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Source: *Social History*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 203-227

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4286016>

Accessed: 05/07/2010 00:10

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David Scobey

Anatomy of the promenade: the politics of bourgeois sociability in nineteenth-century New York*

I

Bourgeois New Yorkers of the Victorian era loved to promenade. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, they made seeing and being seen, in public and in motion, a core rite of sociability – made it, in fact, a test of inclusion within the metropolitan gentry. Consider this sketch, by the popular mid-century journalist George Foster, of Broadway on Sunday ‘at the grand promenade hour’ of six o’clock:

It is then that the nice dressing of New Yorkers is to be seen in the highest perfection . . . a perfect Mississippi, with a double current up and down, of glossy broadcloth and unblemished De Laines. . . . It is above all other streets . . . the test of respectability. If you touch your hat to fifty people in Broadway, your character is ‘O.K.’ – you are an established man.

The display and mutual acknowledgement of ‘respectability’ enabled elite New Yorkers at the same time to police the boundaries of ‘Society’, excluding or expelling those who transgressed its codes. ‘Beware of “cuts”,’ Foster went on. ‘If you are in doubt about yourself, if you are under a cloud . . . shun Broadway as you would a fire. You will be shot down on your first appearance like an outlaw.’¹

Promenading thus represented more than a form of leisure for the metropolitan bourgeoisie. It was a trial of legitimation organized around the offer or refusal of recognitions. At prescribed times and places, the city’s propertied men and fashionable women gathered in public, circulated past one another, and exchanged salutations. Accounts of the scene display a peculiar mix of ceremony and spectacle, preening and

* Earlier versions of this paper were given before the Program in American Culture, the Department of Anthropology, and the Colloquium in Comparative Studies in Social Transformation, the University of Michigan; the Department of History, Princeton University; and the convention of the American Studies Association, New Orleans, November 1990. My

thanks especially to Elaine Abelson, Fernando Coronil, Geoff Eley, John Kasson, John Pemberton, Adela Pinch, Robert Rydell and Alan Trachtenberg for helpful comments and criticism.

¹ George G. Foster, *NY in Slices: By an Experienced Carver* (New York, 1849), 11.

restraint: 'To assist at . . . a coach parade is not unlike attendance upon a function of the ancient Church of Rome,' genteel editor George Curtis wrote about a Newport afternoon. '[The coaches] gravely pass at a deliberate pace, and the great world . . . looks on. . . . One friend, perhaps, in the stately procession gravely nods to another gazing from a carriage.' Not surprisingly, such a 'solemn function' required mastery of complex codes of refinement; as an etiquette expert insisted, 'the salutation of recognition' provided an 'unerring test of the breeding, training, nurture, or culture of a person'.² Promenading was thus a performative utterance of gentility, a way of nodding 'I do' to the cultural authority of bourgeois values.³ Elite New Yorkers used it to constitute and display themselves as a collectivity, a respectable public in the midst of, yet apart from, the larger, 'promiscuous' multitude.

My aim here is to explore this preoccupation with seeing and being seen: to examine why elite New Yorkers used it as a rite of sociability; how they staged it; what import it had for the formation of social relations and identities in nineteenth-century America. Especially in New York, the emergent capital of a national culture, the practice serves as a trace element in the history of the American bourgeoisie. It helps to mark four sorts of theoretical questions in particular.

First of all, promenading points to the role of cultural practices in the construction of class identity and the demarcation of class boundaries. As theorists of ideology might put it, the ritual was literally a form of symbolic 'address', interpellating or positioning people as 'classed selves' according to whether they could participate in the exchange of recognitions.⁴ Such a discursive component to class formation seems especially important to understanding the rapid growth, social fluidity and spatial fragmentation of the nineteenth-century city. The promenade stabilized social position by making it *visible*, symbolically assuaging middle-class anxieties over the deceitful, occluded, illegible conditions of urban life.

Second, promenading speaks to recent interest in the interplay of gender and class relations. Its protocols were relentlessly sex specific, organized around managing the

² George William Curtis, 'The game of Newport' in *Other Essays from the Easy Chair* (New York, 1893), 31, 36–7; Mrs H[arriet] O[xnard] Ward, *Sensible Etiquette of the Best Society* (Philadelphia, 1878), 277. For a visual portrayal that parallels Curtis's description, see the Currier and Ives lithograph, 'The Grand Drive, Central Park, New York' (1869), reproduced in John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York: An Essay in Graphic History* (New York, 1953), 328.

I have used Curtis's *feuilleton* on Newport, Rhode Island, because the seaside resort was the most fashionable summering spot for New York's upper class during the Victorian era. This special relationship aside, one could find similar accounts of promenading and elite sociability in every American metropolitan centre and fashionable retreat. New York City provides the research base for the argument here; but with some delays in periodization, I

am convinced that it holds true for the whole nation. Indeed, I think that these practices were central to the consolidation of a cosmopolitan bourgeoisie bound together by a national genteel culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

³ The concept of 'performative utterance' comes from J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). As with the famous example of 'I do' in the wedding ceremony, I am arguing that the exchange of greetings on the promenade was 'performative': not a *report* on the respectability of those involved, but an *enactment* of it.

⁴ See Louis Althusser's classic essay, 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes toward an investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), 123–73; and the illuminating elaboration in Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980).

encounter between bourgeois women and men in public. American historians like Mary Ryan and Christine Stansell (and, for England, Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff) have underscored the centrality of gender ideologies to the shaping of class identities in the Victorian era; conversely, they have shown how obsessively middle-class values focused on disciplining sexual identity and stabilizing sexual hierarchy. While much recent scholarship has explored this dialectic of class and gender formation within the bourgeois household, anatomizing the promenade enables us to see how it worked in public.⁵

It also enables us to explore the relationship between culture and politics in Victorian America. As an act of heterosocial refinement, promenading delineated a public space – of class exclusion and gender mixing – which were doubly problematic for nineteenth-century American political culture. It defined itself against the ceremonial fabric of republican politics, the patriotic, partisan and military parades which dramatized the civic equality of white men in the United States; it made the avenues a scene of civilizing rites, not citizens' rights. And yet, in the American republic, it was important that civility remain theoretically available to all; membership in the respectable public was not to be blocked by ascriptive or economic barriers. Or so the ideologues of politeness insisted, refusing to 'regard *Rudeness* and *Republicanism* as synonymous terms'. The promenade, in short, served as a site where elite Americans symbolically negotiated the tension between class hierarchies and civic fellowship in a capitalist democracy.⁶

Finally – and underlying these other issues – the promenade helps us to trace the evolution of what Jurgen Habermas has called 'the bourgeois public sphere': the domain of free sociability and voluntary association in which public culture is forged.⁷ According to Habermas, this discursive 'sphere,' organized in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, served to mediate between the prerogatives of the absolutist state and the play of interests in capitalist society. Its institutions – journals, clubs, constituent organizations – provided a forum where diverse interests and identities were forged into a 'public' capable of disseminating its dominant aims and ideals. The legitimacy of this public derived from its openness, its commitment to formal equality and reasoned debate. Yet its efficacy came from the class barriers – education, property, individualist ideology – that regulated who

⁵ Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge, 1981); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York, 1982); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987). Recent US women's and cultural historians have begun to explore gender relations in public settings; see especially Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990); and Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York, 1989).

⁶ Margaret Cockburn Conkling [Henry Lunettes, pseud.], *The American Gentleman's Guide to Politeness and Fashion . . .* (New

York, 1857), 330. My argument here and throughout is indebted to John Kasson's incisive analysis of the nineteenth-century cult of manners as a buffer between capitalist social relations and democratic culture; see Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990).

⁷ See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), especially Parts I–III. In thinking through the relevance of Habermas's argument for nineteenth-century social history, I have been helped by Geoff Eley, 'Nations, publics, and political cultures: placing Habermas in the nineteenth century', unpublished conference paper.

counted as the public.⁸ It was organized, in short, by the same play of inclusion and exclusion that characterized the promenade. And this is no mere coincidence. For the emergence of promenading marks an episode in the construction of the bourgeois public sphere in America. As in Habermas's story, seeing and being seen embodied a mode of sociability that both mirrored the divisions of capitalist society and laid claim to a freer, more universal ideal of solidarity.

And yet the American promenade cuts against this genealogy in two ways. Unlike the coffee-houses and newspapers so central to Habermas's story, promenading did not emerge in tension with the absolutist state, but the nineteenth century's most advanced democracy. It dramatized the legitimacy of social distinction, not social equality; it addressed the bourgeois subject as a rarified 'lady' or 'gentleman', not a rights-bearing citizen. Moreover, the promenading public did not come together in deliberative discourse, but in a contentless ritual of salutation. Substantive talk was bad form on the boulevard; ladies and gentlemen were to efface the interests and differences which would fuel such conversation. Why did the promenade function so antithetically to Habermas's sphere of reasoned communication? Why did it construct the respectable public through a ritual emptying of discourse?

