom she had consigned her family photos for developing;[40] a law against possession of photographs of naked children had been passed in Britain under pressure from Mrs Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA). The government minister responsible for the new law had stated at the time that the law was not intended to apply to innocent family photographs, and the matter did not come to court, but it caused Ms Somerville great embarrassment. A similar scandal erupted in Australia in May 2008, over an exhibition by the famous photographer Bill Henson.[41] Twenty years on, the late Mrs Whitehouse is generally regarded in Britain as a comic figure, and yet a more serious moral panic is in full swing about the dangers of paedophilia.[42] Using naked photographs of your own children may easily be interpreted these days as illicit, and is slowly becoming taboo in the western world.

40 See the report in *The Independent* (London), 5 November 1995. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/julia-somerville-defends-innocent-family-photos-1538516.html, downloaded 3 August 2015.

41 See the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 2008.

42 The concept of 'moral panic' needs little introduction. It stems from Stan Cohen's book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972). A major recent contribution to the literature on moral panics is the body of work by Amanda Rohloff, including her PhD thesis entitled 'Climate Change, Moral Panics, and Civilisation: On the Development of Global Warming as a Social Problem' (2012), Brunel University. See also Petley et al. (2013).

2 The next category belongs to the type of nudity which lies only one step below childhood nudity, or at least it seems to be perceived that way: the nudity of a patient in a doctor's surgery. This is especially the case from the point of view of females, who have been disadvantaged for centuries when they are forced to be examined by male health practitioners. Talcott Parsons discussed the relationship between doctor and patient in classic essays dating from the mid-twentieth century (1951: 428–79). Even though he discussed many aspects of the relationship in detail, little, if anything, was said about the tension between the doctor and his or her naked patients. It is a category that became 'clinical' in its own sense, meaning that almost by default it became accepted that entering the medical domain meant *automatic* separation from seeing naked body as sexual. It became merely a biological object, and feelings of arousal or shame and embarrassment had no place. We could say that very strong elements both of external constraints (*Fremdzwänge*) and self-constraints (*Selbstzwänge*) are very visible here. The doctor internalises the external constraints upon looking at the patient in any other than a purely instrumental and medical way; anything else carries the risk of losing his or her licence to practise medicine or even of a criminal prosecution. So even if a doctor – such as a gynaecologist – is experiencing any 'forbidden' sentiments towards the patient, in no circumstances is he or she allowed to show it.

3 Another category is nudity in art. Reaching as far back as antiquity, we find a plethora of nudes in works of art. Throughout medieval times there are numerous examples of nakedness in art; it was always present to a greater or lesser extent. Things change: by the nineteenth century, it was very common – especially in religious circles – for veils to be painted over the sexual organs in works of art. That can often be seen in Ireland, for example in Newman House in Dublin, where the Catholic University of Ireland was founded in 1851. It is perhaps surprising that so many of Ireland's famous sheela-na-gigs, grotesque medieval carvings of females, survived undamaged.

Pubic hair in art and the symbolic nature of it is especially intriguing. Saints and other holy people were represented without pubic hair; only the common or 'evil' characters were presented with pubic hair. The pubis was considered a symbol of repugnance, something impure and shameful; it appears only to denote sexual and guilty representations of people.

It was also significant which naked parts of the human body were shown. For example, it was more common for the woman's breasts to be featured in art than the man's penis. It was also far more common for a woman than a man to be displayed completely naked. Even if a woman was naked, it was not until much later – perhaps in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century – for her to be displayed with her legs open (except of course in specifically pornographic

images). Even today it is rarer for a man to be portrayed like that (though there are examples, such as in the work of Lucien Freud). Traditionally the female body was always considered more beautiful, at least after antiquity. Berger provides an elaborate analysis of the differences of portraying nude women and men in art. He argues that a woman 'has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and … her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another' (Berger, 2009: 40).

If we were to consider movies as art, we must also mention censorship laws and regulations, especially the Irish history of censorship. Rockett (2004) describes the extent of the suppression of any references to sexual relations in Irish films, which was carried to an especially extreme extent between the 1920s and the 1970s.

4 The next category of permitted nudity is the naturist movement, which in many respects may seem to be very distant from the above categories, but that is quite deceptive. Some people may consider naturists to be able to abandon all the inhibitions and restrictions about the naked body; yet that is not quite the case, as we already know. It is more common for naturists to disapprove of showing any signs or signals of sexual nature while in the company of other naturists.[43] A large number of rules and regulations are to be observed by everyone who wants to take part in nudist activities – for example, no staring, gawking, inappropriate touching of oneself or others, not showing any signs of sexual arousal.

5 The last category in which nudity is 'allowed' is the pornography business. Pornography is the most controversial aspect of nudity, since it is not considered fully legal in most countries. What is mainly of interest for us here is the means of classification between different 'genres' of pornography. So, for instance, what constitutes the parts of the body that are allowed to be shown in soft pornography? Where do the boundaries lie between soft and hard pornography? And how is that to be explained? But to undertake that task is beyond the scope of this book.

7.2 The theory of taboo

It is almost impossible to discuss the existing theory of taboo without acknowledging its fundamental fault, which is especially visible when we look closer at

43 This is a fundamental difference between the terminology of 'naturism' and 'nudism', as explained to me by Irish naturists. The former remains a more 'pure' and family-friendly way of enjoying of nakedness.

the legacy of anthropological writers from Sir James Frazer, through Franz Steiner to Mary Douglas: difficulties become apparent in attempting to apply their theory of taboo to the modern and more complex societies of the western world. The fault lies deep in the difference between anthropology and sociology, or more precisely *developmental* sociology. I should therefore like to propose a new and more encompassing understanding of the concept of taboo, broader in its scope. During my study on the problem of nakedness and feelings of shame surrounding it, I came to the conclusion that a far more complex and systematic conceptualisation of the notion of taboo is needed.

Are patterns of avoidance, in nakedness as in other fields like foods, purely random, *sui generis* in each society? Or can they be explained, at least in part, by aspects of social development? This was the point at issue between the anthropological orthodoxy of the late twentieth century, represented notably by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Mary Douglas (1966; 1972), and the heterodox materialist or developmental view advanced by Marvin Harris (1986).

