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## Status Competition and the Development of an American Habitus

Cas Wouters

This article focuses on the development of an American habitus by comparing the American and English regimes of manners and emotions since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Throughout most of this period, English status competition and social mobility was highly regulated by a unified good society with a formalized regime of manners with strong functions of boundary-maintenance and gate-keeping, providing protection from strangers and intruders. In contrast, the USA had many competing good societies and a very open status competition. This paper raises and answers two related questions: What different type of manners and institutions corresponded to the absence of a strong and unified good society and the absence of a protected regulation of social mobility? What American types of behavior and institutions can be interpreted as functional alternatives to the protection provided by the English system?

The context from which these questions arise is a research project of many years, which was to find, compare and interpret changes in American, Dutch, English and German etiquette or manners books from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. My study of these books aimed at finding anything that seemed typical of a country or a time, anything that would reveal something about the relations between people of different rank (or class) and sex, and that would imply a change in the demands being made on emotion regulation or self-regulation. In addition, I compared changes in social dividing lines between formal and informal, public and private manners, in such matters as privacy, introductions, reserve, visiting hours, business manners, social kissing, dancing, dating, the use of superlatives, personal pronouns, and so on. The project has resulted in two books, the first, *Sex and Manners* was published in 2004 and the second, *Informalization. Manners and Emotions since 1890*, appeared at the end of 2007. In these books general trends are reported as well as national variations. Among the overall trends was a declining social and psychic distance between social classes, sexes and generations, a mixing of codes and ideals, an

informalization of manners, an “emancipation of emotions”, expanding mutual identifications, and increasing interdependencies. All in all, these interrelated trends amounted to increasing social and national integration.

A quite simple illustration of ongoing integration processes consists of the fact that, in the course of the twentieth century, the public who read manners books expanded. Authors in the four societies under study came increasingly to direct themselves to wider middle-class and “respectable” working class circles, and thus manners books came to represent growing numbers of people from more and more layers of society. This expansion reflected the ongoing partial social emancipation of these people, and also, of course, the growth and spread of wealth over broader social layers. The widening of the circles of readers of manners books reflected a widening of the circles of people who were directing themselves in terms of the dominant code, which, therefore, in the course of the century increasingly became the *national* code. These integration processes were carried by the successive ascent of larger and larger groups and their representation in national centers of power and their “good societies”.

The study also shows many national variations, differences regarding pace and place. This contribution derives mainly from one of the leading research questions, which concerns characteristic differences between the four countries involved. The main differences in national habitus formation are understood and explained largely from the specific class structures of the different countries, the regulation of social mobility that was typical for each country, and the specific ways in which the classes in these countries have mingled and amalgamated. The variations have been interpreted as resulting mainly from differences in status competition, the formation of centers of power, the regulation of social mobility, and in the functioning of “good society”, that is, the circles of social acquaintance among people of families who belong to the centers of power and who take part in their sociable gatherings. In each country, these differences instigated a particular course of the processes of social integration and the formation of a national habitus – being a shorthand expression for the mentality, the whole distinctive emotional make-up of the people who are thus bonded together.

This article focuses on the national variations of the USA and on American habitus formation. Albeit restricted to England, comparison is more direct and explicit than in my books as it is directed by the search for functional alternatives in the USA to the protection that was provided by the English class system. This perspective has organized old data in new ways and brought new data into sight. Before getting to the comparison, however, I will

introduce the genre of manners books as sources of empirical material. This introduction will also deal with the connections between manners books and good societies.

### **Manners books and good societies**

The code of manners and the judicial code supplement and reinforce each other; both provide motives and criteria for punishment and reward. They symbolize and reinforce social dividing lines and they provide important criteria for social ranking. Manners therefore function as power resources in the competition for social status and meaning. Manners function as instruments of exclusion or rejection *and* of inclusion and group charisma. Individuals and groups with the necessary qualifications are let in while the “rude” – that is, all others lower down the social ladder – are kept out. Manners are thus a weapon of attack as well as a weapon of defense. Any code of manners contains a standard of sensibility and composure, functioning to preserve and stress the sense of purity, integrity, and identity of the established classes and sex.

In making acquaintances and friends, and for gaining influence and recognition, the manners of good society were decisive. Manners books generally express the codes of behavior of established classes, those represented in the centers of power and their good society. It is here, in the centers of power and their good societies, that the dominant social definition of proper ways to establish and maintain relations is constructed and/or confirmed. But not in isolation. At any time, the manners prevalent in good society will reflect the balance of power and dependence between established groups and outsider groups in the society as a whole. These manners will also come to reflect the subsequent emancipation of lower strata and their integration into society, including, for some of their members, into good society. For these codes function as a model for other social groups and classes aspiring social ascent.

The social code of good societies came to represent increasing layers of society as these layers became emancipated and more socially integrated. In order to avoid social conflict and maintain their elevated position, the people in the centers of power and good society had to increasingly take rising groups into account. As part of this, the former had to show more respect for the ideals, sentiments, morals, and manners of the latter. Thus the dominant code of good manners, modeled after the example of good society, reflects *and* represents the power balance between all those groups and strata that are integrated in society at large. In sum, the manners of a good society have a modeling function, a representational function, and they function to regulate social mobility and status competition.

