Holding doors for others

A history of the emergence of a polite behavior

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Holding doors for others as polite behavior

> »A young woman and a young man, total strangers to each other, simultaneously reach the closed […] door. She steps slightly aside, stops, and waits. He positions himself, twists the handle, pulls open the door and holds it while she enters. Once she is safely across the threshold, he enters behind her« (Walum 1974, 506).

Holding doors for others is an everyday ritual that differs according to gender, age, social status, and stigmatization; it is signified by a spatial boundary—a door—which highlights these differences. As a non-verbal act, holding doors for others is a local and situational form of politeness. It is often accompanied by an expression of gratitude such as »Thank you,« or an invitation such as »Please, after you.« The gesture can be considered a conventionalized and ritualized behavior which also accesses reflexive knowledge.[1]

This formal classification of the gesture does not at this point indicate *why* holding doors for others is considered polite. One could argue that as a voluntary act that requires effort, it is courteous. Holding doors for others thus relates to social cooperation in the form of avoiding physical exertion, according to which the amount of work promotes altruistic

1 While both areas of research relate to micro-sociological concepts, there is a distinction between a sociolingusitic approach (cf., e.g., Watts 2003; Lüger 2001) and a pragmatic approach to politeness (cf., e.g., Goffman [1967] 1982).

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behavior (Santamaria and Rosenbaum 2011).[2] Alternatively, the gesture could be marked as polite if it is viewed as a gesture of priority relating to privileges which are respected.[3]

If we consider the pattern of the gesture, rather than the various possible reasons behind it, holding doors for others appears to be a sequence of coordinated body movements and communicative actions that take place both spatially and temporally. The gesture is directed at the problem that X and Y cannot walk through the door at the same time and it hence refers to situational contingency as subsequent communications are uncertain at the given moment: who should go through the door first? Following this line of thought, holding doors for others can be described as part of an interaction ritual (Goffman [1967] 1982) that reduces this uncertainty in the form of expected reciprocity. For this to be anticipated, specific sequential bracketing is required, which marks the act as a form of polite behavior (cf. Sacks 1992, 521–23). Firstly, there is a need for mutual understanding and for the act of holding the door open. Secondly, the action of holding the door must not convey the impression to the other person that it is done to attain strategic goals or to cement prescriptive asymmetries. Furthermore, the closing of the bracket by uttering a »Thank you« should not appear to be a mere norm compliance (cf. Haferland and Paul 1996, 49–50). However, if the act is merely associated with age, gender, or a difference in socioeconomic status, it does not appear to be voluntary and does not therefore seem an expression of politeness. This applies when it is associated with motives such as being the initial phase of an intimate relationship. Y's gratitude in the form of reciprocal behavior restores the symmetry following the expenditure of time and effort; an inauthentic »Thank you« or the absence of an expression of gratitude could hence lead to a ritual inequality and subsequently to an affront (cf. Blau 1964, 91–93).

2 Santamaria and Rosenbaum (2011) point out that doors will be held open when the total effort of all those involved is reduced by a single effort, and if a critical distance between persons is maintained.

3 For a unique and brilliant insight into the complex phenomenon of doormen, see Bearman (2005).

Holding doors for others therefore often requires careful consideration and reflection. Knowing when, how, and for whom to use the gesture is subject to normative expectations about self-image and the roles of those involved; it therefore requires renegotiation if these identity factors change (Goffman 1956). This becomes particularly clear when looking at the constellation of men and women: holding a door can be interpreted as preferential treatment on the basis of physical characteristics such as strength and weakness, which reflect outdated gender roles (cf. Renne and Allen 1976; Yoder et al. 2002; McCarty and Kelly 2013). Nowadays, this asymmetry is less significant in relation to the self-representation and role expectations which affect how this gesture is negotiated—women also hold doors open for men, and both genders need to reflect on whether they do this for their own or opposite gender.[4]

As a polite behavior, holding doors for others appears to create a context which obviously restricts behavior, and which has the capacity to either reduce or increase complexity. It transforms and mediates the (content-based) incommensurability of the more or less obvious asymmetries of different individuals into a (formal) social coexistence, and thus also facilitates social togetherness in situations where unfamiliarity and diversity could otherwise lead to aggressive confrontations; it hence provides a structure to certain situations and expected outcomes (cf. Rang and Süßmann 2009, 160, 164).