The orthodoxy – associated with Lévi-Strauss – aimed to find the universal structures of the human mind by studying anthropological data. Lévi-Strauss was strongly influenced by early phases in the development of information technology – especially the binary logic of computer programming. Two volumes of his massive study of the thinking of aboriginal tribes of South America were *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969) and *The Naked Man* (1981). What connects the two – nakedness and food – are patterns of binary oppositions in avoidances. Central to structuralist thinking – including that of Mary Douglas – is the 'pattern-making' capacity of the human mind. The problem is that in the structuralist tradition the patterns of acceptance and avoidance, likes and dislikes, tastes and distastes thus created are taken as given, or even as random. This is part of a broader tendency in twentieth-century anthropology not to seek explanations for how such patterns originated and developed, largely because anthropologists traditionally studied pre-literate human groups about whose past little could be known: 'speculative history' was to be avoided at all costs.[44]

Sigmund Freud was one of the most important authors of a 'speculative history' of taboo, which earned him the disapproval of twentieth-century anthropologists. In *Totem and Taboo* (2001[1913]), Freud advances the argument that taboo restrictions differ from moral or religious ones, and are not guided by any particular system of ordinance; and it would seem that he claimed that they appear accidentally for no known reason at all. Since Freud based his speculations on observations of Polynesian societies, where any knowledge of their history is mainly derived from oral accounts, it is easy to understand why Freud jumped to

44 For a detailed account of how and why the evolutionary anthropology of the nineteenth century fell into disfavour, see Harris (1966).

conclusions about taboo restrictions appearing for no known reason. Freud also tends to refer to taboos as ancient and not continuously created, which is another false assumption. But contrary to Freud's ideas of taboo, Elias argues that taboos, these 'social codes of commandments' (2012a [1939]: 486), are a type of steering force in the control of human conduct. He contends that fear, guilt and distaste anchor themselves so deeply in a person's personality that they become firm moral steering codes, an argument that renders Freudian assumptions on taboo quite incorrect.

Mary Douglas in her structuralist approach to the notion of taboo has given us a much more coherent account than Freud on that matter. Yet, as Stephen Mennell pointed out in his book on *All Manners of Food* (1985), the main weakness of the structuralist approach to explaining the issue of taboo is what Elias calls 'process-reduction' (2012b [1970]: 107–10). Caught in the web of dichotomies such as purity and dirt, order and disorder, or awe and aversion, she tends to dismiss all the processes that are behind the changes in between these structures. Even though she acknowledges the dynamics of taboos, somehow at the same time she is inclined to search for the static forms underlying their structures. To say, as Freud did in *Totem and Taboo*, that 'taboos have no grounds and are of unknown origin' (2001[1913]: 22) is also too much of an overstatement or simply a false assumption. There are taboos that seem to linger for so long in the society concerned that they cause its members to lose track of the origin of the taboo. It does not mean that if we were to do a thorough analysis of the social and historical background to a given prohibition – which is very often possible in modern 'historical' societies, though not among pre-literate 'peoples without history' – we would not be able to find the source of it.

A demonstration of this point is Marvin Harris's refutation, in *Good to Eat* (1986), of the orthodox anthropologists' idea that no historical or developmental explanation can be found for food taboos. Harris was able to advance, on the basis of archaeological and historical as well anthropological evidence, explanations for such food taboos as the Jewish and Muslim aversion to pork and the Hindu abhorrence of beef, which had long been regarded by earlier writers (such as Simoons, 1961) as essentially beyond the reach of rational developmental explanation.

A more developmental treatment of the problem of taboo and avoidances can be found in the work of Paul Kapteyn (1980). This looks far more promising, posing the main questions about the origins of and changes in taboos. However, the reasoning behind his explanation of taboo, even though in the spirit of Eliasian theory, tends to slide towards oversimplifying the constructs of taboos. Dividing taboos into 'primitive' and 'civilised' is unhelpful, because taboo as a phenomenon is anything but simple, let alone 'primitive'. Kapteyn coined the

terms 'tabooisation' and 'detabooisation', which more or less correspond to formalising and informalising processes.

Even though it might be erroneously understood that western societies have simply moved on from formalising processes to a new wave of informalisation, the persistence of certain taboos or even their strengthening in some cases of nudity are a clear reminder to us that none of these processes evolves in an entirely predictable and undisturbed linear manner. The growing moral panic towards children's nudity demonstrates that. Something that was once considered quite innocent and pure is now increasingly becoming one of the greatest taboos, spreading through all western societies.

Another example of a similar kind is the case of a patient's nudity during physical examination by a doctor or other medical professional. Some might argue that such inhibitions or feelings of shame were left behind during the process of medicalisation of the human body.[45] Clearly that did not happen, since in the course of the last few decades we have noticed a massive change in the regulation of conduct during examinations, especially where opposite sexes are involved. Talcott Parsons pointed out that 'the physician deals with human beings, and does so in situations which often involve "intimacies", that is, in contexts which are strongly charged with emotional and expressively symbolic significance' (1951: 451). In other words, it is strongly prohibited for a health care provider to express any 'dangerous' sexual emotions. In fact, this taboo is so strong that codes of medical ethics prohibit engaging in intimate relationship even with *former* patients.

Both of the above cases indicate continuing trends towards the formalising of some aspects of manners in today's world. They point to the existence of a 'second nature', which in the case of attitudes towards children's nudity is a conscience-dominated type of personality that is still in the making, and in the case of doctor–patient relations has already become dominant.

The greatest challenge in dealing with the problem of 'taboo' theoretically and conceptually is to abandon the limiting and erroneous understanding, inherited from the intellectual legacy of Freud to Douglas, of patterns of avoidance and repugnance as arbitrary in origin and beyond rational explanation. Speaking of food taboos, Douglas wrote that

> My own preferred approach would be to take the aesthetic as distinct from the nutritional aspect of food to be that part which is subject to pattern-making rules, like the

45 'Medicalisation' is the term used in the sociological literature to refer to the objectifying rationalisation and 'scientification' of the human body. One important source of the idea was Foucault's book *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003 [1963]: 36–7); he suggests that during the most secular stage of the French Revolution, doctors came to be seen as 'priests of the body', indicating their dogmatic and strict relationship with human bodies.

> rules of poetry, music or dance. The explanation of any one such rule will only be found in its contribution to the pattern it helps to create. (Douglas, 1974: 84)

Stephen Mennell (1991) has labelled this tradition of thought 'the quantum theory of taboo': it was not that anthropologists denied that such patterns of thinking had origins and underwent change, but that they assumed to know the state of the pattern at a given time did not enable one to say how or why it had *become* that way or in what direction it was likely to *develop* in future.

Based on my observations of the naturist movement in Ireland, and many other historical examples on changing patterns of dealing with nudity in western societies, I would like to offer an alternative framing of the problem of the concept of taboo, drawing especially on Elias's theory of civilising processes and Wouters's theory of informalisation that is built upon Elias's theory.

Using the term 'taboo' implies something static – as if there are non-changing structures within society – but it would be more appropriate to see taboo as a part of an ongoing process. The static concept of 'taboo' is an example of the more general problem within the social sciences that Elias referred to as 'process-reduction' (see chapter 6 above). Elias therefore advocated that such expressions be replaced with more 'processual' terminology, such as 'social*isation*,' 'urban*isation*', 'court*isation*', 'sport*isation*' or 'civil*isation*'. For this reason I would like to follow Kapetyn in introducing a more accurate alternative to the fixed notion of taboo, that being the terms 'tabooisation' and 'detabooisation'.

Tabooisation concerns avoidances and prohibitions that are part of the stricter formalising processes involved in applying both external and self-constraints. In many cases there may then develop informalising processes leading towards detabooisation. Using these processual terms helps to emphasise that taboos do not change overnight, and that there is a transition phase which most authors fail to acknowledge. It is important to point out that neither of the two processes takes place on the conscious level, and neither exists in any sort of final or 'definite' form. The more complex are the webs of interdependence, the more 'unstable' are the taboos. That is why they should be treated as processes, always operating through formalising and informalising shifts. They never reach a final form, and the process of detabooisation will never result in the abandonment of all self-constraints.