Authors of manners books try to capture the sensibilities and practices that reflect the dominant codes, and to sell this knowledge to insecure social climbers. Every author of a manners book has to deal somehow with the difficulty of presenting the manners that include to the excluded, the higher-class manners to lower-class people, without ever making this (too) explicit. For these books to be sold, the readers had to be lifted up, not put down. However, the modeling function of good society operates only partly through the medium of manners books or rational individual choice because differences in manners and sensibilities become ingrained in the personality of individuals – their *habitus* – as they grow up.

In contrast to individual social ascent, the ascent of an entire social group involves some form of mixing of the codes and ideals of the groups that have risen with those of the previously superior groups. In the twentieth century, the successive social ascent of larger and larger groups has been reflected in the dominant codes and in *habitus*. The sediments of this mixing process can be found in manners books: the patterns of self-regulation of increasingly wider social groups come to be reflected in the codes of manners. They can be perceived in such changes as in the ways in which authors of manners books address their readers, how they draw social dividing lines such as between public and private, formal and informal, and what they have written on social introductions and forms of address. In addition, these sediments can be found in topics in manners books that stand out as specifically English or American, among them the right to “cut”, cruise ships, popularity, and the use of superlatives.

One of the conspicuous differences between England and the USA involved introductions. These were very important in the English manners books of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, while to effect an introduction was of *minor* importance in American books. The latter, for instance considered popularity and business manners to be important topics, while they were hardly ever mentioned in the English manners books. It is from differences such as these that I will describe differences in the English and American regimes of manners and emotions and illuminate them from differences in status competition and in the functioning of good society.

### **The development of a good society in England and English habitus**

In the nineteenth century, English good society became a unified and strong social and political center. The English developed a highly elaborate and increasingly formalized regime of manners, functioning strictly hierarchical and consisting of a complicated system of introductions, invitations, calls, leaving calling cards, “at homes” (specified times when guests were received), receptions, dinners, and so on. Entrance into good society was

impossible without an introduction, and any introduction required the previous permission of both parties. Introductions needed a policy, a strategy, timing and proper gradation; not to have them was regarded as fatal. Etiquette rules functioned to regulate sociability and social mobility. Etiquette books specified these rules in descriptions such as how to maintain public and private boundaries, how to practice reserve and avoid intruding on another's privacy (Curtin 1987).

The English regime of manners functioned quite effectively to screen newcomers into good society and to close their ranks against others. It was a relatively refined system of inclusion and exclusion, ensuring that the newly introduced would assimilate to the prevailing regime of manners and self-regulation, and to identify and exclude "undesirables". Before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this was sometimes made quite explicit, as in *Etiquette for Ladies* of 1863: "Etiquette is the form or law of society enacted and upheld by the more refined classes as a protection and a shield against the intrusion of the vulgar and impertinent" (quoted in Curtin 1987: 130). Later in the nineteenth century, English manners books no longer contained such open and direct references to class differences.

In the development of English good society, the right to privacy was an important invention. It was an extension of the earlier and more restricted concept of privacy, which referred only to bodily functions that had come to be invested with strong feelings of shame and repugnance, and, therefore, to be performed in social isolation only. In its extended meaning, claiming the right of privacy was a way of keeping social inferiors at a social distance while avoiding social discrimination as an open display of superiority and inferiority. This type of privacy functioned to protect sensibilities by softening and distracting attention from differences in social class and status, and it also helped to maintain class privileges. It included the right to be asked beforehand whether or not to accept an introduction to a social inferior. If an "unwelcome introduction" did occur, "it is wiser to appear oblivious of the presence of the person concerned than to convey the impression that you wish the intimacy to progress" (*Etiquette for Ladies* 1923: 18). In England, introductions provided access to intimacy, friendship, and elevated equality.

Privacy also included the right of recognition, which implied the option not to acknowledge the introduction and renew the acquaintanceship at the next meeting. Only in English manners books, the questions of whom to "recognize" by greeting and whom not, who had the "right of recognition" and was, therefore, the one to greet first, were considered important enough to be dealt with extensively. In other countries, to greet first was a gesture of deference; by greeting first, the social inferior acknowledged his lower position. In

England, however, greeting first was not a symbol of deference, it was a right: the right of recognition. It was only in England that introductions had to be acknowledged; it allowed social superiors the possibility of not “authorizing” them.

Already in the middle of the nineteenth century, not to recognize someone to whom one was introduced was called a “cut”. Minimal recognition resulted in a “bowing acquaintanceship”. In the process of social mixing and integration, old forms of reserve and “keeping a distance” lost their function and faded, while a rising level of trust in social and psychic proximity allowed for an increase of socially accepted behavioral and emotional alternatives. However, throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, to “recognize” and “to cut” remained important topics of discussion. It was repeated that it was “absolutely vulgar to force recognition” (*Etiquette for Ladies* 1923: 16), but also that “it is extremely rude and unkind to ‘cut’ an acquaintance publicly by staring coldly in response to a courteous bow and smile. There are many other more dignified ways of ending an undesirable acquaintanceship. One has only to keep one’s eyes averted if one wishes to avoid greeting” (Troubridge 1931: 312). The “right of recognition” and “cutting” found optimal expression in the joke about the lady who refused to “recognize” a man by saying “sexual intercourse is no social introduction”.