Whether based on age, gender or socioeconomics, theories about the origins of holding doors for other always seem based on a difference in

4 Therefore, contingency does not necessarily have to be neutralized. Another example would be if X refers to age whilst Y refers to gender and both give each other priority. In this respect, the literature on politeness recommends that, no later than the second time, one should accept the prerogative offered, according to which the problem will be solved in time (cf. Kamptz-Borken 1951, 38). With regard to stigmatized individuals, the question also arises as to whether, for example, holding the door for a wheelchair user is an affront to the fact that he is disabled. Whatever decision is taken, holding or not holding a door can potentially be considered polite or impolite.

status (e.g., according to age, gender or socioeconomics). In contrast, this paper views this phenomenon as an empirical puzzle and suggests that the emergence of the gesture as a polite behavior is the result of a complex temporal sequence in which factual and social dimensions of meaning are intertwined. The contingent-causal understanding of sociological explanations is guided by a procedural methodological approach, as presented by Aljets and Hoebel (2017) under the title »Methodology of Processual Explanation« (MPE). The basis of MPE can be represented as a three-step process; each step has its own key concepts of basic reconstruction (event, concatenation, and sequence), complex reconstruction (multi-sequentiality, intertwinement, and inference), and temporal explanation. The basic reconstruction describes the sequentiality of events, while the complex reconstruction describes the inference of sequences and therefore serves as a form of narrative explanation (Morgan 2017; Roth 2017).

In the next section, two sequences are basically reconstructed: the factual material fashion sequence and the social politeness sequence. The material fashion sequence describes the formation, development, and eventual disappearance of the hoop skirt as a dynamic, recursive process between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries; the different shapes of the skirts serve as events. Evidence can be found in Georg Simmel's fashion theory and the historical debate is illustrated using newspaper articles, drawings, and other images. The hypothesis is that the increase in the size of hoop skirts created a functional need for doors to be opened and held for women wearing such clothing. The social politeness sequence is characterized by Norbert Elias's theory of civilization as a dynamic process, which began in about the eleventh century and has more or less continued until the present day; it is strongly connected to differentiation within society. A number of books on etiquette, which document this history, serve as events for this process.

In the complex reconstruction, both sequences are related; the underlying questions about the emergence of the practice of holding doors for others as a polite behavior can be answered historically in temporal order. These two sequences can therefore be considered to be intertwined and they

influence each other. It is not suggested that the gesture of holding doors did not exists prior to the introduction of wide hoop skirts: it is unlikely that monarchs ever had to open doors for themselves. There have always been hierarchies and complex rules which govern them, however, it can be assumed that these more formal behavior rules were not considered a matter of politeness. This paper suggests that in certain historical contexts, namely the emergence of the bourgeoisie, this practice came to be viewed as a polite behavior. In order to establish an argumentation which is (contingent) causally plausible, but which is not causally necessary, this paper examines conduct books in which this gesture is discussed. To explain the origins in a time-sensitive manner, it is necessary to refer to holding doors as a polite behavior (shortly) after the disappearance of the hoop skirt. As time is not the only dimension of meaning which structures society, this article also discusses the content and the similarities between the fashion and politeness. The concluding section reflects on the approach and limitations, and above all, proposes further exploration of the intertwinement of materiality and sociality.

Fashion and politeness as sequences—A basic reconstruction

The subsequent sections present the history of the hoop skirt and of politeness as sequences following a basic temporal order (cf. Aljets and Hoebel 2017, 8–9). Both sequences are reconstructed as dynamic, recursive processes. This enables the time period to be determined in which the polite gesture of holding doors for others established itself due to the size of hoop skirts and to the emerging bourgeoisie.

Crinoline—Dangerous fashion

The hoop skirt is a women's undergarment; it is a frame made from different materials, such as reeds or whale bone, which is covered by fabric in order to create a particular form. As a mimetic reproduction, the hoop skirt emphasizes the lower half of the female body and its extensive physiognomy; it also has architectural connotations and can be understood as a caricatured exaggeration of the female body (cf. Lehnert 2013, 76). Hoop skirts can be assigned to different eras according to the

shape and materials used; these can be regarded as events and, on closer examination, as sequences of particular events. They establish the temporal order, which »makes a difference« (Abbott 1983, 129), and places them in particular contexts: the *verdugado*, the *pannier*, the *crinoline*, and the *tournure*.[5]

The *verdugado*, a cone-shaped variant, appeared in Spain in around 1470. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the *vertugadin*, a similar skirt with a barrel-shaped form, was also worn in France. The *pannier* (French: *panier* meaning basket) is a spherical variant which was worn in the eighteenth century. The hoop skirt disappeared before the French Revolution and evolved into the *cul de Paris*, which had cushioned padding at the rear (cf. Boehm 1963, 116). This was followed by the crinoline, which occupied a special status, as will become evident later in this paper. Finally, the center of gravity of the female figure shifted to the back and the hoop skirt became shorter and smaller again. The tournure, which surrounded a small part of a woman's bottom, originated from the *crinolette* or *semi-crinoline*; this is regarded as the final phase of development of the hoop skirt. There were, however, brief reemergences in the twentieth century as the *war crinoline* in around 1915–16 and the layered petticoat in the 1950s (cf. Lehnert 2006, 103).[6]