Naturism shows us that even though people choose to eliminate all their clothes during interaction with each other, it does not mean that all of a sudden every taboo concerned with naked human bodies has been abandoned. It does not result in a return to animalic sexual drives or loss of all inhibitions, as some might be inclined to assume. It is more about the shifting balances of repugnance than returning to some zero-point where all inhibitions are lost. What the theory

of the civilising processes shows us is that, through the continuous development of western societies, we are bound to move continuously 'forward' in the sense of always being interdependent to greater or lesser extent, and we will always have constraints stopping us from 'falling off' the developmental wagon permanently, even if it may seem that way in the short term.

To expand on that further, let me turn now to the work of Abram de Swaan (1981), who in his paper on agoraphobia, shows how broader developments in society overall tend to affect and alter relations between people, even the most intimate ones. He paints a picture of how the development of capitalism in the nineteenth century directly affected the presence in public of bourgeois women, which eventually resulted in the emergence of agoraphobia. Over time, however, the progressive equalisation of relations between men and women resulted in an increasing interdependence of greater numbers of people (1981: 369). De Swaan argues that this in return led to more expansive and stronger tendencies towards self-restraints over the physical impulses of human bodies. This was also affirmed by Marx, who described the levels of transformations that needed to take place for an agrarian population in order to adapt to the more regimental regimes and rhythms of an industrial work force and new ways of living. De Swaan also points out that in similar vein 'Weber has demonstrated the intimate connection between a puritan abstinence and the entrepreneurial style of life in early capitalism' (1981: 369). Following the rationale of Elias's theory, western societies, in comparison to those of the Middle Ages, are characterised by strict controls over impulses and drives. Levels of immediate and spontaneous interpersonal violence have dropped dramatically, including crimes of a sexual kind. De Swaan contends that:

> Relations between people are increasingly managed through negotiation rather than through command. This applies to relations between sexes, between parents and children, often to relations between people in adjacent ranks within organisational hierarchies, and sometimes to relations between local authorities and citizen groups. This makes for a larger variety of possible outcomes, but the process of arranging these relations imposes onerous restrictions upon the people involved. In a sense, this transition from management through to management through negotiation represents an increase in freedom: freedom being taken to mean the possibility to do what one wishes insofar as it does not interfere with that possibility in others. … Desires and rights are almost always demands and claims upon other people and there exists no space which is not occupied also by the desires and rights of others. That is why management through negotiation, even if it were to be thought of as freedom, is so rarely experienced as liberating. (1981: 373–4)

What this shows us with regard to the problem of tabooisation that it is no coincidence that the strongest taboos concerning human bodies, or more especially

naked human bodies, reached their peak in the nineteenth century, with the best example here being the rules and manners often associated and symbolised by the Victorian corset.

7.3 A digression on sociology and anthropology

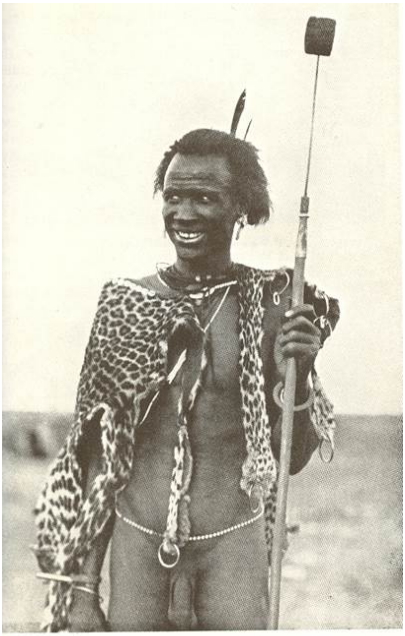
At this point I would like to address a more general problem of differences in how sociology and anthropology deal with the object of their research, which will help us acquire better grasp of the faults in the existing theory of taboo.

Elias's strong criticism of British anthropology is connected with the colonial origins of the discipline (Mennell, 1998: 228–41; Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 37–8). One principal early purpose of anthropology was to provide the rulers of the British Empire with better insight into colonised regions and societies. His main bone of contention with anthropologists concerned their adoption of a narrow and rather arrogant perspective of presuming to 'know' the Nuer or the Ashanti, after short-term fieldwork within the communities. It is arrogant and short-sighted because of the western tendency to ignore the historical dimension in understanding social structures. Elias argued that, especially from the 1920s to the 1950s, there was a tendency for 'British anthropologists to treat "tribal" societies as if they were self-contained, bounded "systems" that existed independently of space and time, and, more particularly, independently of any wider and dynamic social and environmental context' (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 37). This leads to the acceptance of a single person's interpretation as an adequate account of a society's reality.[46]

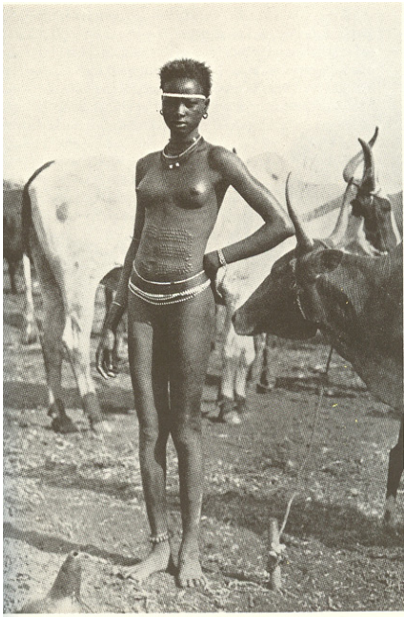
Nevertheless, there are many anthropological studies of tribal societies which traditionally went naked; one of the most familiar is Evans-Pritchard's celebrated study of the Nuer (1940), from which figures 6 and 7 are reproduced. Their patterns of behaviour may lead us to the conclusion that they lived without shame. On the contrary, the way Elias understood the difference between these 'simple' societies and the more 'complex' western ones, is that these 'simple' societies are simple because of the much smaller levels of interdependence, not because they are 'primitive' (or even worse, 'savage'). We are unable to tell how their own civilising process developed because of the lack of written historical records that could provide us with some insights. It would be very far from the truth to assume that these societies have not developed at all and are stuck in some sort of isolated time warp. One might ask, though, how it is possible to

46 Ironically enough, Elias at one point found himself under fire from similar critiques about the alleged ethnocentric traits of his theory of civilisation, to which he provided a lengthy and detailed justification – which was nonetheless ignored by many. See Anton Blok's critique of Elias, reported in Mennell (1998: 232).

have nudity present in our social lives in so many of the different forms mentioned above.