Not being recognized or being “cut” implied being treated as a stranger, that is either being completely ignored or treated with reserve – an attitude consisting mainly of the suppression of emotional expression, “never allowing them to read your feelings, nor, on the other hand, attempting to take any liberties with them” (*The Laws of Etiquette* 1836: 207; Millar 1897: 85). This is related to a basic rule of manners among those acknowledged as belonging to the circle of the “properly introduced”, which was to treat each other on the basis of equality. In fact, the elaborate, highly formal and hierarchically differentiated system of screening and restricting those one met “in company” functioned as a necessary condition for the development of “the requirement that a gentleman treat those he met in company on the basis of equality”, which was, as Curtin observed, “one of the commonest and most frequently reiterated principles of etiquette” (1987: 121). Quite often this was expressed in what became known as the Golden Rule of manners: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Some – those who had been “properly introduced” – were treated as equals with relative intimacy. Others were kept at a social distance by treating them as strangers, practicing reserve, that is, avoiding exactly the kind of manners and emotion regulation required when one was “in company”. Thus, members treated everyone either as an equal or as a stranger.

Even the division between public and private remained secondary to whether one was in *good company* or with *strangers*.

However, also within the ranks of good society, equality was accompanied by numerous differentiations in social distance and social status. Here, a less extreme practice of reserve functioned to keep people considered not equal enough at a social distance and thus to prevent other displays of superiority and inferiority. Procedures of precedence, salutation, carriage of the body, facial expression, and so on, all functioned according to rank, age, and gender to regulate social mobility and to cover status competition within the ranks of good society. These differences were directly connected to the whole English class system. Together, these rules of introducing, “cutting” or the right of recognition, open a window to the technicalities of gate-keeping and boundary-maintenance between the social classes in England. This whole formalized, hierarchical system had the double function of keeping all those one rung down the social ladder at bay, while promising access to those on the next higher rung. This system is typical of a highly secluded good society with an elaborate and strict regime of regulating social mobility involving rigorous social control towards a particular (English) type of self-control.

From about 1870 until well into the twentieth century, most British manners books give the impression of having been written from a one-class perspective, as if all readers belonged, or at least were on the verge of belonging to high Society. During those years, *parvenus* or *nouveau riches* were nearly the only representatives of lower classes mentioned in manners books, except of course for servants. It is another demonstration of the power of the English regime of manners and emotions, motivating the English to develop a highly automatic type of constraint on mentioning the lower classes, lower parts of the body, and lower impulses and emotions. In the 1980s, a retrospective account ridiculed this whole habitus, symbolized in the well-known metaphor of the “stiff upper lip”, by defining the latter as “a condition brought about by an excess of good manners and a genuine attempt not to sneer when talking of the Lower Classes” (Gammond 1986: 63). It was the effective system of gate-keeping and boundary-maintenance of good society which allowed references to contact with lower classes to become scarce, and references to “lower instincts” (emotions related to bodily functions and body control) to become tabooed.

By learning to treat everyone either as an equal or as a stranger, the people involved came to habitually avoid more extreme expressions of superiority and inferiority. In fact, it was exactly because of its refined rigorousness that this regime provided such a protective environment that tact and consideration could be developed more fully. It pressured towards

and allowed for a relatively early shift from avoiding people to avoiding certain feelings and certain displays of feeling, producing that highly demanding English blend of easy-going sociability and reserve. It is the certainty of being more or less with equals “in company” which explains why many English people, to this day, tend to behave in rather easy and informal ways in formal situations, whereas in informal situations where this certainty is lacking, they tend to cling to a relatively greater formality. To put it in theoretical terms, the English adhere to a code of manners and emotion regulation characterized by a relatively small formality–informality span: a relatively small difference between manners in formal and informal situations and relations, more precisely, a relatively small difference in behavior towards social superiors and inferiors on the one hand, and towards equals on the other (Elias 1996: 28 ff).

It seems likely that the scarcity and delicacy of references to class differences in English manners books is also related to the development of a rather intense feeling of community among the English. During many centuries of relative freedom from external threats, England had become a highly urbanized, unified, and homogeneous country, with a high degree of national integration and London as the great center of a national culture (Elias 1960, 1962; Davidoff 1973: 16–17). Yet England had remained a strongly class-segregated society. As a whole, the high degree of social integration and the existence of a strong, unified and unifying center, in combination with the possibility of treating everyone alike, either on the basis of equality or as a stranger, allowed and obliged the authors of manners books to keep silent about problems connected with the social mingling of different classes, whereas these issues were openly and frequently discussed in manners books from other countries. The relatively high level of integration and seclusion of English good society may also explain, at least partly, why the English have developed a taste for understatement and self-mockery; this demonstrative “cool” is connected with a relatively strong inhibition of anger.

A clue to the roots of the process-continuity of avoiding references to class can be found in the ideal of being a gentleman. Most nineteenth-century etiquette writers mentioned as the first and foremost of a gentleman’s qualities his egalitarian manners. At the same time, the gentleman was closely associated with manners that are “easy”, *unself-conscious* and yet self-confident, as well as to owning land, and both are clearly derivatives of court life. In this way, the ideal of the gentleman combined middle-class and aristocratic characteristics; the gentleman personified both, thus symbolizing that strength of English political continuity: the social integration of new groups coming into political power. It was in the transition from a court society to a good society or “High Society”, as the English called it, that the functions of

boundary maintenance and gate-keeping and of including the new rich with “proper social credentials” and excluding “undesirables”, developed into a complicated and highly formalized system. And an important reason for its becoming so complicated was that it should never smell of patronage and condescension, or any other feeling of superiority.

As large middle-class groups became socially strong enough to compete in the struggle for power and status, they also demanded to be treated according to the Golden Rule. In the nineteenth century, particularly in the last quarter, large groups with “new money” were expanding and rising, creating strong pressures on “old-money” establishments to open themselves up. To varying degrees, the established classes had to accommodate the demands of the newcomers (the newly rich) by introducing some of them into the circles of their good society, while keeping a toned down social distance in relation to all others. In this context, the question who had the proper credentials to be introduced was of major importance.