5 For a depiction of the *verdugado*, see the painting by Frans Pourbus the Younger, *The Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia*, ca. 1598–1600, oil on canvas, 217.5 x 131.0 cm, Royal Collection, London, https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/407377/the-infanta-isabella-clara-eugenia-1566-1633-archduchess-of-austria; for the *pannier*, see Diego Velázquez, *Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress*, 1659, oil on canvas, 125,5 × 106,0 cm, Museum of Art History, Vienna, https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/2027/; for the *crinoline*, see Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *L'impératrice Eugénie entourée de ses dames d'honneur*, 1855, oli on canvas, 300,0 x 420,0 cm, National Museums and area of the palace of Compiègne, https://en.palaisdecompiegne.fr/node/249; for the *tournure*, see James Tissot, *The Bridesmaid*, 1883–85, oil on canvas, 147.3 x 101.6 cm, Leeds Museum and Galleries, Leeds, http://www.leedsartgallery.co.uk/gallery/listings/l0031.php.

6 The changes in the hoop skirt show that fashion is oriented towards a historically contingent body image, but that it also created body images through a process of grotesque exaggeration (cf. Lehnert 2013, 67). The

The emergence and disappearance of different forms of hoop skirt and the duration of particular design variants reflects the temporal process of the sequence. While the fashion sequence spans the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, individual events, such as the *verdugado*, were prevalent for different periods of time. However, the length of each process was similar as each type of hoop skirt was worn for several decades. The fact that the hoop skirt changed at all is a central feature of a dynamic fashion process referred to by Georg Simmel ([1905] 1986) as a fashion carousel. The process is driven by the fact that individuals strive to be part of a group and dress similarly to others (integration). At the same time, fashion highlights differences from other groups (differentiation) (cf. Simmel 1992, 107). It is a carousel in the sense that the upper classes introduce innovations and new fashions, while the lower classes adapt to and imitate them. In response, the upper classes react with new fashion ideas in order to individualize and differentiate themselves again (cf. ibid., 106–8). Thus, the evolution of fashion is an unplanned, trickle-down process; it is hierarchically organized and is based on a symbolic, consensual prestige structure of class differentiation.[7]

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history of the hoop skirt can therefore also be described in terms of male supremacy as this clothing emphasized the differences between the sexes. These garments reduced women's mobility, while the accentuated hips punctuated female fertility and created a physical distance from others.

7 In terms of its stability, fashion as a process can represent a device against the unexpected; it can exclude chance and favor a particular direction (path). It is a mutually binding and thus central schismogenetic process (Batson 1936). The more the lower classes adapt, the more intensively the upper classes attempt to distinguish themselves by differentiation (see Mayntz and Nedelmann 1987). In the present, finer distinctions than that of class are necessary in order to describe changes in fashions. For more on this discussion, see Davis (1992, 110–12) and Blumer (1969). The ambiguity of status is a key issue as it cannot be clearly determined; after all, one can dress in a particular way regardless of one's actual status and thus pretend to belong to a particular group. Moreover, class-related theory does not explain why a specific fashion becomes popular and spreads. This theory is therefore limited to a functional maintenance of society's social stratification system and it makes little reference to institutional,

The changing shape of and materials used in hoop skirts are evidence of this process as these garments evolved from a round, barrel-shaped form to a more spherical shape at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Boehm (1963, 205–7) describes the vertical progression of the hoop skirt—from the courtiers to the bourgeoisie, and the horizontal progression from England and Spain to Germany via Paris. The progression of certain types of hoop skirt from higher to lower classes was also influenced by price differentiation as such garments would have been beyond the budget of some social groups (cf. ibid.).

The crinoline marked a significant epoch of the hoop skirt fashion sequences and spanned a period of ten to 15 years. Crinolines were initially made from horse hair (French: *crine*) and linen (French: *linge*). They were later constructed using whale and fish bones (cf. Anonymous 1858), which were eventually replaced by steel hoops (cf. Brooke and Laver 2000, 96). While other forms of hoop skirt were part of the standard repertoire of courtly society and were thus widespread across all of the upper classes, the crinoline was also worn by lower class women. This may have been due to the use of lighter materials and industrial manufacturing, which made these garments more affordable (cf. Lehnert 2006, 115). This lighter material increased the popularity and prevalence of hoop skirts, and led to the derisive term *crinoline mania* (ibid.), which dates from about 1857–67. The term referred to the excessive size of the skirts: at the height of the craze in the 1860s, some hoop skirts were up to ten meters wide.[8] This led to huge temporal, social and factual restrictions, inconveniences and bizarre situations in daily life. In order for a crinoline to sit properly, it usually took two people and sometimes several hours to put the frames together. The ladies who wore them

economic, and political complexities. See Aspers and Godart (2013) for an excellent overview of past and recent research on the sociology of fashion and interdisciplinary approaches.

8 »[…] there was never a fashion invented that was more sexy […]. How great to come into a room and occupy six feet of space« Vivienne Westwood cited in Fred Vermorel (1996).

> »could only walk sideways through the doors, the gentleman who led them had to stay one step ahead of or behind them. When they sat down or several of them were together, they took up three times as much space as before« (Boehm 1963, 122; my translation).