My argument in this paper falls into three parts. The first presents an overview of promenading in Victorian New York, sketches its prehistory in *ancien régime* Europe and analyses the social conditions which impelled genteel New Yorkers to reappropriate it. The second offers an ethnography of its protocols, drawing on both descriptive and prescriptive accounts to explore the class, gender and political implications of the custom. It stresses the twofold function of promenading as a drama of mutual recognition and a tableau of hierarchical display. On the one hand, seeing and being seen affirmed genteel New Yorkers' sense of place within the shifting topography of urban life and affirmed their notions of class and sexual order. On the other hand, it cast the larger public as witness to the spectacle of elite authority. Finally, I explore the political effects of promenading, suggesting that the drama of solidarity and subordination worked to mediate a series of class and political tensions confronting the Victorian bourgeoisie. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, this drama broke down. Formal promenading gave way to a more exclusionary mode of elite sociability and a more consumerist culture of public display. I end by sketching some reasons for that decline and some of its implications for the culture and politics of the Progressive Era.

II

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the career of promenading mirrored New York's material growth. The custom grew more elaborate as the city prospered; it moved uptown as the city expanded; and like these processes of commercial and physical development, its growth was punctuated by two moments of qualitative change. The first 'phase-shift' came in the late 1820s and early 1830s: the era of the Erie Canal, New York's

⁸ The elision of formal openness and class inequality is signalled in the German phrase for the social space out of which the public sphere is

organized: *bürgerlich Gesellschaft*, meaning both 'civil society' and 'bourgeois society'.

commercial defeat of its rival ports, and the creation of a fashionable residential and shopping district around the uptown reaches of Broadway. It was then that promenading became a defining ritual for the city's bourgeois elites.⁹

Elite New Yorkers had taken to public strolling before 1830, of course. Battery Park, on Manhattan's southern waterfront, was long a 'healthful retreat' where 'the fashion and wealth of the City disported themselves in pleasant weather'. Yet such promenading did not involve the arcane codes or social gate-keeping sketched by later observers; it paled beside the indoor rituals – church observances, dance 'assemblies', New Year's Day visits – which Knickerbocker 'society' used to mark off the boundaries of fellowship. It is not surprising that when Manhattan's famous grid was laid out in 1811, the (socially elite) street commissioners reserved space for a militia parade, but no formal promenade. Republican ideals – the celebration of civic duty, the critique of luxury – shaped their vision of public space and processional display.¹⁰

With the commercial take-off of the 1820s, this austerity gave way to calls for 'embellishment[s]' which might 'give [New York] fair claim to rank among the most elegant cities in the world'. Well-paved and lined with opulent stores, Broadway became the city's 'principal thoroughfare, and most fashionable promenade', where urbane natives and visitors flocked to shop and show themselves. 'Our streets are fluid with mud', insurance clerk John Pintard wrote to his daughter in the spring of 1831, 'excepting Broadway . . . along which the Belles and Beaux flutter like papillons, happy to get abroad to visit the Fashion shops.' Here strolling began to take on the coloration of a regular, ritualized performance. 'To see Broadway in its glory . . . you must wait till six o'clock, P.M.,' George Foster reported:

Then . . . on the 'fashionable [west] side', you will see New York's possible in the way of beautiful women, scrupulously-dressed dandies, and pretty children. It is only at this hour of the day that the distinction between the east and the west side [of Broadway] is imperative. In the morning, or at midday . . . you may take the sidewalk most shady or convenient without positive loss of character. But at grand promenade hour, wo[e] be to the unhappy wight or distressed damsel who should be seen plodding along the shilling pavement!¹¹

⁹ For overviews of New York's commercial and spatial development during the Erie Canal era, see Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port* (New York, 1939); Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785–1850* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); and Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown: An Illustrated History* (Boston, 1976).

¹⁰ *New York as It Is in 1834* (1834), 190; Henri Junius Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (Hartford, Conn., 1869), 236. For the social rituals of the old Knickerbocker elite, see John Lambert, *Travels through Canada, and the United States . . . in the Years 1806, 1807, & 1808*, vol. II (1816), 99 (dance assemblies); Frederick Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New*

York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Urbana, Ill., 1982), 229–31 (religious observance); and John Pintard, *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter*, vol. 1, 1816–20 (New York, 1940), 358–9 (New Year's Day visiting). For the connections between Republican ideology and the Manhattan street-grid laid out in 1811, see Blackmar, *op. cit.*, 94–100; and Hendrik Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power: The Corporation of the City of New York in American Law, 1730–1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1983), 163–7.

¹¹ *New York Mirror*, 11 June 1825, quoted in Blackmar, *op. cit.*, 164; *New York as It Is . . .*, *op. cit.*, 18; Pintard, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, III, 226; Foster, *New York in Slices*, *op. cit.*, 9.

Such accounts point to significant shifts in elite culture. Most obvious was the growing *publicity* of its extramural setting and focus on fashion and display. At the same time, the tendency toward ostentation was disciplined by strictures prescribing when, where and how the *papillons* of Broadway were to appear in public. Unlike the boisterous, plebeian promenade on the Bowery, so well described by Christine Stansell and Sean Wilentz, elite sociability grew more elaborate and formalized, a peculiar mix of spectacle and restraint. And 'as Pintard and Foster both suggest, this reflected changes in social relations. On the one hand, seeing and being seen offered a means of sanctioning the new inequalities of New York's boom, creating a stage on which wealth, refinement and 'character' could be elided. On the other, it served to counter the great gender divide of Victorian culture, providing a public sphere into which respectable women not only could, but had to enter: 'the fashionable ladies in the metropolis', Foster noted, '*must* take their afternoon drive in Broadway'. In contrast to the republicanism of the 1811 street-plan, then, the fashionable promenade celebrated social distinction and sexual mixing; in contrast to Knickerbocker culture, it did so through public display.¹²

These developments grew more marked during the second 'phase-shift' of the bourgeois promenade, the late 1850s and 1860s. This was, again, a threshold-moment in New York's growth: the time when Wall Street won control of national finance, a massive wave of immigrants entered New York and metropolitan city-builders began a series of experiments in park-making and public works. Again, economic and geographic expansion brought development of a new uptown landscape of elite residence and sociability: a district that ran from 'Ladies' Mile', the luxury shopping and amusement zone between Union and Madison Squares, to the townhouses and clubhouses of Fifth Avenue, to the new public pleasure-grounds of upper Manhattan. Such spaces afforded the city's bourgeoisie a sumptuous arena for congregation and display. 'Fifth avenue is the fashionable promenade' a guidebook reported in the mid-1880s. '[E]very afternoon the stream of vehicles going to and returning from Central Park is unending, and the pavements are full of well-dressed persons.'¹³

¹² For an analysis of the Bowery as a plebeian promenade and working-class public forum in New York, see Stansell, *op. cit.*, 89–101; and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Making of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), 257–71.

¹³ *Appleton's Directory of New York and Vicinity* (1884), 86.

For overviews of New York's economic and physical expansion during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, see David Scobey, 'Empire City: Politics, Culture, and Urbanism in Gilded-Age New York' (Ph.D., Yale University, 1989); and Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840–1857* (New York, 1981). For the development of 'Ladies' Mile', see Scobey, 'Public space and sexual order in Victorian New York: the ambiguities of Ladies' Mile', unpublished conference paper;

and M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850–1900* (New York, 1985), 43–129. For the history of Central Park and other uptown experiments in landscape design, see Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler (eds), *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. III: Creating Central Park, 1857–1861* (Baltimore, 1983); Albert Fein (ed.), *Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City* (New York, 1967), chaps 1, 2, 7, 8; David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1986), 77–125; Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *Central Park: The Contradictions of a Democratic Public Space* (Ithaca, NY, forthcoming); and Scobey, 'Empire City', *op. cit.*, 353–94.

The uptown movement exacerbated the tendency towards opulence and spectacle in elite sociability – especially on the drives of Central Park. More than anything, construction of the park (1857–61) inaugurated the era of high promenading in New York, promoting a shift to carriage-driving (and in winter, sleigh-riding) and a boom in the city's coach-making trade.¹⁴ By the late 1860s, some 1500 vehicles circulated through the park each day. Patrician lawyer George Templeton Strong described the scene in his diary:

Fifth Avenue . . . was absolutely thronged with costly new equipages on their way to Central Park. . . . It was a broad torrent of vehicular gentility, wherein profits of shoddy and petroleum were largely represented. Not a few of the ladies who were driving in the most sumptuous turn-outs, with liveried servants, looked as if they might have been cooks or chambermaids a few years ago.