A leopard-skin chief



Girl in kraal (Eastern Gaajok)

Figures 6 and 7: Leopard-skin chief and young Nuer woman in the 1920s, from Evans-Pritchard (1940: facing pp. 16 and 222)

Taking into consideration all the taboos related to nakedness within western societies and the way they are transgressed over time, it is safe to say that our societies will never be able to return to an inhibition-free and sexual connotation-free vision of a naked body. There are, as we have seen above, still contexts which allow for at least partial and learned inattention towards nakedness. Yet, in the case of naturism in modern Germany and its extensive acceptance within German culture, it was never acceptable for anyone to go to work in the buff or stroll around the streets of busy towns and cities. The point I am trying to emphasise here is that even though it was once possible for a family to walk through the streets naked on their way to the public baths, today in even the most tolerant European cultures, it is something that belongs within the private realms of one's everyday life or at least in designated places. It is one thing to parade naked in

the comfort of one's own home among one's own family, and another to hover around the freshly baked bread section in the supermarket. The difference between modern European societies and those of late medieval or Renaissance Europe is that our webs or chains of interdependence have grown to such extent that it is no longer welcome or safe to disturb the gentle balances among interdependent groups. As De Swaan argues, we have now entered the stage of our development that operates through the means of negotiation and is therefore more dependent for its working on more predictable traits of behaviour. The pressures of self-constraint have reached a point when people's conduct needs to be and to remain predictable.

If we look more closely, these (let us call them) 'naked instances' are the result of careful negotiations within societies. We need to shed more light on the conditions that allowed communities such as naturists to earn the trust of the rest of society. In other words, the *naked figuration* that they form is the key to it all.

7.4 Back to Irish naturism

What makes the Irish case of naturism so revealing for a sociologist trying to make sense of attitudes towards sexual bodies or nudity is that we have the advantage of hindsight, after watching the transformations of various taboos concerning sexual relations and nudity in other western countries. The taboos and their transformations that occurred during previous generations elsewhere in Europe have only begun to take place in Ireland among a later generation. Because, according to Tom Inglis (2005), the revolution which triggered the processes of 'eroticisation of sex and sexualisation of love' are far from complete, the Irish sexual scene is still full of double standards, which is clearly affecting people's attitudes towards naked bodies. One of the best ways of identifying these dispositions is to compare Irish naturist practices with, let's say for argument's sake, those of France.

Ireland's specificity lies not only in its geographical location in relation to the rest of the continental Europe, which undoubtedly had a considerable impact on cultural change throughout its history, but also in the almost suffocating spread of penitential practices. Inglis (1998a) contends that ever since Ireland became a main centre of Christianity with the arrival of St Patrick, the religion had promoted a guilt-ridden and mortified way of life. The general trend towards being more chaste became a way of showing the superiority and social status of those who chose godly ways, which in turn 'made second-class citizens of married people who pursued the ordinary way of life because they did not have a higher calling' (Inglis, 1998a: 130). This type of systematic rigour over the

bodies of the Irish, with special emphasis on their carnal side, has had a great impact on Irish sexuality and bodies over the past two hundred years.

Looking at the arrival of naturism in Ireland, it is evident that at the time it as a reaction to the religious domination of the Catholic Church. It dominated the infrastructure of the state apparatus, including the civil service, education and hospitals. It also, partly in consequence, dominated people's mentality, through the internalisation of oppressive dogmas into habitual self-controls. Just as initially, according to Mosse (1982), it was the industrial revolution that separated newly established capitalist citizens of the western world from nature and subjected their bodies and emotions to the clock, the Catholic faith built a wall between the tormented souls and bodies of the Irish people. The 1960s in Ireland was a time when many other social movements began to sprout on the social scene. The feminist, gay and communist movements started to come out of the metaphorical social woodwork and gradually to grow in strength and attain some level of legitimacy in the society. Many taboos were being broken, or at least strained, at the time. Nevertheless, Irish naturists were risking a great deal through their practice – hence their secretive ways of enrolling of new members and never enquiring beyond the first names of fellow members. The taboo on naked recreation existed not only outside the club, but also within the group. They trusted each other with their naked bodies, but not necessarily with their identities and reputations – and this is still true to a lesser extent today. This shows that the level of self-constraint ingrained in their psyche since their childhoods is going through a transition that is still in the process of legitimisation, both among the naturists themselves and in the broader outer society. As Elias puts it:

> Fear, distaste, guilt, associations and emotions of the most disparate kinds exaggerate the probable danger. It is precisely this which anchors such prohibitions so firmly and deeply in the personality and which gives them their taboo character (2012a [1939]: 123)

Avoidances or taboos are always associated with fears, and therefore with dangers – some of which may be quite coldly factual. The concealment of women in particular is probably strongly associated with the real danger of rape – in many past ages as well as in some parts of the world today, where there is no effective monopoly of violence and punishment. This real bodily danger is deeply associated, probably everywhere, with the more symbolic fear of the contamination of families' bloodlines. The degree of factual danger from inadequate personal self-constraint (by both men and women) may actually have declined, but the fear

may persist through cultural lag for many generations.[47] I suspect this lies behind the extensive veiling of Muslim women in European societies.

What is more remarkable is the (highly controlled?) relaxing of taboos in modern society. Yet where factual danger is low, fears centre on *shame*. Do we have evidence about the continued prevalence of fearful dreams about being naked in public? Here is one example:

> *Do you feel some sort of thrill when you take off your clothes? Those times when you go on holidays?*
>
> I don't know if thrill is the actual word but I do look forward to it … I do look forward to getting out of my clothes and particularly when driving from the airport to the resort. I probably undress before I start to unpack the car. We'd have hired out a car and that.
>
> *So you would notice and feel aware that you are undressed or dressed?*
>
> Yes. I would.
>
> *It's not that you would walk out of your room and 'Whoops! I forgot'?*
>
> That's the odd nightmare that I have – that I've gone somewhere and forgot to put on my clothes! (Tom, 64)

47 As did the fear of hunger and famine, after the real danger had passed.

8 Conclusion

It is common for sociologists to study societies from what may be called the 'fly in amber' perspective: as if time has stopped dead. Yet both the fly and the amber have their own history. We tend to forget that absolutely everything in our world is part of something bigger, a small fraction of something else, or is an element in a process on its way to becoming something entirely different. It is particularly evident in my study of nakedness, which shows that, unless we look at the history of the development of feelings, habits and attitudes towards naked bodies, we shall not be able to understand the true character of all the taboos and polarised views associated with it. It is one of many reasons why Elias's processual and holistic way of looking at the social world proves so useful.

What I have explored in this book is how our attitudes towards nakedness have developed over time, especially the close connections between nakedness and feelings of shame and embarrassment. For that, Elias's theory of civilising processes proved to be of paramount value. I approached the problem first in an 'inside-out' manner – in other words, to study the relationship between shame and nakedness through a more close-up or 'micro' approach towards naturists, and then to use those findings to make sense of the broader (nude) picture. Investigating their ways of managing shameful emotions provided useful clues about the long-term 'macro-level' development in the broader society of the relation between nakedness, shamefulness and the process of eroticisation of the naked body.