Stairs and carriages were enormous obstacles so women had to be accompanied when using them and assisted in entering and leaving the carriage.[9] The sprawling skirts could even have life-threatening consequences: the Sept. 16, 1861 issue of the *Daily Dispatch* reports that during the first act of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the voluminous dress of the dancer Cecilia Gale caught fire. As her fellow dancers attempted to help her, their dresses also caught alight. Furthermore, some women fell down the stairs, others fell on the street; in total nine women died and dozens more were injured. It is estimated that around 3,000 women died in England at the time of crinoline mania, mainly because their clothes caught fire or got caught in carriages and machines.[10]

From an analytical perspective, the evolution of the hoop skirt should make it possible to identify the point at which the gesture of holding doors for others emerged as a polite behavior. It can be assumed, in particular at the peak of crinoline mania, that women's skirts were simply too wide for them to open doors unassisted; this made it necessary for

9 Photographs from that time show that it involved great effort to put on a crinoline, not to mention move around and perform everyday tasks wearing one; see the Howarth-Loomes Collection of the National Museum of Scotland, in particular the exhibition *Photography: A Victorian Sensation* (June 19–Nov. 22, 2015). Cartoonist frequently made fun of this fashion; see, for example, Paul Sorene, »Scenes from Ladies Dressing Rooms: The Crinoline Craze in the 1850s and 1860s,« Flashbak, digital collection, May 19, 2015, https://www.flashbak.com/scenes-from-ladies-dressing-rooms-the-crinoline-craze-in-the-1850s-and-1860s-35132/; »Crinolinemania—10 Fascinating Facts About the Crinoline,« 5-Minute History, accessed Feb. 5, 2018, http://www.fiveminutehistory.com/crinolineomania-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-crinoline-empire/?cn-reloaded=1.

10 See Christian Neeb, »Reifrock-Mode: Zum Sterben schön,« *Spiegel*, June 30, 2015, http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/reifrock-diekrinoline-eine-mode-die-sogar-leben-kostete-a-1040604.html.

others to hold doors for women. The gesture hence fulfilled a functional need and, as such, had nothing to do with a person's status or gender. According to the research question, this *built-in* precedence thus arose from a rational-functional structure and only later developed into a polite gesture. In order to examine this thesis, a basic reconstruction of the development of politeness is presented in the following section and serves as the second sequence. This enables us to specify the particular time period—corresponding with the emergence of the bourgeoisie—during which the gesture appeared as an interference between these two sequences. Furthermore, this reconstruction makes it possible to identify significant meaning in the content of both processes. The inferences can thus be linked more abstractly and specified theoretically beyond a parallelization of the times when these sequences occurred.

Politeness—Integrative behavior

The evolution of the sociocultural phenomena of politeness can be analyzed according to the theories of Norbert Elias (1980) as a process of filtering the impact of the coarse, violent and feudal world beyond the court.[11] This unplanned process involves social developments (sociogenesis) and changes in personality structure (psychogenesis). Both developments can be described as mutually productive autocatalytic processes of network-like interdependencies (cf. Elias 1980, 142–44); they lead to a pluralizing of sociocultural experiences and are therefore evolutionary (cf. e.g., Haferland and Paul 1996, 26–28; Linke 1996, 72–74). Sociogenesis comprises three stages; feudalization, monopolization of means of violence and power,

11 The term *sociocultural* is understood as a coding system of cultural values; hence, when social order changes, so do the cultural values of the system. A change in politeness is thus subject to inherent systemic factors (cf. Ankenbrand 2013, chap. 6, 7). On different stages and epochs of politeness, see Fidancheva (2013, 37–39); Rang and Süßmann (2009, 165–67); Machwirth (1970, 17–19); Haferland and Paul (1996); and Linke (1996). For criticism of Elias, see Duindam (1998); La Vopa (2000); Schnell (2004a, 2004b); Kuzmics (2000); and above all, Dürr (1988, 1999, 1993, 1997, 2002). Hinz (2002) also writes about this debate; and Goudsblom and Mennell (1997) disagree with Dürr's ideas.

and socialization of those monopolies (cf. Elias 1980, 298–99). Psychogenesis also involves three stages: medieval courtesy, courtly civility, and modern civilization. It leads to self-monitoring, self-discipline, restraint of instincts and emotional distance, as well as to a transformation of external constraints into internal constraints in the form of embarrassment and shame (Elias 1980, 174, 313).

Following population migration in the tenth and eleventh centuries, territorial centers of domination emerged, which in turn led to the development of the nobility during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (cf. Wenzel 1988, 106). As the seat of government and the political decision-making authority, the court was the visible form of direct rule and the highest level of society; furthermore, it represented the unity of society (cf. Siefer 1988, 130). As a figuration, the court acted as a demarcation, detached from the outside world, but it also created internal structures and integration. Courtly socialization incorporated standards of behavior, language, and ceremonies; this courtoisie formed the foundations of a society par excellence (cf. Elias 1980, 60).