Strong's snobbery is a bit disingenuous; the 'broad torrent' was as likely to include his own wife as clothing or oil *parvenus*. Yet he was right to link the park, new economic elites and an elaboration of the apparatus – and expense – of sociability. Throughout the mid-Victorian decades, the props grew ever more elaborate: plush coaches, uniformed servants, thoroughbred horses, even heraldic devices. 'One would hardly believe he was in a republican country', the popular journalist Henri Junius Browne noted, 'to see the escutcheoned panels of the carriages, the liveried coachmen, and the supercilious air of the occupants of the vehicle, as they go . . . flaringly by.'¹⁵

The New York promenade thus reflected a paradoxical ideal of sociability, at once elitist and expansive, exorbitant and regimented: a mix of heterosocial exhibitionism and 'aristocratic' exclusiveness. And as Browne understood, this ideal embodied a second paradox: it was utterly at odds with republican notions of the public sphere. The roots of promenading lay in baroque Europe – most of all, *ancien régime* France. Beginning in the early seventeenth century, Parisian notables had gathered to circulate and display themselves in grand processional spaces laid out by the French crown. By the mid-1700s, such formally designed parades – Unter den Linden in Berlin, Hyde Park in London – were a core element of European city design, a badge of the politeness and modernity of the

¹⁴ Visual representations of promenading in the park are numerous. In addition to those cited in notes 2 and 20, see the engraving in *Harper's Weekly*, 15 September 1860 (drawn by Winslow Homer, then a young commercial artist), showing the new park with barely a grown tree, but already popular for carriage driving; and the illustration of a winter parade of sleigh-riders in *ibid.*, 27 February 1886.

¹⁵ Strong diary, 21 March 1865, in Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (eds), *The Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. III: The Civil War, 1860–1865* (New York, 1952), 567; Browne, *op. cit.*, 124. Strong notes accidentally

meeting his wife on her way uptown for a carriage drive in *Diary*, III, 106 (diary, 4 March 1861). For the boom in carriage-making and its links to the creation of Central Park, see 'Public parks. Their influence on the carriage business', *The New York Coach-Maker's Magazine*, XII (November 1870), 90; and *ibid.*, XI (September 1869), 63 (daily volume of vehicles in the park). For the escalation of class display in Victorian carriage-driving, see 'The equipages of New York', *The Carriage Builders' and Harness Makers' Art Journal*, 1 (1858–9), 52 (heraldic insignia); and *New York Illustrated* (1885), XXIII (display of 'first-class horse flesh').

royal regimes or aristocratic elites which sponsored them.¹⁶ Why should the capitals of absolutist Europe have inspired the bourgeois elites of a nineteenth-century republic, especially the elites of New York?¹⁷

To begin with, both eras were marked by enormous human and economic accumulation in metropolitan centres. Like seventeenth-century London, Victorian New York multiplied in population and engrossed its national capital fund at a stunning rate. 'The capital and energy of the country tend to build up here,' wrote one commercial observer in the 1860s. 'The products of the wheat fields of the prairies, the gold mines of the Pacific coast . . . and the plantations of the South, will heap up a portion of their accumulations here . . . as if these fields of labor were within the city limits.'¹⁸ As in the baroque era, these 'accumulations' gave metropolitan regimes the means for bold programmes of civic improvement. New bridges, squares, parks, aqueducts, boulevards and public edifices were created, both to accommodate urban growth and to celebrate the cities they adorned. These embellishments represented a leading sector of public investment in both the absolutist and capitalist metropolis; they were in fact a primary catalyst for the elaboration of state power. Here again New York elites led the way, pursuing public improvements – Central Park, Brooklyn Bridge, the Elevated railway – that represented pioneering efforts in both city-building and state-building in the nineteenth-century US.¹⁹

Promenading was a key element of this urbanism. Like their baroque precursors, Victorian city-builders filled New York with processional spaces. John Roebling suspended an 'elevated promenade' down the middle of Brooklyn Bridge; Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed a network of formal walks and pleasure drives throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. Bourgeois urbanists in effect reversed the 1811 plan: they adopted the fashionable promenade, not the military parade-ground, as the modal public space of a civilized metropolis, the emblem of its power and urbanity. '[T]he

¹⁶ For the history of city planning and promenade design in Paris and other capitals, see Mark Girouard, *Cities and People: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven, Conn., 1985), 166–232; and Lewis Mumford's extraordinary *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York, 1961), 344–409, which underscores the links between baroque city-building and absolutist state-building. According to Peter Borsay, 'the formal practice of public promenading and the construction of specialized facilities to service this' was prevalent throughout English cities, even small provincial centres, by the eighteenth century; see *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), 162. For a provocative analysis of the meaning of promenading in the *ancien régime*, see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York, 1974), 84–6.

¹⁷ The reappropriation of promenading in

nineteenth-century cities is a part of a larger issue, still relatively unstudied in urban and planning history: why baroque urbanism provided the dominant design ideal for the monumental reshaping of the great metropolitan centres of Europe and America during the 'age of capital'. Haussman's Paris and the Viennese *Ringstrasse* were only the two most comprehensive instances of neo-baroque planning; more piecemeal experiments were undertaken in Budapest, London and the park and boulevard improvements of American cities.

¹⁸ *The Growth of New York* (New York, 1865), 18.

¹⁹ I elaborate this analysis of the links among capital accumulation, public works and state-building in New York in 'Empire City', *op. cit.*, especially 42–104, 179–89, 218–36; and 'City blocs: politics, social class, and the city-building process in Victorian New York', unpublished manuscript.

Boulevards and drives extending far into the country', boasted New York's real-estate journal, would offer 'the glittering exhibition of the fair and fashionable of the world's new imperial city'.²⁰

Such language helps to explain why elite New Yorkers were so avid to build and use promenade spaces: seeing and being seen affirmed their dynamism, prosperity and civility, after all, licensing extravagant display as a badge of membership in the cultivated elite of the ascendant metropolis. Not surprisingly, visual depictions of the custom convey a preening confidence among those in attendance, an air of belonging to the procession of History itself.²¹ Written accounts strike a note of dazzled complacency, presenting the promenade as a 'glittering exhibition' or 'kaleidoscopic panorama'. What comes across throughout is the seductive power of the spectacle, the fun of performing in and for the crowd. A sense of intoxication, for instance, even incitement to fantasy, are unmistakable in the diary of Maria Lydig Daly, a usually conservative judge's wife: 'We had a delightful drive yesterday in the park. It seems strange to me to see how little the rich among us understand about enjoying themselves. *One* stylish carriage, *one* pair of horses, *one* coachmen. . . . It seems to me that if I were rich, I should indulge myself in specialties.'²²

And yet the tone of indulgence reflects only part of the 'affect' of promenading in New York. What it leaves out is the undertone of anxiety: a peculiarly Victorian anxiety concerning the disruptive effects of material prosperity. New York's great mid-century boom was accompanied by a destabilization of established social arrangements, a process that occurred along two fronts. First of all, the boom depended on – and reinforced – the overturning of class and status distinctions that had organized the upper reaches of urban society. Just as landed and aristocratic elites in eighteenth-century England and France gave way to new circles of mercantile and professional power, so American capitalist development fostered a 'mushroom aristocracy' of speculative financiers and industrial entrepreneurs who displaced (and married into) an older patriciate of rentiers and merchants.²³ Nowhere was the unmooring of hierarchy more troubling than in New York, where the emergence of new wealth seemed to confirm the fabulous prosperity, material instability and moral corrosiveness of nineteenth-century capitalism. Middle-class anxiety over these contradictions was inscribed in the rhetorical figure of 'Mr and Mrs Shoddy': the profiteer of shabby clothing, instantly rich yet as instantly ruined, and his socially ambitious wife, veneered with refinements. 'The new rich are at present stronger and more numerous than ever in New York,' Henri Junius Browne observed,

²⁰ John Roebling, *Report . . . to the President and Directors of the New York Bridge Company on the Proposed East River Bridge* (Brooklyn, 1870), 18; *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 11, 44 (16 January 1869). For the promenade spaces laid out by Olmsted and Vaux, see Scobey, 'Empire City', 353–94; and Schuyler, *op. cit.*, 77–100, 114–28.

²¹ See, for instance, the engravings of coach parades published in *Harper's Weekly*, 19 May 1883 and 2 June 1883, and in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 27 November 1875.

²² *New York Illustrated* (1885), 23; [Maria Lydig Daly], *Diary of a Union Lady, 1861–1865*, ed. by Harold Earl Hammond (New York, 1962), 141–2 (entry for 7 June 1862). (My thanks to Kathy Peiss for steering me toward Daly's fascinating diary.)