I have striven to avoid the trap of dichotomising the relationship between 'society' and 'the individual', into which Elias understood the importance of not falling:

> To understand the obstruction that the predominant modes of thinking and feeling pose to the investigation of long-term changes of social structure and personality structure … it is not enough to trace the development of the image of people as societies, the image of society. It is also necessary to keep in mind the development of the image of people as individuals, the image of the personality. … [O]ne of the peculiarities of the traditional human self-image is that people often speak and think of individuals and societies as if these were two phenomena existing separately – of which, moreover, one is often considered 'real' and the other 'unreal' – instead of two different aspects of the same human being. (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 512)

B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozesstheorie 12,
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Elias is here opposing the Parsonian idea – derived from the behaviourist tradition of psychology – of seeing the human mind as a 'black box'. This was the view that we can directly observe actions and their consequences, but that it is impossible to see into the black box of another person's brain to observe the motives leading to that action. This is linked to what Elias refers to as the *homo clausus* view of the person, an erroneous way of viewing 'society' and 'individuals' as separate entities, and individuals as separate beings independent of each other. As an alternative he introduces the concept of *homines aperti*, through which he stresses the networks of interdependence within societies and among individuals, which as a result affect and shape psychic changes among them.

Another important aspect of the figurational perspective is using the past to understand the present. As Mennell argues, 'time is always one axis of a figurational explanation: "no comparison without history, no history without comparison" might serve as a useful slogan' (2015).

Furthermore, I used Eliasian ways of approaching research 'methodology' when I decided to learn about experiencing shame and embarrassment through observing my own emotions during the processes of my 'becoming a naturist' for the purposes of this study. It not only proved necessary and helpful when I was formulating the type of questions I should ask during the interviews, but also became crucial in grasping the ways of managing various emotions for anyone faced with the phenomenon of social nudity. It 'sensitised' me to various aspects of experiencing nakedness, which I may otherwise have missed.

8.1 Up-close and 'involved'

Some interesting conclusions arose from my fieldwork.

In the light of Becker's and Hughes's rationale of the process of 'becoming' a smoker of marijuana or tobacco, I was able to distinguish two main stages of becoming a naturist. I identified what I call here the *initiation stage* of *becoming* a naturist. This stage includes the critical moment of appearing naked in front of other naked people, which is particularly important to our understanding not only of experiencing embarrassment and shame, but also the process of and tools for managing them at this key moment, and at the same time managing their bodies, which is especially significant for male naturists.

The second stage, referred to as the *established stage*, is when a naturist is more at ease with appearing naked and being seen naked by other people; he or she has learned how to enjoy his or her nakedness. Most of the rules and general etiquette have become habitual to him or her, and this is also a stage where practising naturism provides a form of what Elias and Dunning (2008 [1986]) refer to as *mimetic excitement*. In the light of this concept, a person can rely on the

habitual forms of self-restraint guaranteed by second-nature personality, in order – in the case of the naturist – to be able to enjoy the more permissive aspects of their nakedness without automatically engaging sexual feelings.

This part of the book also covered other important aspects of practising naturism, such as specific rules and standards among the naturists, the ways they manage to separate their naked bodies from their sexual bodies, and how any 'merging' of these two elements in a naturist environment is considered exhibitionist.

The interviews, together with documentary analysis of old Irish newspaper articles, provided a good source of information about the history of Irish naturism, its relatively late emergence in comparison with other European countries, and the way it is organised in Ireland. Based on more general comparisons with the philosophy and structures of German *Nacktheit-* or *Freikörperkultur*, I came to the conclusion that Irish naturism cannot be described as a social movement, but more as a pastime or recreational practice.

8.2 Nature, nakedness and shame

In chapters 4 and 5, I stressed the influence of ancient Greek culture in the rise of naturism in Germany. This link was perpetuated by the general disenchantment of German society with the extent of changes coming about through the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and rapid development of technology and transport. These overwhelming forces caused a certain level of discontentment and feelings of being alienated from the natural world. The emergence of nudism in Germany at the time became a part of a bigger reform of German society, the so-called *Lebensreform*.

This gave the basis for my argument about the relationship of the notion of 'nature' to the ideology of naturism, which led to a broader discussion of how we conceptualise nature today. I argued that investigating historical changes in standards and attitudes regarding nakedness in western societies was intimately connected with the long-term civilising processes involving the distancing of individuals from nature.

I also made a connection with Elias's notion of 'landscape', using it to support my argument that we may have adapted the way of looking at and considering 'nature' as landscapes to the way we relate to our bodies, including its animalic aspects. The point was illustrated by naturists trimming their bodily hair and the practice of infibulation by ancient Greek athletes. As the theory of civilising processes indicates, most of the physiological and innate elements of the human animal are moved behind the social scenes, and feelings of embarrassment, shame and repugnance develop towards most of them.

8.3 Conceptualising the problem of nakedness

In chapter 6 I brought the theory of civilising processes to bear on understanding the relationship between nakedness and the emotions associated with it. I applied a long-term perspective in order to pinpoint the importance of, and mechanisms behind, changes in thresholds of embarrassment and shame related to the naked body, and the rise of levels of 'permissiveness' through the process of informalisation.

I applied a more close-up view to the behaviour associated with experiencing shame and embarrassment, emphasising differences between the two, which are often elided by sociologists and psychologists. The Goffmanian and Foucauldian lenses help to uncover new meanings of and tools for handling embarrassment, and then to determine its function in society. I also stressed the importance of the notion of context for perceiving nakedness, and how distinguishing between contexts has a direct influence on our approach to and conception of naked bodies.

In chapter 7 I discussed the problem of taboo and avoidances concerning naked bodies in western societies. I applied some main aspects of figurational sociology in order to provide a critical alternative to the fallacious structuralist ways of understanding taboo in the works of Freud and Mary Douglas. On the basis of the findings from my study, I argued that the structuralist or post-structuralist approaches towards the notion of taboo are too static to be adequate for grasping the mechanisms that drive feelings of taboo. Placing taboo within a processual and more dynamic perspective allows for more accurate understanding of it.

I brought Erving Goffman's special expertise and insight to bear on the experience of shameful feelings from the point of view of an individual. Yet it scarcely needs to be emphasised again that Eliasian theory has been of paramount importance, not only in this particular study, but also for its contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the problem of shame and embarrassment in general. Elias's way of studying societies permits an encompassing and more comprehensive vision of how the individual operates within the society and relates to others. He brings together the micro and macro perspectives on society, showing how both are indispensable.

Taboo, as I discussed in chapter 7, is understood as a range of prohibitions, restrictions and avoidances that are the main cogs in the great and productive machine that is the theory of civilising process. It is thus very hard to look at the problem of the historical relationship we have had with our naked bodies other than through the lens of process sociology. It is even harder to look at sociology in general in the same way, including the works of theorists who once stirred the intellect and now seem rather incomplete intimations of something far greater.