This article considers language to be a means that is flexible enough to map complex dynamics and thus decipher evolving standards of behavior (cf. Krumrey 1991, 228). Conduct books hence enable a version of the history of politeness to be reconstructed. Accordingly, such books can be regarded as catechisms of the socially relevant behaviors of particular social classes and circles; they can also be seen as events that influence the sequence of evolving politeness (cf. Linke 1996, 72).[12] In the fifteenth

12 The history of the genre of books on decency, etiquette, mannerism, conversation and courtesy is a prescriptive history of normative rules, which have been recorded in writing (Häntzschel 1986; Beetz 1990; Montandon 1991; Döcker 1994). In this respect, they reflect social change and new patterns of behavior (cf. Elias 1984, 14; Häntzschel 1991, 200; Haferland and Paul 1996, 10). It cannot be denied that these books only describe ideal types of behavior and do not correspond to real behavior in the respective periods; these texts often present a contrast to actual society, as they cultivate their own images (cf. Linke 1996, 72–74; Linke 1988, 126–28; Jhering [1881–82] 2004, 49). However, the high number of editions and translations into different languages indicate that these standards of conduct

and sixteenth centuries, courtiers began to deviate from courtly codes of conduct and turn to the ancient humanistic ideal of virtuous behavior embodied as an art (cf. Fidancheva 2013, 39). The concept of courtoisie slowly declined and was partially replaced by that of civilité, which was particularly important in France in the seventeenth century (cf. Elias 1978, 181). *De Civilitate Morum puerilium* by Erasmus (1534) can be regarded as a courtly conduct book describing this era. While courtoisie was generally attributed to the court, civility was, above all, attributed to the emergence of the bourgeoisie. This can be understood as a two-layered counter-movement within the same society, as these two groups developed different standards of behavior and language (cf. Elias 1992, 171).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the readership of conduct books changed from courtly society in the seventeenth-century to a more class-defined approach, which addressed the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeois circles (cf. Linke 1996, 77). Courteousness became rigid rules of etiquette according to protocol, while empty formalities were replaced by empathy; in nineteenth and twentieth century conduct books, this was referred to as politeness of the heart (cf. Wenzel 1988, 119). According to Locke's ([1693] 1990) *Gedanken über Erziehung*, an openness to others is preferable. Rather than codified, contrived interaction, this form of politeness should result in genuine, sincere behavior (cf. Krumrey 1984, 1991).

In the late eighteenth century, the readership of etiquette books changed again from aristocratic and courtly bourgeois circles to a specifically bourgeois class. With the economic and political emancipation of this class, certain behaviors became an expression of self-confidence; the bourgeoisie taught themselves the etiquette of their class consequently creating an identity (cf. Fidancheva 2013, 41; Siefer 1988, 132). The virtue, equal opportunities, and moral superiority promoted by bourgeois society are reflected in Adolph Knigge's writings on the principles of human relations in *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (1788). Politeness was now based on a

were widespread: Montandon (1991, 230) mentions 700 to 800 books available in the nineteenth century.

responsibility to act morally according to an *ethica complementoria* (cf. Jhering [1881–82] 2004, 49).

As distinctions between social classes diminished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attitudes to politeness became more socially ambivalent. The flexibility and learnability of the forms of politeness which had been created by the bourgeoisie became problematic, since politeness was understood as a form of strategic interaction rather than a protective façade (cf. Machwirth 1970, 30–31). Following Elias's line of thought, Wouters (1986, 1999) describes a process of informalization between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; this term can be compared to Elias's references to permissiveness. There is a general consensus that in certain social contexts, such as in business, a high level of politeness endures.

As this brief history of politeness has shown, this sociocultural phenomenon is closely linked to social history and differentiation in society. Hence, concepts of politeness are constantly changing; as a result, prescriptive and descriptive interpretations also change according to the historical context. The basic reconstruction of the hoop skirt fashion sequence related to the period in which the bourgeoisie emerged. During that period, this receptive class developed their own language and behavior in order to differentiate themselves from lower classes, and above all, from courtly or noble society. It could be argued that holding doors for others is an element of this unplanned process. In the following section, the two basic reconstructions of the fashion and politeness sequences will be reconstructed in a complex manner to plausibilize this argument in a causal contingent way.

Temporal and social dimensions of the emergence of a polite gesture—A complex reconstruction

The following section examines the thesis that the emergence of holding doors as a polite gesture coincides with the development of the hoop skirt. It is therefore assumed that the basic reconstructed sequences of events are intra-sequential and the complex reconstructed sequences are inter-sequential in relation to the development of the polite gesture (cf.