²³ See Borsay, *op. cit.*, 226–31, for one discussion of the broadening of the British social elite in the eighteenth century; Jaher emphasizes the 'circulation and fragmentation of elites' in New York a century later, *op. cit.*, 157.

and [they] are now a power in the Metropolis. . . . These are the people who flare and flash so . . . on the public promenades . . . and who strangers regard as the exponents of our best society, when they really represent the worst.²⁴

Browne's rhetoric makes clear that the social fluidity of the 'age of capital' represented more than just a problem of economic or generational conflict within the urban bourgeoisie. It rendered problematic the very basis of bourgeois identity: the capacity of the propertied and powerful to recognize one another as constituents of a moral collectivity. Karen Haltunnen has shown how deeply this identity crisis preoccupied the genteel middle class, provoking sharp anxiety over the simulation of respectability by 'confidence men and painted women' and the dissolution of shared public culture into unbridled market competition. To observers of New York, the emblematic milieu of this descent into atomism and deceit was the street, most of all the bustling, downtown commercial street: '[W]henever we walk through the denser part of a town', argued the landscape architect and reformer Frederick Law Olmsted,

to merely avoid collision with those we . . . pass upon the sidewalks, we have constantly to watch, to foresee, and to guard against their movements. . . . [We see] thousands of fellowmen, have met them face to face, have brushed against them, and yet have had no experience of anything in common with them.²⁵

At the same time, the Victorian bourgeoisie experienced a second set of social disruptions, also encountered on – and symbolically associated with – the city streets. I mean, of course, the intensification of class inequality and disorder in American cities, especially New York. From the Astor Place riot of 1849 through the Labor Day marches of the 1880s, working-class New Yorkers took their grievances into public with sometimes apocalyptic effect. 'Who will ever forget the marvelous rapidity with which . . . a ruffianly and desperate multitude . . . crept from their . . . dens to join in the plunder of the city?' reformer Charles Loring Brace wrote of the 1863 draft riots. Such language captures wonderfully the fearful sense of an urban public sphere in which violence could erupt out of nowhere and spread everywhere like contagion. 'Walk down [Broadway] on a holiday, when the Irish crowd the sidewalks', an urbane magazine sketch suddenly warned, 'and all you have . . . dreamed of savagery will gleam . . . from those . . . daredevil eyes. The materials of riot in the heart of the vast and populous city then strike one with terror.'²⁶

Genteel New Yorkers, in short, experienced the city as a double threat to social and

²⁴ Browne, *op. cit.*, 35.

²⁵ Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, Conn., 1982); Frederick Law Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns* (Boston, 1870), 11.

²⁶ Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (New York, 1872), 30; [H. T. Tuckerman], 'Through Broadway', *Atlantic Monthly*, xviii (December 1866), 727. For the history of working-class violence and labour

insurgency in Victorian New York, see Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712–1873* (New York, 1873); Peter Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in Antebellum New York* (New York, forthcoming); Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1990); and David Scobey, 'Boycotting the politics factory: labor radicalism and the New York City mayoral election of 1886', *Radical History Review*, 28–30 (1984), 280–325.

moral order. On the one hand, it was a place of fluid identities and eroded trust; on the other, a place of class conflict and latent violence. Politics, of course, was supposed to transcend such uncertainties and divisions, and the republican tradition offered a panoply of rituals aimed at binding men together as citizens and partisans. Yet, as the 'terror' of the Broadway sketch makes clear, the Victorian bourgeoisie could no longer be reassured by torchlight parades and holiday oratory. For these practices contradicted the strongest impulses with which they sought to shape public culture in New York: the impulse to exclude the urban masses from, and include genteel women in, the community of discourse. *Harper's Weekly* captured the dissonance between republicanism and respectability wonderfully in an 1872 engraving: entitled 'A Politician's New Year's Day Reception', it portrays a Manhattan lady constrained to receive at home – quite literally, to bow before – one of her husband's ill-dressed constituents.²⁷ Popular politics has become the intruder here, palpably violating the class and sexual lines of civilized fellowship. And nowhere did it seem more transgressive than New York, home to Tweed and Tammany.

Instead of politics, then, genteel New Yorkers took their stand on the ground of *politesse*. They created a culture of refined sociability – socially exclusive, sexually mixed, politically mute – designed to sanction the city's inequalities and stabilize its play of appearances. And, as with the baroque era, they did so through a cult of manners. Bourgeois sociability depended on a complex repertory of presentational performances – visits, balls, church-going, pleasure-driving – which posited the ideal subject as, above all else, polite. The effect of such performances was to generate a pair of new *personae*, the gentleman and lady; or, rather, to translate these pre-industrial status figures into the normative 'class selves' of a capitalist elite.²⁸

The promenade played a special role in this culture of politeness. For it reclaimed the street: the setting most emblematic of the disorders of the age of capital, its 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation', as Marx and Engels famously put it, in which 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned'. Seeing and being seen undid this scandal, investing the profane streetscape with ritual order. 'An army on the march to battle could not move with stricter precision,' George Foster wrote of the genteel crowd on Broadway, 'a procession of monks and nuns bound convent-ward, with more sacred gravity.'²⁹

The promenade thus embodied a curious mix of confidence and anxiety, extravagance and decorum. It mirrored, that is, the contradictory needs of the elites who reappropriated it: the need to legitimize their ascendance, yet ward off the disruptions that attended it. Promenading symbolically organized a collectivity which could mediate these needs. It celebrated the accumulation of wealth, leisure and power in the capitalist metropolis; but, at the same time, it mobilized these 'accumulations' against the city's own moral and social liquidity. In the process, the promenade did more than simply reclaim the streets for the privileged. It symbolically redeemed the public sphere itself, making 'the materials of riot'

²⁷ The engraving was published in *Harper's Weekly*, 10 February 1872.

²⁸ The best accounts of the rituals and geography of the American cult of manners are Haltunen, *op. cit.*; Kasson, *op. cit.*; and Kenneth L. Ames, 'Meaning in artifacts: hall

furnishings in Victorian America', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, ix (Summer 1978), 19–46.

²⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1948), 12; Foster, *op. cit.*, 11.

into pacified onlookers, transvaluing the daily traffic in commodities and identities into a decorous exchange of recognitions.

III

How did this transvaluation work? The first thing to notice about the structure of promenading is how sharply bourgeois New Yorkers segregated it as a ritual occasion. They took pains, for instance, to mark it off in space, strictly prescribing where the fashionable were to congregate. Throughout all its migrations, the promenade always took place on a main, axial avenue or gathering-place, typically within the new districts for amusement and leisure that coalesced during New York's mid-century boom. This location, set apart yet public, was integral to the symbolic work of promenading. On the one hand, it made the selective exchange of recognitions an especially pointed act: New York's most visible common ground was being occupied for the purpose of mapping, as one etiquette book put it, 'the distinction between the polite and the vulgar'.³⁰ The promenade marked off a space of exclusive respectability within and against the multitude, dividing the public sphere like the 'fashionable' and 'shilling' sides of Broadway.

On the other hand, this fixing of *class* lines opened a site where *gender* boundaries could be more fluid. The district within which promenading took place – roughly, from Union Square to Central Park – occupied an intermediary position in the sexual geography of New York. It symbolically mediated between the norms of an uptown, 'female' world of refined domesticity, properly secluded from public gaze, and a downtown domain of commerce and labour into which ladies could not reputedly intrude: '[I]t was unthinkable that a young girl should venture into the business district and return therefrom unscathed,' recalled a 'society' matron in the 1920s. Canal Street 'was . . . an insurmountable social barrier'.³¹ The creation of this 'midtown' shopping and amusement district, in short, delineated the first distinctively public landscape in which respectable sexual mixing could occur. Staging the promenade *there* marked it as a rite of heterosociality.

The temporality of promenading was similarly bounded. Sunday after church represented the most important occasion for seeing and being seen. Yet every day had its 'canonical hour', when the workaday circulation of the street was transformed into ceremonial display. '[F]rom eleven until three', Walt Whitman noted in an 1856 sketch, Broadway 'boils and surges . . . in an undistinguishable and hopeless confusion', but at mid-afternoon, 'the special hour of the promenade' brought 'no contemptible show of millinery and dry goods, whalebone, and crinoline'. Like the barrier of Canal Street, the time-line of the 'canonical hour' serves here to mark a threshold. Crossing it meant moving from a realm of 'surging' energy to one of ritual 'show': a movement represented above all by the timely appearing of the lady in public. Just as in the geography of promenading – or the engraving of the politician's wife – it was the bourgeois *woman* who figuratively condensed the class requirements and sexual risks of polite sociability. Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, her presence marked what had to be protected in and from public

³⁰ *How To Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette* (New York, 1872), 100.

³¹ Mrs John King Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder* (1924), 45.

exposure. To accompany her on the promenade beyond the 'canonical hour' was, like crossing Canal Street, to breach respectability itself. 'A gentleman will not ask a young lady to compromise herself', one expert advised, 'by driving with him at an unseemly hour.'³²

The most important boundaries around the promenade, however, were not spatial or temporal but behavioural. To map these, we must rely not only on depictions of New York but also on the prescriptive literature of manners. Nineteenth-century etiquette manuals were notoriously elaborate in their advice, and it is tempting to read them as compensatory fantasies rather than guides to action. Yet they show us more about actual sociability, I think, than a post-empiricist cultural historian might expect. As John Kasson has argued, the literature of manners was a leading sector of the Victorian culture industry, with dozens of titles and often dozens of editions being published. The manuals form part of an emergent middle-class commercial culture obsessed with instituting American standards of refinement and civilized intercourse. Manhattan served that culture not simply as its publishing headquarters, but as the national capital of politeness, the authorizing scene for experts who promised 'questions answered from the New York stand-point'.³³

How reliable were these experts? They seem genuinely to have shared the class milieu through which they guided the unwashed. Most came from genteel, Protestant backgrounds and had extensive education; some belonged to literary and reform networks of considerable influence. To be sure, all wrote for a readership distant from Fifth Avenue: ambitious clerks and milliners, *parvenus* and migrants, young people seeking the *terra firma* of respectability in the *terra incognita* of the city. Etiquette books might well have served such readers as a vehicle of class voyeurism, the nineteenth-century equivalent of watching *Dynasty*. Certainly they seem to overformalize what must have been more supple codes of behaviour. Yet even in presenting petrified accounts of the promenade, they afford a glimpse at the protocols which organized it.³⁴

What, then, do we find in the manuals, the memoirs and the *feuilletons*? A ritual structured by three defining elements: the choreographing of constant, decorous movement; the displacement of social discourse into visual spectacle; and the formal exchange of recognitions and greetings. Let me sketch the rules governing each of these in turn.