In his study of Victorian manners, Michael Curtin observed an “obsessive concern of the etiquette writers to establish criteria by which to identify and to exclude undesirables” (1987: 420). Obviously both observations are related: the quest for criteria did result in more precise rules that to a large extent became internalized and yet functioned to externalize class discrimination: no longer was it the individual who engaged in acts of discrimination, it was the rules of good society. Thus the obsession effected an externalization. The development of relatively strict and effective rules for inclusion and exclusion in England implied a relatively powerful, persistent and enduring external social control towards developing a corresponding type of self-control (Elias 2000) – a typically English habitus. This habitus and its corresponding regime of manners and emotions is characterized by the paradox of having preserved a rather hierarchical class-society, in which those who were “properly introduced” could feel bonded and protected enough to develop and maintain relatively high degrees of tact, consideration, and tolerance.

### **The USA and its open status competition**

A similar obsessive concern with rules and criteria “to identify and exclude undesirables” is absent from the books published in Germany and the Netherlands. It is also absent from the American ones, but for a different reason: In the USA, the English attempt “not to sneer when talking about the lower classes” was taken to the extreme of an ideology of a classless society (an ideology on which Russians under Lenin and Stalin tried to improve) in combination with an ideology of social success, which implied that, in American manners books, information on class or status was likely to be censored somehow or only presented in hidden ways. Class

divisions were claimed to be absent from the USA by ideologically externalizing them to “old Europe”.

Edith Wharton’s book, *The Age of Innocence* is an example of externalization, for the title refers to “Old New York” and “old America” when it was still untainted by the complications and corruption that prevailed in Europe. The book suggests that innocence was lost by an increase of bad manners and loose morals when – probably in the Gilded Age – old New York had to give way to a New Society in which the life of brilliant societies in Europe was copied. Wharton clearly suggests that the *Age of Innocence* was terminated in a process of Europeanization.

Apart from ideology, American social integration processes have lagged behind compared to those in England and other countries in Europe. For a major part of the history of the USA, White Anglo Saxon Protestants (wasps) and later a broader category of European-Americans have strongly dominated over other Americans. African-Americans, for example, had been traditionally excluded from respect and respectful positions, but when a middle class developed within their midst, a “black bourgeoisie” with enough economic and social capital to claim and receive more respect, areas of friction and social hostility appeared, triggering accommodation processes. However, it was not before the 1940s that an article was written on manners in the relation between “Negroes” and “whites”. And in the early 1970s, they surfaced in special books with special titles such as *How to Get Along with Black People: A Handbook for White Folks*. In mainstream manners books, however, the rising interest in interracial etiquette did not surface before the second half of the 1980s. Before that period, the situation was summarized by Lipset in his popular *First New Nation*, when he claimed that the USA was “a new nation which successfully developed ... a relatively integrated social structure (*the race issue apart*)...” (1963: 17; italics added). In those years, the American establishment continued to feel that it was possible to put the “race issue” in brackets.

By the end of the 1980s, this state of denial had shriveled: most etiquette books now contained some small rejection of prejudice, ethnic jokes, ethnic insults, and bigotry. It marks a stage in the transformation from avoiding classes of people to avoiding layers of feeling: feelings of superiority. It signifies an early stage in a process of social integration. Another such symptom was the emergence of a separate specialized genre of manners books for “multicultural” situations and relations, with titles such as *Different Worlds* (Bode, 1989), *Multicultural Manners* (Dresser 1996), and *Basic Black* (Bates and Hudson 1996). The fact that a separate genre of manners books had come to exist next to mainstream manners books

may be seen as a continuation of segregation, but it certainly was a segregation by different means.

Related to America's stalled integration is the fact that, throughout the twentieth century, American good society has also been far less an integrated and secluded whole. According to Davidoff, "those who felt they were eligible for entry on the basis of wealth and achievement but who were excluded on grounds of religion, ethnic background or race, formed their own Society" (1973: 102). The USA remained far too diverse for the various power elites to develop a unified good Society together with a solid regime of rules for entrance and exclusion. The American upper classes were more spread out and more strongly divided among themselves, the country being much larger and characterized by much greater differences between the North and the South – fighting the Civil War –, but also between East(coast) and West(coast) and in-between a Bible Belt, dominated by Texan Oil Puritans and Neoconservatives, with nowhere a unifying and dominant center such as London or Paris.

To the end of the nineteenth century, the country club and the country day school became the main fortresses of exclusiveness: good societies. No doubt, some of these many good societies were more nation-wide than others, and as such observed by Society reporters, but most were more local and all were competing. The example of New York as based on a novel by Edith Wharton can be supplemented by Tom Wolfe's observation that in this city, there has been a more or less constant competition between "two Societies, 'Old New York' and 'New Society.'" In every era, 'Old New York' has taken a horrified look at 'New Society' and expressed the devout conviction that a genuine aristocracy, good blood, good bone – themselves – was being defiled by a horde of rank climbers" (1970: 35).

