6

The Sociable Self

The previous part traced the introduction of two of the keywords of modern social history and theory into English: 'modern' and 'society'. Using printed title-pages as a discursive index, it showed that 'modern' and 'society' were first deployed within three years of each other, in the second half of the 1570s. In the case of both words this was done by English humanists looking to compare their present with the classical past; to emulate and disseminate the learning and knowledge of ancient Rome and Greece in the vernacular; and so to reform their contemporary commonwealth. For Thomas Digges, 'modern' established this relationship with the ancients temporally: by adopting classical theory, he looked to transcend the limitations of his 'Gothic' inheritance by direct engagement with the earlier civilization. For John Barston, 'society' provided the means of establishing an associational and institutional continuum between republican Rome and the borough of Tewkesbury. As tellingly, both Digges and Barston dedicated their treatises to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. Leicester was a prodigious patron of educated talent and the presiding spirit of the more militant and interventionist end of English and continental Protestantism – English 'puritanism' broadly defined. The initial use of 'modern' and 'society' was, as this suggests, inextricable from confessional conflict at home and abroad: 'modern' first proliferated on texts about modern war; 'society' (despite Barston's attempts to make the word indigenous) initially signified The Society of Jesus above all other associational groups. Thereafter the uptake of both words by the writing and reading public was comparable; by 1700 they were well-established fixtures within English print culture.

Preceding chapters also outlined the history of two older terms with conceptual affinities with 'society'. The first of these, 'company', was the Anglo-Norman synonym of *societas*. Although it pre-dated 'society' in English by several centuries, the chronology of 'company' after the 1570s was remarkably similar to its Renaissance equivalent. Taken together, the increasing prominence of 'company' and society' on printed title-pages suggests a burgeoning recognition of the power of deliberate and purposeful association at precisely the moment when 'modern' became a feature of English print consciousness. The language of 'commonwealth' – the word closest in sense to our contemporary understanding of society – provides an altogether more complex and contested story. However, in certain crucial respects this history likewise converges with that of 'modern', 'society', and 'company'. Most importantly, the notion of 'commonwealth' that became normative after the social and semantic conflicts of the mid sixteenth century was deeply indebted to humanism. This was true in the sense of the importation of ideas about *res publica* over the long dureé. It was also true in terms of the semantic finessing by those Cambridge humanists who exerted so much cultural and political power in the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth. As significantly, it was through the weight of international Protestantism – and the patronage of Leicester – that this 'modern' idea of commonwealth became legitimated in print after 1559. The publication in the 1580s of both 'Smith's Commonweal' and its satirical inversion, 'Leicester's Commonwealth', illustrated the extent to which 'commonwealth' had been appropriated as a term of both the Renaissance and the Reformation. The astonishing efflorescence of 'commonwealth' writing after 1649 in turn illuminated the force of these processes and the vitality of the word. That it became inextricably linked to regicide and republicanism insured the utter disavowal of the vocabulary – if not the concepts so signified – following the restoration of monarchy in 1660.

These emergent lexicons offer one means of demarcating the more general transition from medieval to modern society. This is true diachronically, in the sense that their early history in English marks a significant period of discursive and conceptual change. It is also true synchronically, in that each of these words, and the larger processes to which they were connected, helped shape the way that people at the time viewed their world and their place within it. Having sketched (albeit crudely) the scale and pace of their respective assimilation into the printed vernacular, the final two chapters now consider the implication of this process for two well-known features of early modern social development. The focus of Chapter 7 is on English colonialism