Promenading was, above all, sociability in motion, perpetual motion, people passing each other back and forth repeatedly, actors and spectators in a tableau of orderly circulation. To disrupt the flow of the spectacle – for instance, by stopping to talk – was impolite: 'If you have anything to say to any one in the street . . . however intimate you may be', one manual advised, 'do not stop the promenade, but turn around and walk in

³² Walt Whitman, 'Broadway', *Life Illustrated*, 9 August 1856, reprinted in Whitman, *New York Dissected* . . . (New York, 1936), 121; *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture* (Chicago and New York, 1893), 115. For an account of the Sunday morning promenade, see *New York Illustrated*, xxiii.

³³ Quoted in Kasson, *op. cit.*, 56. Kasson offers an illuminating analysis of Victorian

etiquette literature in *ibid.*, 34–69. Like him, I treat the manuals as parts of a relatively unitary discourse, ignoring differences in their date and place of publication; not only do they tend to agree in general prescriptions, but they quite often recycle one another's specific formulations as well.

³⁴ For the social background of etiquette authors and their readers, see *ibid.*, 48–57.

company; you can take leave at the end of the street.' The ideal of motion was supremely mediated, at once dutiful and leisurely, self-impelled yet self-restrained. Neither the idle gaze of the loafer nor the preoccupied urgency of the busy was appropriate demeanour; both signalled in complementary ways the presence of an atomistic and appropriative self. In contrast, the decorous rhythms of the promenade represented the suspension of instrumental aims and personal interests. 'It is desirable that there should be a continuous movement of all engaged', Frederick Law Olmsted argued concerning the design of a carriage parade in Central Park, 'and that the attention of none should be unnecessarily held to other matters in such a way as to interfere with the enjoyments which are special to the promenade.'³⁵

This stress on releasing motion from motive helps to explain one of the most peculiar features of the practice: its repetitive structure, in which (to quote Olmsted again) 'the same people pass and re-pass each other many times'.³⁶ Such circularity seems a paradoxical way to have inscribed order on the metropolitan landscape. It made the promenade an act of symbolic containment, an effort to circumscribe the energies of urban growth and enclose the domain of the respectable public. At the same time it resembled nothing so much as a parody of commodity exchange. The choreography of promenading thus seems to enact ceremonially a sort of ambivalence toward the capitalist metropolis. Its leisurely pace and recuperative structure re-present the market as a model of free, yet hierarchical sociability, at once mirroring, subverting and legitimizing the frenzied circulation of people, goods and money taking place further downtown.

The ritualizing of circulation depended on the second feature of the promenade: the suppression of active, engaged discourse in favour of a *spectacle* of sociability. '[T]he decorum of the street', observers noted, required 'sacred gravity' and 'profound silence'. Exchanges were to be brief, safe and undemonstrative, especially in that most dangerous of close encounters, the acknowledgement of a relation with the opposite sex. 'A faint smile and a formal bow are all that the most refined lady accords' to a male acquaintance, the experts instructed, while a gentleman, passing all but the closest of lady friends, should 'bow, but do not speak'. In place of this muting of conversation and affect, the promenade amplified visual and somatic cues into a veritable pantomime of civility. Men performed their place in the respectable public through arcane rules of gestural presentation: 'When you salute a lady or a gentleman to whom you wish to show particular respect . . . cause [your hat] to describe a circle of at least ninety degrees from its original resting place.' For women the key medium of display was costume, opulent costumes generally bought on or

³⁵ [John A. Ruth], *Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (New York, 1878), 43; Olmsted, *Report on a Promenade*, New York City Department of Public Parks, Document No. 67 (1875), reprinted in Frederick Law Olmsted, Jnr and Theodora Kimball (eds), *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park* (New York, 1928), 386. See also Conkling, *op. cit.*, 128 (impropriety of hurrying or being preoccupied with business); and *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture* (1893), 103

(injunction against 'street loafing'). It is worth noting, given the influence of Walter Benjamin's work on Baudelaire's Paris, that this ideal of decorous, self-disciplined movement sets promenading against *flanerie*; the ritual may be seen as an effort to suppress the improvisatory, voyeuristic and appropriative qualities of the *flaneur's* explorations of urban space.

³⁶ Florence Howe Hall, *Social Customs* (Boston, 1887), 292. The author was the daughter of the famed reformer, Julia Ward Howe.

near the parade of fashion itself: '[The] brilliancy [of] female . . . form and frippery of dress that passes for two hours in a kaleidoscopic panorama', one tour guide wrote of the Fifth Avenue scene, 'could not help but dazzle the most stoical of spectators.'³⁷

Why did bourgeois New Yorkers ground polite sociability in the production of this sort of spectacle? Here again, the promenade seems to be mediating their anxieties toward urban social order, anxieties concerning both alternative models of the public sphere and their own place in it. On the one hand, the stress on gravity and restraint distinguished the bourgeois promenade from its plebeian cousin on the Bowery. It offered a model of public demeanour which placed discipline and decorum above the rowdyism of popular amusements or the assertiveness of popular politics. 'Your conduct on the street should always be modest and dignified,' warned the best-selling writer James McCabe. 'Loud and boisterous conversation or laughter and all undue liveliness are improper in public.' On the other hand, the displacement of 'undue liveliness' seems aimed at voiding any substantive social experience which might divide elite New Yorkers from one another. It projected an ideal of sociability in which all *particular* bonds among people were consigned to a private realm of contingency: 'A carefully-bred lady will never be capricious in her public recognitions of gentlemen, nor will she be demonstrative. Self-respect withholds her from exposing any private sentiments of dislike in her public greeting.' Not only private sentiments, but also social affiliations, material interests, indeed all concrete grounds of relationship were to be disengaged from the performance of respectability except respectability itself. As one expert put it, the 'passers in the street know no difference in individuals'.³⁸

The result was a curiously depersonalized form of sociability. It bound ladies and gentlemen into a public, but it did so by distancing them from one another. A lady's salutation 'means recognition and nothing else', a manual warned the aspiring gentleman. 'Under all circumstances, upon the promenade . . . her smiles are faint and her bows are reserved . . . no matter how cordially she may have received [you] at a recent ball.'³⁹ Presumably such formalism offered a way of mastering appearances in the city; yet it also reinforced a strangely opaque conception of the bourgeois subject. Ladies and gentlemen rendered their class identity visible to one another by erasing its actual history.

The body was the most important prop in this drama of effacement. The protocols of promenading fashioned it into a semiotic medium, a sort of marionette of decorum. Yet its expressiveness came from the intensive discipline to which ladies and gentlemen subjected it. The promenading body was covered from bonnet to boot and all signs of organic process rendered invisible. Not only were functions like spitting and belching to be suppressed, but also any mode of corporeal or sensory contact which breached the physical frontiers between persons. Jostling, staring, loudness and most hand-shaking were

³⁷ Foster, *op. cit.*, 11; Curtis, *op. cit.*, 36; *Social Etiquette of New York* (1883), 22; [Ruth], *Decorum*, 44, 127; *New York Illustrated*, xxiii. One telling sign of the identification between promenading and spectacle was the proliferation of walking galleries in *indoor* settings of fashionable public display, such as hotels, theatres, and department stores; see Lois

W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago, 1983), 34, 68.

³⁸ James D. McCabe, *The National Cyclopaedia of Business and Social Forms* (Cincinnati, 1881), 411; *Social Etiquette of New York*, 21–2, 23.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 21, 22.

impolite; a lady could take a man's arm only in situations that required an unusual degree of symbolic protection, at night or on an obstructed sidewalk. Even the *figurative* soiling or disheavelling of another's body risked turning a civilized encounter into a moment of violation:

[D]o not offer to shake hands with a lady in full morning costume [i.e. with gloves], should your glove be dark-colored or your hand uncovered. . . . [L]ift your hat . . . as a substitute for this dubious civility, with some playful expression [like] . . . 'Really, Miss—, you are so beautifully dressed, and looking so charmingly, that I dare not venture too near.'