8.4 Ambivalence, involvement and detachment

While I was writing this study I realised that my ambivalent feelings towards nakedness, after more than four years of intensive observations and the disclosure of my own and other people's naked bodies, might carry a deeper meaning. Through the use of Elias's concepts of sociogenesis and psychogenesis, it is easier to grasp the direct link between studying shameful feelings about nudity among naturists in Ireland (the micro-sociological analysis), and a broader understanding of how shame and embarrassment affect western societies in general (on the level of macro-sociological analysis). In other words, in order to avoid potential ambiguity here, let us turn to the more paradigmatic example of a story by Edgar Allan Poe (1841), 'A descent into the maelstrom', to which Elias refers for a clearer illustration of the gist of the problem. It is a story of three brothers who were caught in their boat at sea in a deep whirlpool. One of the brothers was swept away overboard and drowned, and the second brother clung to the boat completely paralysed with fear. The third brother, however, despite being terrified of the situation he was in, managed to look around and notice that among all the scattered objects in the sea, those that were cylindrical in shape were going down more slowly than others. He jumped into a barrel and threw himself overboard, and instructed his paralysed brother to do the same. Failing to do so, the second brother drowned with the boat and the third one survived after the whirlpool subsided and left the fisherman afloat in the barrel. Elias provides the following explanation on the basis of the story of the third brother:

> After a while, however, he calmed down. He began to think more coolly; and by standing back, by controlling his fear, by seeing himself, as it were, from a distance like a figure on a chessboard forming a pattern with others, he managed to turn his thoughts away from himself to the situation in which he was caught up. It was then that he recognised the elements in the uncontrollable process which he could use in order to control its condition sufficiently for his own survival. Symbolically representing in his mind the structure and direction of the flow of events, he discovered a way of escape. In that situation, the level of self-control and the level of process-control were, as one can see, interdependent and complementary (Elias, 2007 [1983]: 109).

This short story has a direct connection to what Elias calls the 'critical process'; it can also be reinterpreted in the light of my own research. Looking retrospectively at my initiation into the world of social nudity described in chapter 2, my story could be compared with that of the third fisherman in Poe's story. However, it needs to be noted that for me – and probably for other people asked to imagine the social situation of appearing naked in front of other people – the most likely imagined scenario would be that of the second brother, paralysed with

fear. One of the commonest social nightmares and fears is about being caught stark naked in public – and I too experienced this when rolling about in bed the night before going to my first naturist meeting. I feared that I would drown in the pool of my own shame and from the gazes of other people looking at my nakedness. It is the same fear that has been experienced by many naturists, as they told in their stories of their 'first times' in naturist settings. Yet, when actually faced with it, I was able to present a level of self-control over my own fears, enough to be able to blend in among the group and observe their behaviour, and immediately manage to learn from it. I had my brief moments of heightened emotivity during my first exposure to naturism at the swim in September 2012. After that day, my emotions during naturist meetings never reached the same level of intensity, my nakedness became my 'costume' as Bonfante (1989) once argued. Elias warns against this 'high emotivity of response', because it tends to impair the much-needed opportunities for realistic assessment, for both a tangled fisherman at sea and a sociologist during his or her fieldwork. Wouters and Mennell argue the following:

> The development of such a third-nature habitus involves an attempt to reach back to 'first nature' without losing any of the control that was provided by 'second nature', the self-regulating conscience that functions to a large extent automatically. Thus the rise of a 'third-nature personality' demands and depends on an emancipation of 'first nature' as well as 'second nature'. (2015: 268–9).

I am becoming more convinced that there would be no sociology without the development of the 'third-nature personality'. I would go so far as to say that the timing of the rise of sociology as a discipline was strongly connected with our rising ability to reflect upon ourselves with greater levels of detachment than ever before in the history of western societies.

8.5 Final remarks

I have demonstrated throughout this book that it is as important to study all the smaller processes, such as experiencing shameful and embarrassing emotions brought upon by the sight of a naked body, as it is to study them as part of the other broader processes that allow us to place them in a sequential order. Other studies on nakedness have failed to make the important connections between it and the compelling process directed towards distancing from our animalic and 'naturalistic' selves. The compelling process becomes evident through various more or less inventive ways of covering our nudity. They also often failed to address the key notion of how and why nakedness became sexualised to such an

extent in the first place, through trends towards establishing certain taboos and then eroticising nudity through a gradual and controlled overthrowing of them.

I have tried to draw attention to the importance of how we understand feelings of shame and embarrassment, and pointed out that a better definition and comprehension of the two is needed if we are to understand puzzling phenomena such as blushing. Overall, however, I have stressed the sociological importance of studying naturism, to show the relationships between the distancing from central physiological human functions, the development of sexual manners, and the working of mechanisms of control over sexual impulses.

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B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
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Index

ablutions 121
'going unwashed' 125
Acanthus the Lacedaemonian 96
agoraphobia 173
akroposthion 97
alousia 125
Anacreon 98
animalic nature 86, 112, 114, 151
anthropology 169–70, 172, 174–6
anthroposphere 113
Arieti, James A. 95, 97
art
Greek 97
nude in 161–2, 166, 167–8
Ashanti 174
Attwood, Feona 135
Atwood, Margaret 13
Augustine, St 146
avoidances 165, 182

baptism 126–7
barbarians 95, 98
Barcan, Ruth 17
bathhouses 120–8, 125, 130–1, 149–50
bathing 148
mixed 21, 121–2, 123
see also bathhouses
Becker, Howard S. 17, 180
bedroom 151
Bell, David 111
Bentham, Jeremy 160–11
Berger, John 139, 161–2, 168
Bloch, Iwan 93
blushing 116–19, 185
body
language 45, 58–62
management 56–63
pedagogics 64
see also constraint
Bonfante, Larissa 95, 96–8, 123, 181
Bonneville, Françoise de 121, 128, 130
Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab 125
breasts 134–5, 167
Breslau 149–50
British Naturism (magazine) 101
British Sun Bathing Association 99, 101
Brody, Hugh 109
Bronzino (Agnolo di Cosimo) 139–40
Burgess, Thomas Henry 116
Butler, Judith 34
buttocks 134–5
Byzantine Empire 125

Cap d'Agde 99
capitalism 173
Carpenter, Edward 87
Casanova, Giacomo Girolamo 132–3, 135
Catholic Church 81, 106, 107–10, 146, 176–7
Caxton, William 114–15
censorship 168
Central Council of British Naturism (CCBN) 99
children 108, 117–18, 147, 151, 166, 171
babies 144
blind 118–19
Christianity 112, 122, 125, 126–8, 139
aversion to flesh 129–30
see also Catholic Church
Chytry, Josef 91
circumcision 98, 125, 136
civilisation 89
civilising processes 13, 23–5, 96, 112–14, 143–8, 153, 162–3