In comparison with New York, the good societies of Los Angeles have been far more diverse. As *The Economist* reports, in the 1960s and early 1970s,

[t]he Wasps ruled the center of town ... and Pasadena. The Westside of the City, stretching from Hollywood to Beverley Hills to the coast, was dominated by Jews, many of them in the film business. Property developers, aerospace corporocrats, oil magnates and savings- and loan sharks all had their own empires. ... Blackballed by the Wasp oligarchy, the Jews set up a rival establishment, with their own country clubs and political networks. The result was a "headless city" that found it hard to build the civic institutions - art galleries, concert halls and the like - that most other cities take for granted (*The Economist* 12 July 1997: 31–2).

At the close of the twentieth century, the city of Los Angeles had remained “headless,” or, better, “multi-headed”, with dozens of competing ruling groups and their good societies, Jews, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latino’s and others, all involved in an open jostling for higher status. In this sense, Los Angeles can be taken as a model for the country at large.

In the absence of a central and unified good society, America’s social competition remained to a far greater extent an “open competition” with less rules or mechanisms to regulate social mobility and provide “protection” from “intruders”, which also means that the secure feeling of being in “good company” was lacking. In their absence, competition had less boundaries and was more intense and fierce. This may well explain why American manners books were more openly books for status-conscious social climbers on a social ladder, the rungs of which were pretty unclear and unstable. The open competition and uncertainty of status may also explain the relatively large interest in manners and the continued large popularity of manners books in the USA. The authors of these books regularly wrote from the perspective of the people wanting entrance into good society or “smart circles”, the accomplishment of which was seen in the inclusion in *Who’s Who* or the *Social Register*. In contrast, English authors took their perspective rather exclusively from within good society, revealing a confidence and a degree of identification with the established that is virtually absent in American manners books. Americans wanting to cross the lines of social class were presented with a much more direct kind of advice than anything to be found in the English sources. Two examples of American advice are: “If a person is more prominent than ourselves, or more distinguished in any way, we should not be violently anxious to take the first step” (Hanson 1896: 38) or “Too much haste in making new acquaintances, however – ‘pushing’, as it is called – cannot be too much deprecated” (Sherwood 1907: 2).

In the early twentieth century, many American authors still explicitly presented the English code as an example: “If we could learn to treat the English people as they treat us in the matter of *introductions*, it would be a great advance” (Sherwood 1907: 359). In this tone of writing is regret: we would if we could, but we can’t. Other authors treat introductions in a similar way: “If not friends from childhood, acquaintance between young men and young women begins with an introduction, and this matter of introduction is one rather too lightly considered on our free American soil” (Harland and Water 1905: 123).

Taking the matter of introductions “rather too lightly” implied that the ranks of American good society did not close as efficiently as those of English good society. It also implied that protection against strangers or intruders was less efficient and that people always had to find

out what degree of social proximity or distance was appropriate. This aspect of America's rather open competition between many good societies served to make these ranks more dependent upon external social controls and prevented the level of mutual trust from rising. These consequences of the relatively weak protection from strangers or intruders is expressed, for example, in this remark from 1924: "There are unfortunately many persons abroad in the land without proper social credentials, who seek new fields of adventure by the easy American manner of beginning a conversation" (Wade 1924: 28).

Most probably in seeking protection from persons "without proper social credentials", attempts to imitate the English etiquette rules lasted until well into the 1920s. In 1922, in the first edition of her famous manners book, Emily Post had still tried to gain greater acceptance for an elaborate system of introductions. She wrote, for instance, that when people were introduced, this did not necessarily bring recognition: "if Mrs ... and Mrs ... merely spoke to each other for a few moments, in the drawing-room, it is not necessary that they recognize each other afterwards" (1922: 10). Although this was relatively formal, and very English, Post was not really exceptional: *Social Usage in America* presented similarly strict rules for introductions (Wade 1924).

Post used the word "recognize", but its meaning was clearly different, unrelated to an elaborate system of regulating social mobility or to the question who greets first. This question receives little attention in American manners books and greeting habits are similar to that in countries like Germany or the Netherlands: the young greet the older or more distinguished persons. Social inferiors pay respect to social superiors by greeting first. Moreover, American rules on introductions were unrelated to the right to privacy as the English had developed it. According to the historian John Kasson in his study of nineteenth-century American manners books, the urban middle classes thought highly of privacy, but here the word privacy is restricted to the right to be alone in performing bodily functions and the right of children to have a separate bedroom. None of his examples go beyond the family household. Obviously this kind of privacy is related to but different from the one that functions to facilitate the avoidance of social discrimination and lower-class people. The difference was expressed in the 1950s by Harold Nicolson, a member of British "high society". Impressed by the relatively low importance attached to privacy in the USA, he portrayed Americans as having a

curious indifference to, or disregard of, what to us is one of the most precious of human possessions, namely personal privacy. To them, ... privacy denotes something exclusive, patronizing, "un-folksy", and therefore meriting suspicion. Thus they leave their curtains

undrawn at dusk, have no hedges separating their front gardens, and will converse amicably with strangers about private things (Nicolson 1955: 18).

Despite all their resistance to the English, American WASPs stayed Anglo-Saxon in the sense that, for them, English manners retained their function as a model and continued to be their main standard of comparison. “In the USA, calling cards never functioned as they did in England. The custom was imitated but, without its function, it soon became too demanding and too English. Often, the Americans found the English model empty, but they kept accepting it as a model” (Schlesinger 1946: 40–1). This can be interpreted as a symptom of status insecurity related to both class and nationality. The status insecurity was related to the open competition between the classes and would have provided an additional breeding ground for the experience of relatively strong status insecurity as a nation, which in turn fuelled the love–hate relation with the English.