As this amazing advice makes clear, bodily self-discipline was especially important in preserving women from the dangers of heterosociality. Yet this was only an extreme case of the general rule: that the respectable public was brought together through the inscribing of distance. Tipping a hat rather than shaking a hand, passing by rather than conversing: the socializing effect of the promenade came precisely in its curtailment of contact, its staging of bodies in the act of 'daring not venture too near'.⁴⁰

The final feature of the drama was the exchange of salutations. What made all those gesturing bodies into a collectivity, transforming the vacancy of their spectacle into a space occupied by a public, was the act of mutual identification: the mirrored tipping of hats, the call-and-response of nods and bows – not simply seeing and being seen, but recognizing and being recognized. Here was the key to the ritual, the moment in which entry into the respectable public was conferred and confirmed. Not surprisingly, it was hedged about with rules. Between different categories of person, for example, only one had the authority to initiate or terminate a public encounter. Social inferiors had to defer to superiors; the young to the old; and, of course, gentlemen to ladies. Other 'rules of engagement' specified discursive and physical procedures. A gentleman removed his hat in saluting a lady, but merely bowed and touched it to another man. A lady was permitted to exchange niceties with men only if she were married or mature; young single women were silently to bow. No lady, of course, acknowledged any male with whom she was not already acquainted from a less promiscuous milieu: 'A lady, be she young or old, *never* forms an acquaintance upon the streets . . .' instructed one manual. 'To do so would render false her claims to ladyhood; if it did not make her liable to far graver charges.'⁴¹

Ultimately such rules did not involve questions of know-how so much as know-who.

⁴⁰ Conkling, *op. cit.*, 130–1. For rules of body management, see also Mrs L. G. Abell, *Woman in Her Various Relations* (1853), 136; [Ruth], *Decorum*, 125; and this encouragement from Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston, 1873): 'By having your wits about you, you can win your way through a thronged street without touching even the extreme circumference of a balloon sleeve . . .' (74).

⁴¹ [Ruth], *Decorum*, 123. For rules of salutation on the promenade, see *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture*, *op. cit.*, 99, and Hall, *op. cit.*,

292 (social and age hierarchies); Hartley, *op. cit.*, 68 (codes of male gesture); and S[arah] A[nnie] Frost, *Frost's Laws and By-Laws of American Society* (New York, 1869), 89 (woman's control of encounter) and 26 (married *v.* single women). The 'far graver charge' of which women are being warned in the quoted passage is of course that of prostitution or sexual impropriety; many of the rules covering female presentation and demeanour – muteness, affectlessness, bodily restraint – can be understood as efforts to mark semiotically the difference between 'ladies' and 'loose women' on the street.

They delineated the borders of the respectable public, instituting a set of class and gender ideals which bound men and women together as its constituents. Consider, for instance, the relationship between these codes of recognition and class position. It was central to the ideal of public sociability that the promenade be formally open, a Habermasian space, a republic of refinement; salutations were not to be parcelled out according to wealth or rank or personal intimacy, only the performance of respectability itself. As one manual argued in a diatribe against the use of *sir* and *madam* as terms of address:

Equality . . . is the basis of society . . . and as titles of all kinds are contrary to the ideas of republican simplicity, there is no need to use any expression that implies deference or inferiority. . . . [T]hose . . . who are ladies and gentlemen are such by education and refinement, and need no such gratuitous branding to let their fellows realize the fact.

At the same time, etiquette experts saw 'the recognition of class and grades of rank' as not only compatible with 'true republicanism' but intrinsic to it. 'Nature . . . has nowhere in the universe given us an example of . . . absolute, unqualified, dead-level equality', a defender of 'Republican distinctions' claimed. 'Harmony is born of difference, not sameness.' The cult of manners sought to accommodate these contradictory sentiments, to reconcile the egalitarian claims of republicanism with the need to legitimate class and cultural hierarchy. It thus made 'lady' and 'gentleman' into ideological signs *par excellence*: universal ideals of personhood which were putatively available to all, but which legitimized the privilege of certain types of people.⁴²

For it is belabouring the obvious to note that the promenade was actually barricaded with class barriers. Any ritual that took place in the middle of the working day, in the fashionable amusement district, in elegant, specialized costume required too much money and time for all but the most well-heeled New Yorkers; the taste for carriage driving made these entry costs even greater. Nor were the barriers simply pecuniary. Being saluted on the promenade also depended on two types of *cultural* capital in short supply: formal acquaintanceship, which was generally conferred through a prior nexus of card-calling and parlour visits; and mastery of the forms and norms of polite culture, which was generally conferred through growing up in the northern, Protestant, genteel middle class. Inclusion was difficult 'for persons who had not the adornments of polite learning in youth', as one manual put it, who 'find themselves possessed of [the] wealth to command the elegances of society, but have not the polish to make themselves agreeable'.⁴³

Yet these class barriers were not impermeable. The whole thrust of the last quotation – and the boom in nineteenth-century etiquette books – was that polish could be acquired. It was the mobility and heterogeneity of the American bourgeoisie, after all, which made public sociability so important, and so fraught, to begin with. The promenade offered a way of distinguishing the refined from the Shoddy's within that fluid world, not by reference to some external criterion of wealth or background, but by sheer ritual competence. It was a performative utterance, confirming status simply by its successful

⁴² *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture*, *op. cit.*, 76; *How To Behave*, *op. cit.*, 124–5.

⁴³ *Guide To Good Behavior* (Philadelphia, 1856), 5–6, quoted in Kasson, *op. cit.*, 54. For

the indoor visiting rituals on which the exchange of street salutations depended, see Haltunnen, *op. cit.*, and Ames, *op. cit.*

portrayal, by the *praxis* of commanding recognition on the street. And that was its ideological power. It opened the respectable public to the upwardly mobile; yet it did so by commending bourgeois ideals of propriety, self-control and deference to all who aspired to enter. The tipped hat of the promenade was thus more than just a greeting; it was a nod of consent to the disciplines of genteel culture.

Of course the most important of those disciplines concerned gender relations. It must be clear by now that the promenade was an obsessively gendered performance. It was a novelty in America precisely as a mixed rite of public sociability, and it elaborately regulated the dangers and pleasures of having women, and men meeting women, on the streets. As I have shown, the code of politeness demarcated special times, places, costumes and scripts within which women could safely venture into public and be recognized there as ladies. At the same time, it protected and enforced their ladyhood by replicating the sex segregation and hierarchy of Victorian domestic ideology. The lady in public was hedged about with rules: no travel below Canal Street, no driving after dusk, no making of new acquaintances on the street. And, as in domestic ideology, this sequestering carried a sort of compensatory moral authority: the right to initiate, refuse, control or terminate social intercourse. Victorian writers thus endowed the lady's demeanour with an almost charismatic propriety, as if she embodied in her person the transmutation of the profane streets into a decorous public sphere:

The true lady walks the street, wrapped in a mantle of proper reserve so impenetrable that insult and coarse familiarity shrink from her . . . seeing and hearing nothing that she ought not to see and hear. . . . She walks along in her quiet, lady-like way . . . secure from any annoyance to which a person of less perfect breeding might be subjected.⁴⁴

What is striking about this passage is not simply the burden to which it subjects women for any breach in civility. It is the way that respectability gets feminized in the process. The model bourgeois here is not an entrepreneur or citizen, but the true lady wrapped in the mantle of her proper reserve; *she* exemplifies the sort of performed self-effacement which was the mark of public refinement. In effect, the lady lends the authority of her sexual modesty to the cause of class order, legitimizing the ideals of genteel culture and disciplining those who might prefer a world of 'coarse familiarity' to one of 'impenetrable reserve'. At the same time, she lends the authority of her gentility to the cause of gender order, legitimizing the ideal of 'true ladyhood' and disciplining women whose less than perfect breeding might lead them to seek pleasure, exercise, employment or the vote on the city streets. The figure of the lady in public thus embodied a pointed mixture of commands and solicitations. Intertwining the confinements of gender hierarchy with the privileges of class hierarchy, she made mastery of sexual decorum the safe conduct pass into the republic of politeness.

Clearly these structures of acknowledgement represented more than just a behavioural code. They literalized Louis Althusser's celebrated account of ideology: a symbolic

⁴⁴ John H. Young (comp.), *Our Deportment: Or the Manners, Conduct, and Dress of the Most Refined Society* (Detroit, 1882), 145-6; a similar passage appears in [Ruth], *Decorum*, 122.

discourse which structured people's identities, solidarities and ideals by subjecting them to forms of recognition and address which assigned them a particular self.⁴⁵ This process of 'interpellating' ladies and gentlemen, as Althusser calls it, involved one final rule of conduct on the New York promenade. I mean the necessity of *refusing* acknowledgement to non-respectable others against whom the genteel public gained its compactness and legitimacy. Two such 'alter egos' were primary. First of all, the putative lady or gentleman who lacked refinement or had breached it. For these sorts – bounders, divorcees, cads and worse – polite society reserved the arcane practice of 'cutting', the performed denial of recognition. This counter-ritual had its own codes and choreography, which mirrored those of public salutation. The silence of a 'stiff bow', for instance, was preferable to verbal rejection. A single lady was not to cut a married one; nor could a young man cut an elder. Most importantly, a gentleman could never refuse the greeting of a lady – 'but when a woman makes herself conspicuous by . . . vulgarities in dress or conduct', one manual hastened to add, 'one may surely be excused for . . . not meeting the eyes'.⁴⁶