and national incorporation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The chapter suggests that the dialectic with the ancients was fundamental to defining and driving England's imperial agenda. It also argues that companies, societies, and commonwealth were axiomatic to the organization and implantation of that agenda. English imperialism and nationalism were not simply an achievement of the 'state', as historians and sociologists often assume, but also a triumph of voluntary and purposeful association. This was as true for the plantation of Gaelic Ireland as it was for settlement in America and trade in the Indies. Before turning to the macro realm of geo-politics, however, Chapter 6 considers the altogether more intimate sphere of inter-personal relations, behavioural norms, and notions of the self. It contends that the concept of company offers an important means of understanding social interaction in the past: that it can serve, like 'the family' and 'the state', as a category of historical analysis through which and by which experiences in general can be recovered. On from this, the chapter argues that early modern England witnessed the dissemination of a particular set of behavioural expectations and conventions – what early moderns took to be 'manners' – that were quintessentially 'modern' in the Renaissance sense of that term. Although very much a feature of the micro-politics of everyday life, the valorization of classical precepts by England's 'middling' and 'better' sort had quite as profound an impact on social identities, relationships, and distinctions, as well as communicative expectations and skills, as the developments considered in Chapter 7.

It should be stressed from the start that historians and sociologists have long argued that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed, for better or worse, changes in both the codes of conduct informing social interaction and (by extension) the behavioural habits expected of the self. Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris all bewailed the detrimental effects of 'classicism' and 'commerce' on the expressive and sociable capacities of individuals: the modern malaise was to be found not simply in architecture or differentials of wealth but also the 'manners' of the people and the quality of their social relationships (Waithe 2006, 160). Indeed, Morris's intense and lifelong experimentation with different kinds of 'company' – from the Pre-Raphaelite 'brotherhood' to Morris & Co. to the Hammersmith socialists – reflected a largely fruitless obsession to create the kind of environment which would sustain the bonds and reciprocities of fellowship which, as he saw it, had been destroyed by capitalism. If Morris's perspective presaged the Christian socialism of Tawney then William Johnson perceived himself, in contrast, as the custodian of modernity insofar as it affected the educated elite of Victorian society.

He used his role as pedagogue to the privileged few in order to inculcate classical habits of thought and behaviour rather than knowledge *per se*; it was on these humanist foundations that his creed of aristocratic republicanism (as he styled it) rested (see above, Chapter 1). Johnson may well have drawn on the more nuanced observations of Matthew Arnold, who noted how the great promise of the classical ('Hellenic') turn in Europe had been eclipsed in the course of the sixteenth century by various stripes of evangelicalism ('Hebraism'). For Arnold both of these cultural trends, as the mainstays of Western European civilization, were implicit in manners and attitudes as well as aesthetic preferences (or lack of them). So, too, was the 'anarchy' in their absence as suggested by the capitalist credo of 'Doing as One Likes' (Waithe 2006, 160).

The Victorian identification of the Reformation and Renaissance as epiphanies within a longer cultural dureé presaged the work of two of the founding fathers of twentieth-century sociology. Max Weber saw a direct connection between objective cultural change – in this instance, the rise of ascetic Protestantism – and the acquisition of ostensibly 'rational' behaviours and attitudes by individual subjects. For Weber the tenets of Calvinism – such as thriftiness, hard-work, moderation, reason, and self-control – outlived the context of their initial development to become the behavioural strait-jacket that encased modern economic endeavour. As precepts for living as well as salvation they represented, in effect, the 'spirit of capitalism' (Weber 1992, 181). What Weber did for the Reformation, Elias repeated for the Renaissance. He argued that the rediscovery of the ancients in fourteenth-century Italy signified not so much the possibility of 'sweetness and light' (as Arnold claimed) as the onset of unprecedented levels of social disciplining and control. This was imposed not by force of arms or political pressure but by the dissemination and internalization of codes of 'civility' and the attendant sanctions of embarrassment, shame, and ridicule. Insofar as 'the civilizing process' was concerned, it was the fork rather than the gun – table manners rather than military tactics – that precipitated the onset of modernity (Elias 2000, 89–92).