In the 1920s, protective rules such as introductions faded further and in the 1930s, attempts at establishing them had vanished. The expansion of business and industry, together with an expansion of means of transportation and communication, gave rise to a multitude of new and more casual relations. These made the old system of introductions too troublesome. It was an era in which many newly wealthy families were jostling for a place within the ranks of good society, bringing about a formidable spurt of informalization. It is then that the often-observed American characteristic of social promiscuity was more sharply profiled than elsewhere, not only in the eyes of foreign observers, but also by Emily Post. In her 1931 edition she wrote: “Fashionable people in very large cities take introductions lightly; they are veritable ships that pass in the night. They show their red or green signals – which are merely polite sentences and pleasant manners – and they pass on again” (1931: 15). And in 1937, this remnant of an old system of protection from persons “without proper social credentials” was given up altogether. Post observed: “introductions in very large cities are unimportant” and she concluded “The idea of protection, as it existed then, is out of tune with the world of today” (1937: 16/353).

At this point two questions rise: What different type of manners and institutions correspond to the absence of a strong and unified good society and to the absence of a protected regulation of social mobility? What American types of behavior and institutions can be interpreted as functional alternatives to the protection provided by the English regime of manners and emotions?

## **Open status competition and American habitus**

The development of a specifically American cultural structure – particularly America’s relatively open competition between various centers of power and their good society – helps to shed light on several aspects in the development of the American habitus. It was the fierceness of open competition which triggered and allowed for acting “American Tough”, for boasting and using superlatives. Americans tend to use superlatives – overstatements, judged according to not only the English standards but also to those of the Netherlands and Germany – and relatively open displays of feelings of superiority. Irving Berlin dealt ironically with this tradition in his lyric “Anything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you”. A later example is a “line” used by businessmen: “You’re a real pro; you can charm a monkey’s balls! But the difference between you and me is that I can do it *all* the time”. And Judith Martin told me in 1992 that the use of superlatives in negotiations leaves many with the question, “What’s the bullshit degree?”. The question has penetrated all spheres of life. Wide use of exaggeration and superlatives is symptomatic of uncertainty of rank, of porous and changing social dividing lines. In the USA, a relatively open competition between a large variety of centers of power and their good societies, and also a stronger reliance upon external social controls have formed a barrier to the development of lower-pitched or subtler forms of expression and negotiation; they continued to stimulate more pronounced and accentuated forms of impression management. In societies and circles where social mobility is more clearly regulated and social positions are less insecure, the use of superlatives tends to diminish. And national characteristics such as a taste for understatement, self-mockery, and ridiculing or “sending up” authority seem to have developed only in close connection to the development of a rather intense feeling of community with a relatively strong inhibition of anger, that is, in relatively cohesive and well-integrated societies.

In the absence of effective rules of procedure for avoiding “strangers” and situations that might be dangerous (for which reason it was important to avoid anger), a few American types of behaviors and institutions can be interpreted as functional alternatives and succession to the protection provided by the English system of introductions, cards and calling. Most directly, of course, this goes for the rise and expansion of a protection industry, a market for buying and selling weapons and for hiring the people that carry them. In the USA, the selling of protection by the “Mob” is a perverted form of the protection industry. In contrast, English society is well-known for its degree of pacification – even the police does not carry fire arms – and its high degree of public civility and orderliness – people lining up and standing orderly in a queue – which is probably expressed best by Hyppolyte Taine in his *Notes on*

*England*. Commenting upon “families of common people taking their dinner on the green sward of Hyde Park”, leaving not the tiniest remnant behind, Taine wrote: “This is perfect; the aim of every society is that each one should be always his own constable, and end by not having any other” (1886: 28-9). In contrast to this English example of social constraint directed at exercising self-restraint, the lower degree of pacification in the USA was demonstrated in an early development of a protection industry in which various kinds of “security experts” such as private investigators, detectives, body guards, and bouncers, provided security-related services, many of which functioned as external social controls.

This protection industry has functioned as a model for a typically American “hardboiled” version of whodunit novels, written by famous authors such as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Mickey Spillane and James Hadley Chase. In his essay “Raffles and Miss Blandish,” George Orwell compared this type of American crime novels with their English counterpart. The latter type was represented in a series of stories, written in the early twentieth century, about a gentleman crook, Raffles, for whom “certain things are ‘not done’, and the idea of doing them hardly arises” (1972 [1944]: 66).

Raffles ... has no real moral code, no religion, certainly no social consciousness. All he has is a set of reflexes – the nervous system, as it were, of a gentleman. Give him a sharp tap on this reflex or that (they are called “sport”, “pal”, “woman”, “king and country” and so forth), and you get a predictable reaction (1972: 79).

There are “very few corpses, hardly any blood, no sex crimes, no sadism, no perversions of any kind” (1972: 67). All these are, however, central to James Hadley Chase’s novel *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, about an American type of detective, published in 1939. In this book, the pursuit of power is a pervasive motive, and “if ultimately one sides with the police against the gangsters, it is merely ... because, in fact, the law is a bigger racket than crime” (1972: 71). “In *No Orchids* anything is ‘done’ so long as it leads to power. All the barriers are down, all the motives are out in the open. ... there are no gentlemen and no taboos. Emancipation is complete. Freud and Machiavelli have reached the outer suburbs” (1972: 75, 79).