Aljets and Hoebel 2017, 11–13). The MPE suggests that the two sequences are reconstructed in a complex manner by outlining a temporal causal inference, in this case by interweaving the history of materiality and sociality; references to social meaning serve as the content of this intertwinement. Thus, the focus is *not* on a causal necessity, but rather on the *proximity of meaning of unlikely events*.[13] Hence, although the gesture of holding doors may have existed as a general behavior before the crinoline fashion, it was identified as polite behavior after the emergence of the crinoline. With reference to the politeness process, holding doors for others therefore emerged as a new element or event. This can be seen as a fusion rather than a turning point (cf. ibid., 16–18; Abbott 2001, 240–60), since one process provides the other with a means of reproduction.

Temporal inference processes

Changes in the meaning of gestures usually occur when there are processes of social differentiation and, above all, of demarcation, as has been shown earlier in this article. The fashion and politeness sequences are linked within the context of the emergence of the bourgeoisie. This intersection acts as the temporal concatenation of the sequences and establishes a weak or plausible temporal causation in the changed attitude towards the gesture of holding doors (cf. Aljets and Hoebel 2017, 11). The sequences are interlinked: the introduction of hoop skirts, the middle phase of crinoline mania, and the eventual disappearance of these garments. A precise period can be specified for the disappearance of the hoop skirt thus concluding the fashion sequence. This relatively short period of time can be narrowed down even further to the time of crinoline mania: from 1857–67. As described earlier, during this period, skirts became so wide that holding doors became a rational-functional act as it was simply

13 As Elias showed in relation to other gestures, such as spitting and sniffing, gestures are always subject to a change in meaning according to attitudes, among other things: »[T]he transformation of a piece of action that serves in all its details as a pattern for something else« (Goffman 1977, 98). If that action is endowed with additional meaning, in this case with politeness, it can create new contexts (cf. Haferland and Paul 1996, 34, 53–54).

impossible for women wearing them to reach a door handle. In order to provide temporal empirical evidence for this, 78 German and English conduct books published between 1800 and 1900 were examined.[14] As the question is whether holding doors for others as a polite form emerged during this time span, the phenomenon is regarded as a weak form of causality.

Two findings are central: firstly, differences could be found between the act of holding doors for higher ranking persons and for women. This gesture is only considered in the thematic context of gender (e.g., Anonymous 1859, 319). The conduct books examined do not mention the gesture in relation to higher ranking persons. This is regarded as a form of evidence for the hypothesis that the hoop skirt led to the emergence of this gesture because they were only worn by women. It should be mentioned that holding doors for others is often referred to in relation to servants (e.g., Anonymous 1870, 24; Hartley 1873, 242–44). While this could be seen to relate to differences in rank, it could be argued that holding doors for others is not a matter

14 The examined books were analyzed by means of a basic form of content analysis using the search function in the pdf files to identify the following German terms: *Tür*, *Aufhalten*, *Aufmachen*, *Vortritt*, *Vorrecht*, and the old German expressions for door, *Thur*, *Thüre*, and *Turi*. In the English publications, a search was carried out for the English translations of these terms: door, holding, hold, open, prerogatives, preferential, primacy and privilege. The books were selected according to their availability. Fortunately, an amazing plethora of conduct books are digitalized. The central sources were the internet sites archive.org; zeno.org; hathitrust.org; and the British Library Catalogue: explore.bl.uk/. Unfortunately the gutenberg.org website was inaccessible for German IP addresses for copyright reasons at the time the research was carried out. See Krumrey (1984, chap. 4 and 15) on editors, publishers and readers of conduct and etiquette books, and on the number and size of editions. Several editions with changes in approaches to holding doors could be seen as indications that this gesture was considered as a new form of politeness. Unfortunately, only the books by De Valcourt (1855, 1865), Conkling (1863, 1868) and Hartley (1860, 1873) could be found in multiple editions, but these were not published before and after crinoline mania or there were no changes concerning the issue of holding doors.

of politeness if the person doing it is being paid for carrying out this duty and it is therefore not a voluntary act.

The second finding which directly relates to the temporal dimension of the hypothesis put forward here is that in the 31 conduct books published from 1751 to 1855, there is no mention of the practice of holding doors for others. Even more significantly, in the English conduct books published in around 1855 (e.g., Wells 1857, 97; Anonymous 1859, 319; Hartley 1860, 184, 203; Conkling 1863, 131) and in the late 1800s (e.g., Bloomfield-Moore 1878, 240; Philputt 1882, 101, 122; Smiley 1889/1892, 34), the gesture of opening and holding doors is mentioned more frequently. In the German conduct books which were examined, this gesture is only mentioned at the end of the eighteenth century (e.g., Ernst 1884, 133; Calm 1894, 251–52; Kistner 1886, 62). From the beginning of the twentieth century, it is frequently mentioned in books in both languages (e.g., York 1893, 312–13; Vogt 1894, 156; Berger 1895, 65; Sandison 1895, 17; Cooke 1896, 31; Wedell 1897, 299; Schramm 1897, 30, 32; Holt 1904, 377; Pilati 1907, 29–30; Schütte 1934, 33). In American conduct books, holding doors for others, especially for women, is mostly mentioned in relation to attending church (Wells 1857, 97); it was also addressed prior to 1855 (e.g., Bayle-Mouillard 1833, 4; Hervey 1852, 116–17). No link to holding doors at church as polite behavior was found in German conduct books.[15]