B. Górnicka, *Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment*,
Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozesstheorie 12,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-15984-9

psychogenesis and sociogenesis 117, 146–7, 153, 160
Irish 110
control of animalic nature of humans 134
see also under naturism
Clapham, Adam 89
Clark, Kenneth 161–2
clothes 149, 178
Club Nautica
gaining access to 30–3
swimming session 34–8
party 38–42
Annual General Meeting 41
history 101–2, 106
Cokal, Susann 138, 140–1
Colchians 98
colonisation 18
Connolly, Linda 109
Constable, Robin 89
constraint
external (*Fremdzwänge*) 147, 167
internal (self) (*Selbtswänge*) 147, 167
self-restraint 56–60, 71, 129, 161, 162, 172 , 181
sexual 98
see also body management
contexts, naked 161–2
Cook, Captain James 165
corsets 135, 164, 174
Courbet, Gustave 133
Crawford, C. E. G. 87
Crossley, Nick 64
Crowley, Jeananne 104
Cuffel, Alexandra 125, 126
Cullen, Clara 109

danger 177–8
Darwin, Charles 93, 116–18
Davies, John Langdon 20
defecation 25, 36, 117, 144, 150
Descartes, René 156
Deutsche Leibeszucht (German Body Cultivation) 89
deviancy, sexual 102
doctor–patient relations 167, 171
Douglas, Jack D. 16–17
Douglas, Mary 169–72, 182
dreams, nightmares 36*n*, 154, 178, 184
dressing and undressing 143, 148, 166, 178
drives
animalic 116–17, 137, 141, 156, 172
basic 119, 153
sexual 129, 153
strict controls over 173
duelling 88
Duerr, Hans Peter 23–5, 134
Dunning, Eric 63, 145, 163
Dürer, Albrecht 130
Durham, Meenakshi G. 135
dys-appearing body 64

ego 153–5
Egyptians 98, 136–7, 138
Elias, Norbert
and manners 112–14, 143–4, 146
on bathing manners 13–14
on Germany 88
on nakedness 23, 137, 148–51
on nature 114, 181
outward bodily propriety 143–4
figuration 155–7
and excitement 162–3
norms of conduct 165, 170
on anthropology 174
importance of 179–80, 181–4
On the Process of Civilisation 13, 134, 143, 151, 153–4
see also civilising processes
Ellis, Havelock 18, 21–2, 93, 129, 130, 131–2
embarrassment
differs from shame 152–5
and naked body 33, 37, 51, 59, 148–51, 151–61
and blushing 117–18

long-term changes 14–15, 143–5
see also shame
emotions 115–19, 144, 162
shameful 179
see also drives
Enlightenment 131
environmentalism 89
Erasmus, Desiderius of Rotterdam 112
erection 56–8
eroticisation 115, 135, 141, 149, 176, 179
Ethiopians 98
Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. 174–5
excitement, mimetic 63, 81, 114, 118, 163, 180–1
exhibitionism 76–80, 138

Fagan, Garrett G. 85, 121, 125
fears 165, 170, 178, 184
Fellowship of the Naked Trust (FNT) 87
feminism 177
Ferriter, Diarmaid 100, 107
films, Irish 168
Flügel, John C. 22, 47, 93
Ford, Patrick K. 136
foresight, increasing 117
figuration
naked 155–7, 176
nature 157
'textile' 158
perspective 180
see also under Elias, Norbert
food *see under* taboo
foresight 160
formalisation 25, 110, 114–15, 120, 135, 172
Foucault, Michel 93, 109, 119, 160–1, 182
Frazer, Sir James 169
Freikörperkultur (FKK) 86, 96, 105, 181
French Revolution 92
Freud, Lucien 168
Freud, Sigmund 93, 94, 154, 160, 182
on taboo 169–71

Galen 139
gaze, panoptic 161
Gay, Jan 20
Geigel, Alois 93
gender 82–3, 139
genitalia 124–5, 126, 132–41, 167
'cock rings' 138
phobia 138
Germany, Germans 86, 87–96, 105, 151, 157, 165, 175, 181
Weimar Republic 89
Enlightenment 91
nationalism 93
Giddens, Anthony 24
Goffman, Erving 138, 151–4, 158–61, 182
Goudsblom, Johan 47, 113, 114, 115, 116, 127n, 146, 160
Gouldner, Alvin 152
Greeks, ancient 85, 86, 91–8, 120–2, 129, 136–9, 151, 181
guilt 170
gymnasion 126
gymnastics 127
gymnosophy 18–19, 94, 95, 96
gynaecologists 167

habitus 114, 146, 147, 163
hair, bodily
maintenance of 34, 40
pubic 37, 40, 133–41
and art 139–40, 167
removal 138–41
hammam 125–6
harems 139
Harris, Marvin 169, 170
Health and Efficiency (magazine) 100–1
Hebrews 98
Heidegger, Martin 64
heliotherapy 89–90
Henson, Bill 166
Heracles 97
Herodotus 98

Heerzog, Rebecca M. 141
Hillenbrand, Robert 126
Hinz, Michael 24
Hitler Youth 89
Hochschild, Arlie Russell 64
Hodges, Frederick M. 97–8
Holliday, Ruth 111
homines aperti 156, 180
homo clausus 156, 180
homosexuality 106–7, 177
Hoss, Stefanie 121, 122–3, 124–5, 126
Hudson, Liam 120
Hughes, Jason 17, 145, 180
hunger 117
hygiene 126, 146

India, British 87
individual and society 156–7, 179–80
industrialisation 88
Industrial Revolution 95, 157
infibulation 181
informalisation
  processes 14, 25–6, 74–5, 86, 136, 171
  first-nature personality 25–6, 83, 137, 164
  second-nature personality 25, 68, 83, 163–4, 171, 181
  third-nature personality 21–2, 26, 68, 83, 137, 163–4, 184
  controlled decontrolling of emotional controls 26, 118, 163
  spurt 96
  Irish 107–10
  see also formalisation
Inglis, Tom 41, 107–8, 176–7
inhibitions 151, 172–3
inspectionism 76–7, 94
intercourse *see* sex, sexuality
interdependence 145, 147, 156–7, 160, 172, 176
International Naturist Congress 103–4
International Naturist Federation (INF) 32, 101, 103, 105
involvement and detachment 183–4
Irish Free State 108
Irish Gay Rights Movement 107
Irish Naturist Association (INA) 13, 30–1, 99, 101, 102–3, 104, 106
Islam 125–6, 138

Januszczak, Waldemar 128
Jerome, St 128
Jolly, Penny Howell 136, 139, 149
Judaism 122–5
Juvenal (Decimus Junius Juvenalis) 122

Kapteyn, Paul 170–1, 172
Kelly, Eamonn P. 136
Kilmer, Martin 138–9
King, Michael 16
Kosso, Cynthia 121
kouroi 97, 136
Krieken, Robert van 144
Kuzmics, Helmut 152–3
Kyeser, Konrad 130
kynodesmē 97–8

landscape 114, 139, 181
Lebensreform (Life Reform) 88–9, 181
Leder, Drew 64
Lévi-Strauss, Claude 169
Lindquist, Sherry C. M. 135
linguistics 144–5
loincloths (*subligar*) 122
love, sexual 108, 137–8
Lynch, Edmund 107

McQuaid, Archbishop John Charles 109
Macrones 98
Mahomed, Horatio 131
Malthus, Thomas 107
manners *see under* Elias, Norbert
Marchand, Suzanne 91
Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis) 122
Marx, Karl 173
media, mass 135
medicalisation 171
Mellor, Philip 64