Other typical American types of behavior and institutions that can be interpreted as functional alternatives and succession to the protection provided by the English regime of manners and emotions are the introduction and expansion of “service”, of business manners, of industrial relations departments and social engineering. The same goes for “have-a-nice-

day” manners, for the American struggle for popularity, and for the multitude of American expressions such as “take it easy”, “no sweat”, or “keep your shirt on”. In the 1940s, this “take-it-easy” custom was interpreted as evidence of the desire of Americans “to avoid mental and physical irritation and the strain that follows it” (Whyte 1943: 131). And indeed, the custom functions to lubricate and pacify relations.

The American obsession with being popular and being liked also seems directly connected to the limited protective function of etiquette rules in the USA. In American etiquette books, good manners and high popularity are closely and openly linked. The manners books from the other countries use the term “success” or “social success” in the sense of gaining respect and appreciation, but the term “popularity” is entirely absent. In the USA, popularity and an open competition for being popular was central to the dating system. For this reason it was called the “rating and dating” system (Waller 1937). In their peer groups a young woman was “valued by the level of consumption she could demand (how much she was ‘worth’), and the man by the level of consumption he could provide” (Bailey 1988: 58). Dating became a ‘competitive activity dominated by money and consumer on-upmanship’ (Caldwell 1999: 229), a paying and petting contest for popularity. In my book *Sex and Manners* (2004), I have presented a sociogenesis of the American dating system in which I describe how an instrumental business-like attitude towards women – paying and petting – with its underlying uneven balance of power between the sexes became part of an American tradition, and were internalized as part of the American habitus.

For example, the head start in the emancipation of sexuality is related in an explanatory way to the reputed fascination of Americans for breasts and oral sex, that is, “blow jobs” – the fact that “eating pussy” is far less celebrated signals a rather male-dominated sexuality. The gradual social acceptance of petting in the 1920s, but explicitly not of “going all the way” (and preservatives hard to get), channeled sexual experimenting and sexual excitement gradually from breast fondling towards oral sex. The boasting and bragging about these pleasures will have hardened into a cultural fashion and subsequently into an enduring fascination with breasts and oral sex, a “national characteristic”. In the same process, other all-American inventions may have originated such as the taxi dance (now extinct) and the lap dance. The competitive attitude of the popularity contest as it was institutionalized in the dating regime soon was stretched out to a commercial attitude as it developed into “petting and paying”, and ever since the 1960s into an expanding massive consumption of sex bought on a market.

Popularity, friendship and success in business were directly connected in 1936 by Dale Carnegie who brought this out straightforwardly in the title of his millions-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. This open emphasis on social manipulation as an art, presenting its author as some sort of “charm-school” director, was typically American; in other countries such a title probably would have been banned as too embarrassing to be commercially sound. In the Netherlands, for example, Carnegie’s book title was translated as “How to Make Friends and Establish Good Relations” and in most European countries, the American tradition of connecting friendship, popularity, and success in business was often experienced as a tradition of insincerity and hypocrisy. It is not hard to find examples in this tradition of wanting to be liked and seeking validation from everyone that do indeed go over the top. Take the following introductory words to a 1992 book in the Dale Carnegie-tradition:

Too often many of us feel like Willy Loman did in Arthur Miller’s classic play, *Death of a Salesman*. Willy said: “Oh, I’m liked, I’m just not *well* liked”. We want to be well liked, we want to be able to meet new people without a trace of nervousness or a queasy stomach, we want to know how to be casual and friendly, know how to turn strangers into friends. In short how to unlock the “real you” and have people like you. That’s what this book is going to do for you. (Cunningham 1992: xi)

Ironically, these lines are an example of exactly that American death-denying mentality against which Miller’s play is directed.

In the USA, the fact that the protective function of etiquette rules was relatively small may have stimulated an expansion of these rules to business corporations: business etiquette. Large numbers of books, newspaper sections, and articles on the subject appeared. Particularly in the 1930s, the declining importance of introductions and other such hierarchically differentiated ways of establishing relationships coincided with an increasing concern for manners in the business world. “And so,” Arthur Schlesinger observed, “stereotyped politeness, having been ejected from the drawing-room and the dance floor, found an unforeseen asylum in the marts of trade” (1946: 61). Manners were seen as basic to “service” and an expanding “service industry”. “They call it ‘service’”, wrote Harold Nicolson in the 1950s, “but we should describe it as a universal gift for being unfailingly helpful, hospitable and polite”(1955: 16). The success of “service” and “have-a-nice-day” manners cannot be explained by referring to economic profitability alone. An additional answer is related to America’s class system of open competition and to its corresponding

relatively high levels of coercion and violence in this competition, which were also a social legacy of the “frontier society”. The following anecdote from a 1909 manners book may illustrate this: “‘The idea of calling this the Wild West!’ exclaimed a lady, traveling in Montana, to one of the old hands. ‘Why, I never saw such politeness anywhere. The men here all treat each other like gentlemen in the drawing-room!’ ‘Yes, Marm, it’s safer’, laconically replied the native, with a glance at his six-shooter” (Hardy 1909: 279). This anecdote shows how “service” and “have-a-nice-day” manners have a pacifying function.