The more important 'other' was, of course, all others: the whole mixed populace of urban society, represented by the 'promiscuous' crowds of the street. As with cutting, to ignore such people was a positive act: it policed the borders of the bourgeois public sphere, confirming its territorial integrity. Yet the crowds also played a more complex role; they had to be excluded from the spectacle, but to witness it as well. This is why elite promenading always took place in grand, public processional spaces. It was designed to draw apart from, yet remain in the midst of, the multitude; it represented an act of occupation, not retreat: '[T]he flashing splendor of busy idleness [is a] pageant . . . displayed gratis for the passengers in the omnibus [and] the pedestrians', George Curtis observed of the coach parade. 'They sit and stroll . . . while the gay play proceeds before their eyes.' The onlookers were a necessary element of the 'pageant'. Their gaze endowed it with theatrical authority, confirming its legitimacy with the tribute of their attention: 'It is natural . . . that [a man] possessed of wealth and power should wish [to show] the eyes of his fellow-citizens his abundan[ce]' a carriage-makers' journal argued. '[N]o display of wealth and power would be tolerated . . . if it did not prove trustworthy and benevolent.'⁴⁷

Promenading was thus a double performance, a rite of mutuality within a spectacle of hierarchy. On the one hand, it represented a symbolic act of class formation. It offered genteel men and women a means of including one another in a moral collectivity, with its own ideals of cultural authority, sexual order and physical self-mastery. On the other hand, it represented a symbolic act of class subordination. It offered the gentry a means of displaying its ascendance over the whole social order, not by expelling all others from its presence, but by displacing them to the margins, as a willing audience, seeing *without* being seen. The two symbolic acts comprised a single drama. Together they mapped out an elite public-within-the-public, inscribing class and cultural hierarchy across the common landscape in New York.

As ideological dramaturgy, this was quite powerful and revealing. Yet understanding it

⁴⁵ Althusser, *op. cit.*, 160–70.

⁴⁶ Frost, *op. cit.*, 91; Ward, *op. cit.*, 283. See also Hall, *op. cit.*, 292, for the rules of cutting. My emphasis on the importance of ideological 'alter egos' here, oppositional figures *against*

which a subject-position is defined, owes much to Therborn, *op. cit.*, 27–8.

⁴⁷ Curtis, *op. cit.*, 37; *New York Coach-Maker's Magazine*, xii (November 1870), 90.

only *opens* the question of the promenade's salience for shaping class, gender and power relations in Victorian New York. The symbolic form of the ritual does little to tell us how New Yorkers really appropriated it; how they inflected or revised or resisted it; how it affected their everyday relationships and identities. We can be sure, I think, that for the middle half of the nineteenth century, on most warm days and many cold ones, New Yorkers performed or observed the little drama of solidarity and subordination which I have portrayed here. Yet what was its actual political efficacy? To explore that question, we must return from prescriptive codes and ritual protocols to the streets of New York.

IV

Let us start with the aspect of the promenade most difficult to reconstruct: the experience of the multitude who witnessed the spectacle as outsiders – what I have called the drama of subordination. Victorian pictorial and narrative accounts confirm the importance of that audience, depicting crowds of onlookers lining the promenade. '[T]hese drives do [not] constitute a source of recreation for the . . . privileged classes alone', reported a coach-makers' journal. 'Most . . . are . . . well filled with pedestrians, who seem to enjoy the pageantry as well as the best . . . provided on the drive.' Who were these pedestrians? What meanings did they give the scene? It may be that they resembled the socially aspiring readers of the etiquette books: middling young men and women literally on the edge of refinement, training themselves for entrée, taking careful notes from a distance. For such people, visiting the boulevards and studying the manuals were two versions of the same event, at once 'real' and 'prescriptive'. They would have experienced their position of inferiority – whether on the street or on the page – as nothing more than a necessary apprenticeship in the craft of politeness.⁴⁸

Then again, much of the audience may have been truly plebeian: a disreputable public of street hawkers and park labourers, newsboys and prostitutes, casualized working people who crowded the main thoroughfares as a place of labour or rough sociability. For them the parade of fashion would not have represented a training-ground, but an opportunity for trade, licit or illicit, a scene of fantasy – or perhaps a space of provocation. Certainly we find acts of resistance in which the script of elite sociability has clearly been understood and the proffered role of docile onlooker rejected. The *New York Tribune* reports one such moment in its account of traditional New Year's visiting in 1853:

The most disagreeable feature of the performance was the filthy drunkenness of certain gangs of short boys and other rowdies, who banded together, in some instances in droves of thirty or forty, and took possession of the sidewalks, driving respectable people into the gutters. . . . Broadway was in full possession of these fellows and their kindred.⁴⁹

Despite the persistence of street violence in Victorian New York, such disruptions of elite sociability were few and far between. Middle-class observers hardly ever give us the

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, xii (September 1870), 52. I am attending the promenade.

indebted to John Pemberton and Adela Pinch for the suggestion that reading etiquette books may have enacted the same sort of relationship as

⁴⁹ *New York Tribune Semi-Weekly*, 4 January 1853, 3.

sense that the presence of the populace threatened the peace or ritual order of the promenade. Quite the contrary: they tend to claim that the spectacle worked to pacify the crowd, even win its consent to the hierarchies of wealth and status being dramatized. 'Wealth and power are dangerous things, if concealed,' the *New York Coach-Maker's Magazine* argued, 'while, on the contrary, free and open display serves to enforce the equilibrium of things. . . . [W]e are . . . proud of the old man, who makes a brilliant display of his honestly accumulated wealth, and we think about making something similar ourselves.' From a carriage-makers' trade journal, of course, such views were special pleading. Yet such writers as George Curtis, Henri Browne and even Walt Whitman portrayed the parade of fashion similarly, as a seduction which arrested the gaze of the multitude and elicited its desire: 'Notice those carriages, with liveried servants,' Whitman complained in a Broadway sketch. 'Such sights are particularly pleasing to plain republican eyes . . . ; for the glory of the style aristocratic so mystifies . . . the democratic plodders on the way side, that they can only wonder and adore.'⁵⁰

What of the promenade's other aspect, the elite drama of seeing and being seen? Did it heal the uncertainties and fractures that provoked such anxiety among bourgeois New Yorkers, uniting them in the performance of respectability? Here, again, the code of sociability did not determine the uses of sociability; different people could appropriate it to organize their lived relationships in a variety of ways. Certainly genteel observers worried that the accent on display nourished 'pretension and parvenuism' in bourgeois culture. They feared that '*nouveaux riches* . . . anxious to hide their past with purple' would appropriate the promenade, making it just another site of ostentation, false identity and illegitimate power: 'For the first time . . . this winter', Maria Lydig Daly brooded in her Civil War diary, 'our new rich drive [carriages with] four horses. There were six such turnouts a few days [ago] in the park. The theaters and opera are crowded. Such things have no parallel but in the days of the French Revolution and are, I feel, ominous.'⁵¹

Yet most accounts by insiders do not stress the element of competition and deceit in bourgeois sociability. They portray a culture whose specular, impersonal codes promoted solidarity. Ironically this is clearest during the secession crisis; for it was then that the growth of ritualized sociability coincided with the deepest fractures of ideology, party and economic position among the New York bourgeoisie. Maria Daly's diary, for instance, is not filled with apocalyptic foreboding, but with the minutiae of an exhausting social scene. A pro-war Democrat, Daly mixes often acerbic commentary on *parvenus* and painted ladies, Conservatives and Radicals, with an untroubled capacity to engage them all in polite society. '[H]onest men could agree in the social circle', she wrote to a Republican lady after receiving her for a visit, even if 'they were obliged in public to consider party'. Not only in the parlour but on the promenade, divisions of party and belief could be suspended in favor of the bonds of sociability: 'Politics may rage', a columnist noted in the carriage-makers' journal, 'but Mayor Wood and Mayor Tiemann' – bitter political

⁵⁰ *New York Coach-Maker's Magazine*, XII (November 1870), 90; Browne, *op. cit.*, 126–7; Walt Whitman, 'An hour in a balcony' (1842) in Joseph Jay Rubin and Charles H. Brown (eds), *Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora . . . : A*

Collection of Recently Discovered Writings (State College, Penn., 1950), 26–7.