Mennell, Stephen 117, 144, 145, 147, 170, 172, 180
menstruation 32–3, 39
Merrill, Frances 19
Merrill, Mason 19
Messenger, John 109
methodology 46, 180
Miles, Margaret R. 111n, 121, 126–7, 129–30
Mittelalterliches Hausbuch 113
Montalivet 99
morality 154–5, 164
Morel, Bénédict Augustin 94
Morison, Fynes 148, 149
Morris, Desmond 134, 141
Mosse, George L. 92–4, 157, 177
Mouratidis, John 95, 97
movements, social *see* social movements
Munich 87
Murnan, Sarah K. 138

nakedness
  naked body 70–2, 76
  history of 13
  naked male beauty (Greek) 96, 121–2
  male 123
  female 123, 126
  in Renaissance 131
  acceptance of 175–6
  fearful dreams of 178
  see also shame *and* embarrassment *and* sex, sexuality *and under* Elias, Norbert
Nacktkultur 86, 88, 92, 181
National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA) 166
nature 113–14, 131
  and naturism 85–6
  human 111
naturism, naturists 14–15, 154, 162, 168
  initiation stage 46, 48–9, 58, 180
  established stage 46, 63–70, 180–1
  definition 74
  legality 99
  codes of behaviour 39–41, 52–9, 70
  and civilising processes 86
  Irish 81, 98–107, 138, 159–60, 172, 176–8, 181
  holidays 100
  beaches 7, 16, 102, 104–5, 159
  respondents' experiences 52, 58, 60, 65, 70–6, 80–1, 102–3
  photography 102
  philosophy of 162
  identity 77–81
  see also nudism
Nazis 89
Nettleton, Sarah 64
Noah 108–9
Norris, David 99, 106, 107
Norwood, C. E. 19–20
nudism
  definition 73
  philosophy of 17
  movements 93–4, 95
  see also naturism, social movements
nudity
  history of 119
  permitted contexts 166
  public 165
Nuer 174–5

Ó hÓgartaigh, Margaret 109
Olympic Games (Ancient Greek) 96–7

paedophilia 166
paganism 126, 129, 136, 139
palaestra 122
panic, moral 135, 166, 171
panopticon 161
Parmelee, Maurice 18–19, 94
Parsons, Talcott 167, 171, 180
patients *see* doctor–patient relationship
Patrick, St 176

penis 67, 97–8, 124, 136, 167
people, 'textile' 155, 159–60
Pepys, Samuel 132, 135
performativity 34
  performative body 37
permissiveness 182
perversion, sexual 126
Philhellenism 91–2
Phoenicians 98
physical functions 55
Plato 95, 129
Playboy 100
Poe, Edgar Allan 183
pornography 100–1, 137, 140–1, 166, 168
  'pornification' 135
Preda, Aurelia 96
privacy 151, 159 *see also under* sex, sexuality
process-reduction 170, 172
prostitutes 138–9
psyche, human 147
psychogenesis *see under* civilising processes
psychologisation 160
psychologists 182
pudendum 137
Pudor, Heinrich 90
Puritans 127

Quinn, David Beers 148

Ramsey, Sara 138
rape 134, 177
rationalisation 160
religion 146 *see also* Christianity, Catholic Church, Islam, Judaism
Renaissance 147, 148, 156, 176
repugnance 55, 141, 148, 172, 181
research problems 15–16
Retzinger, Suzanne M. 115
Rockett, Kevin 168
Rohloff, Amanda 166n
Rome, ancient 120–2, 129
  Jewish population 122–3
Ross, Chad 88, 89, 90–1
Ryan, Paul 107

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis 145
satisfaktionsfähigkeit 88
Satlow, Michael L. 123, 124, 136
saunas 165
Scheff, Thomas J. 115
Scheper-Hughes, Nancy 109
scopophilia 133–41
Scott, Anne 121
Scott, George Ryley 20
secularisation 110
segregation of the sexes 108, 151
Seidman, Stephen 137–8
Sennett, Richard 152
sensationalism 104
sex, sexuality
  anal 133
  arousal 111, 128, 135, 159, 161, 167, 168
  control of 92
  importance of 93
  myths 20
  oral 133, 141
  and privacy 24
  sexual body 70
  'total body' 75, 132, 137, 141
  erogenous xones 137
  sexual restraint 94
  Irish 108, 176–8
  sexualisation 135, 137, 176
  desexualisation 120, 135, 137
  re-sexualisation 120
  desensualisation 137–8
  'missionary position' 134
  'titillation' 132–3, 141
shame
  and naked body 148–51, 167
  differs from embarrassment 152–5
  long-term changes 14–15, 143–4
  blushing 117–19
  see also embarrassment *and* blushing

sheela-na-gigs 136, 168
Shema 124–5
Shilling, Chris 64
Shorter, Edward 75, 132–3, 135, 149
Simoons, Frederick J. 170
Smith, Glenn 16
smoking
    marijuana 17
    tobacco 17
Smolak, Linda 138
social movements 90, 177
societies, 'simple' or tribal 174–5
sociogenesis *see under* civilising processes
sociology 174–6, 179, 182
    developmental 169
Somerville, Julia 166
Spartans 98–1
speech 145
sports, naked 96–8
stigmatisation 106, 159–60
state formation 134, 144
Stearns, Carol 115
Stearns, Peter 115
Steiner, Franz 169
Story, Marilyn D. 16
structuralism 169–70
sublimation 49, 94
superego 147, 153–5
Swaan, Abram de 173, 176
swimming *see under* Club Nautica
Syrians 98

taboo 46–7, 144, 165–78, 182
    primitive 171
    tabooisation 171, 172
    detabooisation 171, 172, 173–4
    static concept 172
    see also food
Tanach 123
tefellin 125
Teodorescu, Sergiu 96
Theodore of Mopsuestia 130
Thomas, Keith 112
Tilly, Charles 90–1
towel rule 39, 54–6

Ungewitter, Richard 88–9
United States of America 20, 77–8, 101
urbanisation 88
urination 117, 150
Usāmah ibn Munqidh 125

vagina 149
vagina dentata myth 111n
Valerius Maximus 130
Victorian period 13, 21, 87, 112, 115, 117
    in England 25, 108, 127, 131
Vienna 87
violence 96, 137
    monopoly of 177
    sexual 134
    'heroic rape' 134
virgins 128
Visé, Jean Donneau de 131

Wacquant, Loïc 64
Ward, Bowen R. 122
Warren, Howard C. 13, 46–7, 48, 63, 77
warrior-athletes 97, 98
Weber, Max 146, 173
Westermarck, Edward 17–18
Whitehouse, Mrs Mary 166
Whorf, Benjamin Lee 145
Williams, Linda 111n, 140
Winckelmann. Johann Joachim 91–2
Wolfthal, Diane 134
Wood, Lesley J. 90–1
Wouters, Cas 14, 25–6, 96, 114–15, 134–5, 137–8, 163–4
    see also formalisation *and* informalisation
wrestling 127

Yalom, Marilyn 135
Yegül, Fikret 121, 122

Ziolkowski, Jan N. 111n, 128