English social historians have subsequently explored the sociological impact of 'Hebraism' and 'Hellenism'. Forms of evangelical godliness have long been taken to be primary cultural progenitors of early modernity, usually in drives for social regulation and reform (Thompson 1991, 53–4; Wrightson 1996, 25–31). 'Intense religiosity' lay at the heart of local and national campaigns for the 'Reformation of Manners' (Ingram 1996, 78, 79–81). It was also integral to the 'disassociation of polite and plebeian cultures' by

1700, whereby 'sharper distinctions of education, religion, attitudes, beliefs and manners' reinforced 'the polarizing effects of demographic and economic development' (Wrightson 1982, 13–14). This story of cultural conflict and differentiation accords in many respects to that told by Keith Thomas from a more anthropological perspective, not least in terms of the inextricability of economic and cultural developments. However, as an early proselytizer of Elias's 'civilizing process' Thomas was also more attuned to the social impact of Renaissance humanism. As early as 1977 he argued that the 'revival' of 'classical doctrine' in the sixteenth century facilitated an encompassing social 'movement to develop new standards of bodily control and social decorum' that 'covered a wide range of behaviour'. Concerned specifically with the 'place of laughter', Thomas noted that this 'cult of decorum led to a profound divergence between the streams of polite humour and folk humour'; by the end of the seventeenth century 'it was only the vulgar who could go on laughing without constraint' (Thomas 1977, 79, 81). The same process has been surveyed as a European phenomenon by Peter Burke, who regards it as 'a strategy' of the 'upper classes' for 'distinguishing themselves from those whom they perceived as their social inferiors' (Burke 2000, 39).

This chapter contributes to this historiography in two stages. The first considers 'company' as a general category of historical analysis for appreciating the acquisition and performance of behavioural norms within contexts of sociability. Recent studies have emphasized that people in the past were more capable of engendering their own particular conventions than Weber and Elias, or indeed Thomas and Burke, allowed (Wood 1996, 267, 277; Shepard 2003, 11; Griffiths 2008, 22–3; Withington 2009b, 65). Moreover they did so not as atomized individuals but as members of groups – 'societies' and 'companies' foremost among them (Muldrew 1998, 151–7; Barry 2000, 192–4). What follows accordingly outlines a number of intersecting factors which at once shaped the formation of company and allow the 'tangled, messy, skein of overlapping and intersecting social networks' to be approached and compared historically (Wrightson 1996, 11–12). It was in precisely these kinds of situation that social habits were shared, learned and performed (Withington 2007b, 301–3). Part II then considers the kind of behaviour perceived as especially 'modern' in the 'early modern' sense of that term: in particular, the process by which classical precepts and values were appropriated and disseminated as templates for contemporary 'manners'. The dissemination and assimilation of civility was certainly one feature of this process. However, so too was the unprecedented valorization of 'wit' and 'ingenuity'. The chapter argues that

from the last decades of the sixteenth century 'wit' and its correlates came to justify a host of insubordinate and humorous practices that were not so much the inversion of civility – what Anna Bryson describes as 'anti-civility' – as tenets of humanism in their own right (Bryson 1996, 243).

Company and Historical Analysis

Chapter 4 showed that early modern 'societies' and 'companies' ranged from informal interactions (like men 'making merry' in an alehouse) to formal corporations (like the Royal Society or East India Company) with varieties of social networks and institutions in between. It also argued that while this spectrum of associational forms clearly made for an increasingly diverse range of groupings and activities, the concept of purposeful association remained remarkably stable. The point of what follows is to show that there is a similar congruity insofar as the constituent parts of different types of company and society were concerned. Although any two instances of purposeful association differed in terms of their institutional, sociological, and cultural particulars, there were generic similarities which historians can analyse and compare. These include a company's purpose or purposes; its concentration and organization of powers and social 'capital'; its internal structure (including hierarchies, rules, and roles); the sociology of participation; its prevailing culture; and the kinds of behaviour or *habitus* expected of participants. It is worth considering each of these factors in turn.