⁵¹ Browne, *op. cit.*, 124; [Daly], *Diary*, 318 (entry for 28 November 1864).

adversaries – “jog along” side by side, or meet “on the road” with friendly greetings, and even their horses seem to exchange looks of pride in their respective equipages’.⁵²

In practice, then, promenading seems to have marked off a space of elite fellowship apart from the disorders and deceptions of city life. And it was not simply a space of escape. For if Fernando Wood and Daniel Tiemann really did go jogging along together, if Whitman’s ‘democratic plodders’ really did stop to ‘wonder and adore’ the coach parade, then the fashioning of identities and solidarities on the promenade had some truly important consequences. It offered bourgeois New Yorkers a small but strategic way of handling the class instabilities and political fractures that attended their ascendance. Promenading helped to create a sphere of sociability which did not overturn Republican politics – Wood and Tiemann kept on opposing each other for office, after all – but rather pre-empted and pacified it. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, we know, mainstream politics was grounded in a powerful, solidary culture based on gender segregation, interclass (male) fellowship, and ‘primordial’ partisan identification, often articulated along ethno-religious lines.⁵³ Bourgeois sociability, I believe, projected an alternative cultural system, based on heterosociality, class hierarchy, and the effacing of partisan and ethnic division. This culture did not supplant established identities and loyalties, but it subjected them to the discipline of civility. It constructed a public-within-the-public whose solidarity persisted beneath and against the fractiousness of mainstream politics. (Thus we are not surprised to find our two friendly mayors, once out of office, allied in the ranks of New York’s most powerful landowners’ association.) And it invested that public with a splendour before which the masses were to gaze in mute wonder or captivated longing. ‘[P]oliteness is power’, exhorted an etiquette writer, ‘and . . . for the ambitious man there is no surer road to the highest place . . .’⁵⁴

Such a reading of elite sociability helps to make sense of the paradox with which I opened this paper: why a variant of Habermas’s public sphere took shape in the United States through solidarities which were both socially exclusionary and discursively empty. My argument suggests that it was the very vacancy of the promenade, its voiding of all overt social and personal reference, which made it so politically strategic in, and in tension with, a capitalist democracy. To borrow a metaphor from psychoanalysis, we might say that promenading placed politics under repression – that the assertion of political authority was the necessary but unnameable aspect of its meaning. Put this way, the

⁵² *ibid.*, 317 (entry for 28 November 1864), and *passim*; *New York Coach-Maker’s Magazine*, III (September 1860), 63. For another glimpse of elite sociability in the midst of, and in spite of, the Civil War, see Strong, *Diary, op. cit.*, III, 251: ‘went after dinner to the upper end of Central Park. . . . The long lines of carriages and the crowds of gents and giggling girls suggested peace and prosperity. There was nothing from which one could have guessed that we are . . . in the very focus and vortex of a momentous crisis’ (8 August 1864).

⁵³ The historiography on nineteenth-century mainstream political culture is vast, but for an introduction, see Morton Keller, *Affairs of*

State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); and Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928* (New York, 1986). The role of gender ideologies and solidarities in structuring political partisanship, participation and exclusion remains to be studied thoroughly.

⁵⁴ Maurice Francis Egan, *A Gentleman* (New York, 1893), 15, quoted in Kasson, *op. cit.*, 68. For the participation of Mayors Wood and Tiemann in the West Side Association, the voice of elite real-estate interests in the 1860s and 1870s, see West Side Association, *Proceedings of Six Public Meetings . . .* (New York, 1871).

microhistory of promenading rejoins a larger story about class and culture in Victorian America. It converges with other recent work on bourgeois practices and values in the mid- to late nineteenth century: Lawrence Levine's account of the inscribing of cultural hierarchy in theatres and concert gardens, John Kasson's study of the dissemination of the cult of manners, my own research into the ideology of park and urban landscape design. Moreover, in lyceum lectures, libraries, museums, concerts and even resorts, we find similar stories: a bourgeoisie caught between confidence and anxiety, anchoring its sense of moral legitimacy, projecting its ideals into new tutelary and leisure institutions, and thereby laying claim to a sort of effaced political authority in exchange for disseminating what Matthew Arnold had nicknamed 'Culture'. For the empire of 'Culture' was nothing, I want to argue, but politics placed under repression. Or, to quote the epigram of an etiquette manual quoting Edmund Burke:

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon these in great measure, the law depends. The law teaches us but here and there, now and then. Manners are what corrupt and purify . . . barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in.⁵⁵

V

As a ritual, then, promenading performed much the same function which Claude Lévi-Strauss ascribes to myth-making: the symbolic resolution of real contradictions. Seeing and being seen mediated a complex nexus of social and ideological tensions in late nineteenth-century New York. It both dramatized and disciplined the material attainments of the city's elites, stabilizing their sense of collective identity and collective power in an era of volatile social change. It sanctioned and regulated sexual mixing for a class which both desired and feared it. It asserted the authority of genteel culture, not as opposed, but as prior and even necessary, to the orderly pursuit of republican politics. And yet such a catalogue of mediations presents much too 'clean' a picture of the custom. What made promenading so elaborate, even obsessive, was its precarious balance of extravagance and anxiety, energy and decorum. In the end – which is to say, the end of the nineteenth century – that ritual economy broke down before the class, gender, and political tensions which it was organized to accommodate. Bourgeois New Yorkers abandoned the drives and boulevards for other, less public sites of elite fellowship.

Beginning in the 1890s, we find dramatically less evidence of the formal promenading I have discussed. Instead, the thoroughfares of fashion were given over to more specular, commodified displays, such as Dreiser captures in the second half of *Sister Carrie*: parades organized around the conferring of celebrity rather than respectability, rituals of an emergent mass culture, not a residual class culture. Nothing signals this shift from refinement to amusement more nicely than our manuals of politeness. Up until the end of

⁵⁵ Burke epigram to Hall, *op. cit.* For recent scholarship on the politics of 'culture', see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Kasson, *op. cit.*;

Scobey, 'Empire City', *op. cit.*, chaps 4–6; and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982), chap. 5.

the nineteenth century, they still codify riding and driving under 'rules of salutation'. Ten years later, these appear in chapters on leisure or sports.⁵⁶

Clearly this decline marked a transformation of the conditions to which the promenade had been a response. On the one hand, New York elites fled the avenues in the face of a mass public which no longer seemed so amenable to the drama of subordination. The last twenty years of the nineteenth century saw a more organized and culturally heterogeneous working class taking over the processional spaces of New York for its own class, ethnic and political rituals. Union Square and Ladies' Mile became a regular site of workers' parades, strike demonstrations and radical oratory. Even in the precincts of Central Park, genteel notions of park-use gave way to a more democratic, recreational vision. Ironically, then, Labor Day parades and popular athletics may have threatened the culture of politeness in a way that riots never did: not by disrupting the bourgeois public sphere, but by posing a legitimate alternative with its own organization of sociability and leisure.⁵⁷

On the other hand, genteel culture was eroding from within. Middle-class women and men began at the turn of the century systematically to reject the ideals on which the selves named 'lady' and 'gentlemen' and the politics of promenading were predicated. They abandoned a 'Victorian' model of public culture which elided respectability, sexual regulation and bodily repression in favour of heterosexual companionship, physical expressiveness, and the frank embrace of an emerging culture of sensuous, often strenuous amusement. At the same time, they invented a whole network of separate institutions for the pursuit of elite fellowship: athletic and country clubs, prep schools, fraternities and university associations, genealogical societies – sequestered, often exurban settings defined by the withdrawal of sociability from public exposure rather than the display of it.⁵⁸

As scholars like Warren Susman and Jackson Lears have argued, these phenomena mark a sea-change in bourgeois values and identity: the emergence of a new class culture, perhaps even a 'new class', whose touchstones were no longer property, propriety and self-control, but professional expertise, consumer gratification and therapeutic self-expression.⁵⁹ They also mark the emergence of a new landscape of power, and with it the end of the terrain on which seeing and being had such political salience. Like elite

⁵⁶ Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, especially chap. 31; Mrs Burton Kingsland, *Etiquette for All Occasions* (New York, 1901), 405–7.

⁵⁷ For the use of public space for labour militancy at the turn of the century, see Scobey, 'Boycotting the politics factory', *op. cit.* For the democratization of recreation in Central Park, see Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ For an introduction to this shift from 'Victorian' to 'modern' norms in middle-class culture, see John Higham, 'The reorientation of American culture in the 1890s' in John Weiss (ed.), *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit, 1965), 25–48; Lew Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago,

1981); Banner, *op. cit.*, esp. chaps 8 and 9; and John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1978).

⁵⁹ See the essays collected in Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1984), especially "'Personality" and the making of twentieth-century culture', 271–85; and Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (eds), *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History* (New York, 1983), especially Lears, 'From salvation to self-realization: advertising and the therapeutic roots of the consumer culture, 1880–1930', 3–38.

sociability, the authority of this new middle class was being 'interiorized' at the turn of the century, dispersed across a complex field of new institutions and enclaves: professional associations, corporate hierarchies, reform organizations, universities, as well as the social, educational, and fraternal settings listed above.⁶⁰ Outside that hived world of power, of course, spectacle remained central to public life; indeed, in nickelodeons and stadiums, it became one of the defining experiences of the early twentieth century. Yet where public spectacle had once worked to legitimate class and cultural hierarchy, now it served to solicit consent through mass fantasy. Where spectacle had once been a medium of self-representation by which a respectable public made visible its authority – to itself and its subordinates – now it became a mode of amusement concocted by elites who remained invisible and elsewhere.

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⁶⁰ The theme of 'interiorization' and involution of power broached here was suggested by the work of Jean-Christophe Agnew; see 'A house of fiction: domestic interiors and the

commodity aesthetic' in Simon J. Bronner (ed.), *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920* (New York, 1989), 137.