In German encyclopaedias, there are earlier references to holding doors for others in relation to order of precedence (ger.: *Vortritt*).[16] However,

15 For an amusing example of how troublesome doors are and how important reflexive knowledge was in this regard, see De Valcourt (1865, 401). He refers to the reader as a »poor friend« if he thinks entering a room is a simple matter; he then goes on to describe which foot one should enter a room with if the door opens to the right or the left, as well as what one should do with one's hat and how one should observe others during this process.

16 See *Pierer's Universal-Lexikon*, 4th ed. (Altenburg: Pierer, 1864), s.v. »Vortritt«; and *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Sohn, 1801), s.v. »Der Vortritt.« At the time, the word was rarely used in standard German.

since this study is not about the privilege, but about the explicit act of opening and holding doors, and its normative role as polite behavior, these factors can be disregarded. The simple act of holding doors for others was first referred to at around the time wide hoop skirts were introduced.

Considering social strata

While the temporal intertwinement shows that the events in the fashion sequences can serve as elements reproducing the politeness process, the content of both processes has a similar social dimension and therefore has further content-related compatibilities. Firstly, both fashion and politeness—as well as the theories discussed earlier, which describe their development—refer to times when different social classes viewed each other with skepticism. Simmel and Elias respectively describe recurrent fashions and politeness processes as forms of mutual adaptation and as the distancing of two social groups: the upper and lower classes. While the upper classes developed their own fashion combinations, standards of behavior, language, and ceremonies, the lower classes strived to adopt these practices. This brings about the creation of new combinations and behavioral forms among the upper classes and leads to negotiation, rejection and differentiation between the two groups.

The second shared reference, which is closely linked to this mechanism of progress, is the negotiation of membership in the form of inclusion and exclusion (cf. Felderer and Macho 2002, 19). The mechanisms of adaptation and differentiation lead to identification with the establishment or the outsiders (Elias and Scotson 1965). Clothing, as well as language and behavior, indicates which group people belong to, so individuals from both classes negotiate their membership to particular social groups and classes, and thus also their place as individuals in society. Both groups play significant roles as they demonstrate an individual's need to dress, act, and speak differently in different groups, but also in different social contexts, such as business, family, or politics.

Fashion and politeness both have a public face. According to the theories of von Jhering ([1881–82] 2004, 7–8), in a third shared social reference, the two phenomena are connected by means of deviation. Impolite

behavior or an extravagant appearance can lead to contempt and, in extreme cases, to exclusion from a social group. This puts pressure on individuals to adapt both these forms of behavior. Unsociability and an over-individualized appearance increase contingency, perhaps even leading to the expectation of rude behavior from an individual who has a particularly eccentric appearance. Through their communitizing functions, both fashion and politeness share a prophylactic purpose. They allow for unconventional, but not harmful behavior; transgression from norms leads to exclusion and improper behavior is treated as a disturbance (cf. ibid., 10). As both fashion and polite behavior involve personal acts: an individual needs to ensure that they do not to look too similar to others or behave too differently in relation to their social group. Hence, both these phenomena also generally bind the individual to society in a way which primarily relates to the fundamental concepts of subjectivity and social self-observation (cf. Elias 1980, 351–52).

The distinctions between behavior and appearance, and between actual and simulated politeness, cast doubt on the clear differentiation between group memberships; it can be assumed that there are motives and intentions behind actions (Weinrich 1986). A permanent suspicion of motives is therefore a fourth shared reference, since behavior is oriented towards external expectations and staging (cf. Fidancheva 2013, 28–30). The unclear boundary between upper and lower class groups tends to create metastases in the dichotomy of natural being and artificial appearance, both of which distinguish themselves through deviation (cf. Kimmich and Matzat 2008, 10–12). This also applies to fashion since one can dress in a way that implies membership of a particular social group and hence become part of that group. Both fashion and politeness processes can therefore lead to skepticism and reservations as they can be viewed as calculated actions (Stäblein 1997).

To summarize the arguments for the content-related similarities between the two processes, both sequences share a temporal intertwinement and content-related dimensions. It can be concluded that the emerging bourgeoisie adopted the practice of holding doors as a polite gesture and as a behavioral expectation *during* and *after* the emergence of the hoop skirt.

The data examined does not provide conclusive evidence for a strong causal explanation. In general, it is simply too difficult to establish such a causal connection, however, what this analysis does is to offer plausibility. In this regard, it presents a case for how materiality and sociality are intertwined and how such cases can be investigated.