Boasting, using superlatives and the tough-guy tradition are exaggerated or accentuated forms of communication that may provoke conflicts, but the “take-it-easy” and “have-a-nice-day” customs are the other side of the coin, they function to lubricate and pacify social intercourse. A related way of organizing protection consisted of the “Human Relations” school of Elton Mayo and the subsequent spread of industrial relations departments in American business. During the 1930s, 31 per cent of all American companies maintained such services (Stearns 1994: 125): a much higher ratio than elsewhere at the time. These departments, services and other forms of “social engineering” operated as a form of organized pressure towards an increased avoidance of conflicts, and in conflicts, to increased attempts at de-escalation through “role-taking” and using diplomacy and compromise, not anger, shouting, and ridicule. They are another form of external social control, a kind of security system, preventing and containing conflicts and the dangerous emotions involved. They formed a social constraint towards self-restraint through which the level of insecurity, mutual fear, suspicion and hatred was lowered. In a country where so many “tough guys” of so many diverse groups are fiercely involved in open competition, where the state has rather incompletely monopolized the use of violence – where there are so many weapons around – the need “to avoid getting angry” has been quite pressing. This necessity illuminates Peabody’s observations that “for Americans, a tradition of violence exists side by side with a desire to be liked by everyone” and that Americans in particular try to avoid public hostility and get “along with others without friction by smiling affably” (1985: 174–211). In her book *Star-Spangled Manners*, Judith Martin saw this as a characteristic of American history: “With an occasional truce for however long it takes to clean up after a natural or unnatural disaster, we have been living in a state of low-grade mutual suspicion, subject to sudden outbreaks of hostility” (2003: 292). Norbert Elias has interpreted this “tradition of violence” in terms of a lower “stage in the development of the organization and regulation of violence.” Comparing the 1950s American ‘Maycomb model’ of the relation between established and outsider groups with the English ‘Winston Parva model’, Elias writes that the latter relationship “is astonishingly free of the use of physical violence” because “the

citizens of Winston Parva live in a society in which the state monopoly of physical violence was firmly established and effectively maintained” (Elias 2008: 222–3).

Whereas the English class system of gate-keeping and boundary-maintenance provided a form of organized protection that was largely internalized and taken for granted, the much larger American variety of codes of conflict management and their lesser predictability has functioned as a barrier to a further rise in the societal level of mutual trust or mutually expected self-restraints. Americans had accordingly remained more dependent upon external social constraints. In this relational context, Americans developed “social engineering” into a kind of security system in order to control conflicts and the dangerous emotions involved. Industrial relations departments provide one such form of external social control. They lubricate, supervise, and pacify, and it is this function of lowering the levels of insecurity, mutual fear, suspicion and hatred, which helps to explain why industrial relations departments spread so early and widely. They provided a strong social constraint towards self-restraint.

Social engineering was also popular among politicians and others who believed it could produce a “great society”, a belief also demonstrated in a number of successive “wars”, from the War Against Alcohol (Prohibition), via the War Against Communism (McCarthyism, the Cold War, and Vietnam), the War Against Drugs to the War against Terrorism. In turn, this belief and these “wars” indicate relatively high levels of fear and suspicion. As a rule, the level of fears and anxieties in a society is related to the strength of the denial of death anxiety: the higher this level, the more denial. This regularity is a specification of Elias’s observation that the structure of fears and anxieties is nothing other than the psychic counterpart of the constraints which people exert on one another through the intertwining of their activities (Elias 2000: 442).

The connection between American class-denial, death-denial and insecure national we-identity, is also demonstrated in many of the remarks on America as a young nation. Take Emily Post: “The other countries are old, we are youth personified! We have all youth’s glorious beauty and strength and vitality and courage” (Post 1922: 619; 1942: 859–60). Of course, Post did not mean that there are no old people in America; she expressed a we-identity that will last longer than a few generations. It is this we-identity of the We–I balance that is youthful and will live on, and a bit of its imagined immortality spills over to the I-identity. Vehement nationalism or patriotism usually indicates a strong we-ideal in combination with a contested and insecure we-identity, a combination that usually blocks a deeper sense of mortality, for in defense of both we-identity and we-ideals, I-ideals are subordinated, sacrificed, and the use of violence is accepted more easily. At the same time, the value of an individual human life is impeded from rising. The death penalty can be taken as a criterion.

As national integration expands, the gap between we-ideals and we-identities declines, and as the we-identity becomes more secure, the value of an individual human life usually rises together with an individual's sense of mortality. From the end of World War II onwards, Americans seem to have continued the remarkable combination of a weak we-identity and a show of strength as a superpower.

### **A concluding remark**

The relative absence of a strong and unified good society, protected against intruders via formalized and internalized rules regarding entrance and mobility, appears to be connected in explanatory ways to a relatively high level of (status) anxiety, a correspondingly lower level of mutual trust, and a comparatively strong reliance upon external social controls. These higher levels of social competition and mutual suspicion have been directly related to the tensions and conflicts among classes, ethnic groups, the sexes and the generations, and more specifically to America's history of a relatively strong domination of Wasps and later also other European-Americans over other Americans. Both America's comparatively low level of social integration and its history of relatively open competition appear to have been central to the development of a specifically American cultural structure and help to shed light on several aspects in the development of the American identity and habitus, such as the use of superlatives, "American tough", "take-it-easy", and "have-a-nice-day" manners, a preoccupation with popularity, and social manipulation or social engineering.

The particular course of the process of social integration in England and in the USA has provided a major key to the understanding of processes of national habitus formation. It appears that each particular course corresponds to changes in the forms and levels of competition and cooperation, to changes in the relative power-chances of the rising and falling strata. In summary: the specific processes of social integration in each country, particularly the ways in which the ranks of social superiors have been opened up *by* the rising strata – emancipation – and *to* the rising strata – accommodation – appear to have been decisive for the ways in which their distinctive codes of manners and self-regulation have influenced the type of mixture that finally resulted as the national habitus.

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