All companies had, by definition, a purpose or purposes associated with them. This was as true for large and ancient corporations like the London livery companies as it was for modern initiatives like the Society for the Reformation of Manners or 'the secret Practices and Cabals of the Lewd apprentices' which, according to one 'eminent citizen's son', structured 'our modern Debauches' (Anon. 1683). The rationale of civic societies and companies were formalized in charters and founding myths and reproduced in rituals, pageants, and other modes of civic performance and display; they are relatively straightforward for the historian to recover. The reasons behind everyday sociability – on the doorstep, for example, or in the alehouse – were inevitably more tacit and elusive, although one of the aims of sermons, advice books and other prescriptive literature was to make the purpose clear. Whether company was formal or ephemeral its purpose was, in fact, always a question of debate,

interpretation, and possible contention. This is true at the level of printed discourse. Proponents of guilds and companies like John Barston presented them as the agents of civility and commonwealth as well as economic profit. Critics like Thomas Hobbes (and subsequently Adam Smith) styled corporations as private enterprises dedicated to the enrichment and protection of their members. It is also true in terms of the contrasting (and less recoverable) perspectives of particular companions, participants, and society members. It is impossible to know, for example, how many free miners in Derbyshire identified with the official corporatism and 'collective identity' bestowed by their courts, rights, and customs (Wood 1996, 279). We do know that when Elizabeth and Mary Marshall agreed to join two London citizens 'in company' in October 1662 they did so in order to 'make merry', visit the playhouse, and possibly glimpse the king in Greenwich. However, for the citizens John Leake and Richard Odingsells who orchestrated 'the company' the ulterior motive was to persuade and cajole the sisters into clandestine marriages (Withington 2007b, 303–7). Purposes also proliferated because people could encourage their companies to develop inadvertent functions. As well as repositories of legal expertise and contacts, the Inns of Court were crucial agents of the English Renaissance after 1560, patronizing classical translations, plays, treatises, and revels, and structuring the formation of generations of literary circles and clubs (O'Callaghan 2007; Winston 2010a; 2010b). Likewise many kinds of society and company – from religious networks to colonial companies to alehouse sociability – developed into hubs of political debate, decision-making, and collective activism during the troubles of the mid seventeenth century. The essential polyvalence of purpose is ensured, finally, by the different interpretative frameworks which historians and social theorists inevitably bring to the table. Since the Second World War they have ranged from varieties of historical materialism, with its emphasis on class interests, to sociological functionalism, and the imperative of 'social control', to more recent discussions of 'social capital' and the possibilities of social empowerment (Putnam 2000).

Whichever perspective is preferred it is clear that societies and companies were an important means of organizing, cultivating, and often enclosing different kinds of capital and power, whether social, economic, political, cultural, and/or military (Putnam 2000, 21–2; Corfield 1995, 248). Urban corporations offer the most obvious example of how privileges and 'freedoms' (as they were termed) could be clustered together for the use of society members. These usually involved the right to trade and manufacture in a particular town or

city, to train apprentices and employ journeymen, to receive forms of public charity and support (material and spiritual), to hold civic and legal offices, to bear arms in defence of the community (as watchmen and militias), and to be represented in parliament and the central courts as a corporate 'body', or 'commonweal'. These powers came with many public obligations and responsibilities and they were only available to people – usually men – who were formally enfranchised, on oath, to the corporation: that is 'freemen', 'burgesses', 'citizens', and their household dependants (Barry 2000). Over the course of the early modern period other kinds of company increasingly served to organize and concentrate different kinds of power. John Lilburne described the concentration of spiritual credit when he defined the 'true church' in 1645 as 'a company of believers who are washed in the blood of Christ by a free and voluntary consent or willingness to enter into that [. . .] holy state, city or kingdom – and by the power of Christ to become a constituted or politique body or corporation' (Lilburne 1645, 28). Sir John Reresby had a different kind of power in mind when he recalled 'the garrison I formed' in the city of York in September 1686 as 'ten companies consisted of 500 (beside officers) and the daily guards of 80 men (by detachment of eight out of every company' (Reresby 1991, 433).