Holding doors for others—An example of the complex intertwinement of sociality and materiality

This article presented the practice of holding doors as a polite gesture and explored its origins. It pursued the thesis that the gesture arose from a functional need, due to very large hoop skirts, which was later coded as politeness. This was discussed using a methodology of processual explanation. In order to examine the development of the hoop skirt and politeness, first a basic reconstruction was created. This was followed by a complex reconstruction, which looked at these two sequences as temporally intertwined and as content-related processes. It became apparent that the gesture of holding doors as polite behavior appeared in conduct books during and after the period in which the widest hoop skirts were worn. It is also evident that the two processes share various references in terms of their content. The analysis offers an explanation that is plausible, but calls for further study to confirm it.

In order to establish with greater certainty that the central time of origin for the gesture of holding doors as a polite form was during the popularity of the hoop skirt, in particular at the time of crinoline mania, further sources could be analyzed, such as novels, essays, diary entries, letters, notes, and newspaper articles written at that time. Furthermore, French, Spanish and Italian etiquette books should be examined since the hoop skirt was also widespread in those countries. As this research was concerned with establishing what may have happened and is therefore about counterfactual or transformational approaches (Beatty 2017), it would be interesting to examine whether the gesture also emerged as a polite behavior

in other cultures where fashions for particularly large items of clothing can be found.[17]

As differentiation of society (Luhmann [1997] 2012) played a central role in these arguments, one could investigate the emergence of the semantics of love, which occurred during the same period of history. Due to the dissolution of social classes, the question arose as to how and which romantic partners should to be selected since this was no longer determined by social class structures (Luhmann 1994). Newly adopted gestures served as a function to reduce contingency and could be considered signs of a good male partner; women who knew how to behave in response to such rituals could also be viewed as worthy. In this regard, one final speculation can be made: the adoption of the gesture of holding doors can be regarded as a form of problem solving, since the emerging bourgeoisie had difficulties recruiting members. Guaranteed membership by birth was excluded, therefore recruitment was only possible from *below*. This created a permeable demarcation line and therefore an uncertainty about status (cf. Links 1996, 91). This new form of polite behavior may therefore have helped individuals to differentiate and emancipate themselves while at the same time stabilizing their own identities.[18]

Furthermore, the theoretical conciseness with regard to the contents of the sequences could provide information about the similarity between the phenomena of fashion and politeness. This calls for a more precise

17 In order to show a further concatenation of the sequences, other fashion objects could be analyzed as well. The creation and disappearance of white lace gloves as fashion accessories would be interesting, for example, as it can also be assumed here that women avoided touching dirty door handles in order to protect their hands. In addition, another form of hoop skirt, the tournure, could be investigated with a similar procedure to establish the extent to which these skirts contributed to the polite gesture of pushing in chairs for women. It might also be interesting to consider the question of the width and weight of doors, which would consider architecture as another material *actor*.

18 Walum (1974, 506) refers to holding doors as a gesture of »middle-class society.« For Mills (2003, 206), it is a gesture of »white, middle-class men to white, middle-class women.«

investigation of the theories of Georg Simmel and Norbert Elias from a relationist perspective (cf. Ebers 1995; Neckel 1997; Häußling 2010; Waizbort 2013). However, the theoretical aim of this research is primarily based on the factual dimension: This paper implicitly represents an attempt to formulate an example of the influence of objects on the emergence of (politeness) norms and expectations par excellence. The relationship between sociality and materiality has been explored in many ways in recent decades (see for example Samira et al. 2014; Kalthoff et al. 2016). The case examined here suggests an actor-network perspective since the hoop skirt can be viewed as an actor that intervenes in the social sphere. In his studies on the Berlin key (1996) and the Italian hoteliers' key (1991), Latour showed, for example, that objects have translation capacities as well as the ability to act and to structure social expectations. One criticism of Latour is that he does not consistently follow the symmetry he suggests, and that the programs of action are still put into practice by actors. This research could be seen as a case that meets this criteria, as the hoop skirt establishes its own program of action and translation capacities towards differentiation of society. It is a contingent moment because the material and social aspects are symmetrical, i.e., they enter into a relationship which is unpredictable, hence introducing expectations to the act of entering a building or a room. Social change cannot therefore be explained by non-societal causes, but rather by man-made artifacts that affect society in a way that could not have been foreseen (Hahn 2015). It is the result of reciprocal processual relations between a network of humans and objects, a practice in which things »borrow their steel-like quality from a fragile society« (Latour 1986/90, 266; my translation).

The question of how expectation structures are formed and stabilized in a complex historical setting is closely connected to this. If current expectations are related to the constellations in which they arise, this can shed light on how such structures change, as well as on the variations that can develop, and the limitations and exaggerations which they are subject to. With regard to this topic, closer links between historical and social science research are not only desirable, but would be invaluable. Research on politeness is significant since it allows for interdisciplinary cooperation

between historians, sociologists, literary and communication studies scholars, and other disciplines in equal measure (Boothe 2007).[19]

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