The organization of military force was different again to the kind of power described in *The Case of Richard Thompson and Company* in 1677. Thompson explained how he and three friends 'being severally possessed of considerable Estates, did upon 2 January 1670 (as is frequent with other merchants) enter into a Society among ourselves, giving our joint-bonds for security to all such persons as offered money to be deposited with us' (Thompson 1677, 3). The company thereafter enabled 'several advantageous or probable Trades: That of Wine, that of Silk, that to Russia, parts of East India Shipping, the private trade to East India, the Irish manufacture, Exchange, etc, omitting nothing within the compass of ingenuity' (4). The accumulation of financial capital differed, in turn, from the social capital that company offered the wine merchant Marmaduke Rawdon. He remembered how 'he passed the winter [of 1656] in York very merrily, with good fires, good cheer, and good company, and was so admired amongst the young ladies, that on Valentine's Day he had notice of fifteen, whose names I have seen' (Rawdon 1863, 83–4). It was through his 'company' that Rawdon's friendships, reputation, and status were constructed and the possibilities of social action – in the sense of what he did and who he did it with – established. The company of Rawdon confirmed his position among the urban elite (he boasted that his many Valentines 'were the daughters of knights, and those that were not were young gentlewomen of very good quality' (84)). However, across the social spectrum it was through the active participation in company that charity, credit, neighbourliness, and networks of mutual support were created and accessed. In this respect the creation of 'Friendly Societies' and other kinds of co-operative institution at the end of the seventeenth century formalized associational bonds and the pooling of charitable aid and resources that had long characterized the neighbourliness of local communities (Wrightson 1982, 51–7; 2007). The formation of workers 'combinations' at around the same time adopted the template of the guild in order to pool, protect, and control the provision of skilled male labour (Thompson 1991, 56–61; Rule 1996, 302–6; Chase 2006, 187–9). The flipside of this was that the inability to associate – whether through choice or exclusion – represented a deprivation of powers and the capacity for collective action. It is no coincidence that the two most economically and politically vulnerable social groups in early modern England – the labouring poor and most classes of women – were for the most part deprived the means of the capacity for purposeful organization (Pelling 2000, 49; Shepard 2008, 90–1, 94–5).

In the third instance, the concentration of powers usually entailed the creation of roles, rules, and hierarchies for companions and participants: institutional structures which shaped the dynamics or politics of interaction within any particular grouping. Again, incorporated societies and companies offer the most obvious example. In early modern York the corporate community sub-divided into a 'mixed polity' of councils, companies, assemblies, and committees, all with their particular functions, hierarchies, and cliques. While the craft companies of Newcastle-Upon Tyne evolved constitutions that were broadly democratic in nature (in the Aristotelian sense of that term), those in Ludlow were much more oligarchic in structure (Withington 2005, 107–12, 169–71). When John Awdelay set about describing 'the crafty company of Cozoners and Shifters' who (he claimed) populated the streets of Elizabethan London he also invoked a formal hierarchy of roles and functions: 'An Upright man . . . is of so much authority, that meeting with any of his profession, he may call them to accompt, and command a share or snap unto himself, of all that they have gained by their trade in one month'; 'A Kitchen Mortes is a Girl, she is brought at her full age to the Upright man to be broken, and so she is called a Doxy, until she comes to the honour of an Altham (a married woman)'; 'A Prygman goes with a stick in his hand like an idle person. His property is to steal clothes off the hedge'; and so on (Awdelay 1575, Aii–Aiii). The structures and roles so described

implied (however fallaciously) solidity and permanency. Yet even the most informal interactions developed institutional structures that were specific to the moment (Goffman 1972; Burke 2000). 'Making merry' was, for example, an intricate process of jesting, singing, playing, drinking, arguing, bragging – and perhaps dancing, gaming and smoking – in which different companions at different moments would have been expected to fulfil particular roles and duties: as jester, balladeer, discussant, host, friend, audience, 'wit'. Some would have been better at it than others: there was a hierarchy of performance that was possibly (though not necessarily) determined by social position and status derived from other contexts and companies. Doorstep gossiping likewise involved (at the very least) an interlocutor, a subject, an audience, and a response – as with any conversation, the construction of rumours and 'common fames' required people to know what to do (and how to do it) in relationship to others.

Fourth, the institutional terrain created within companies was closely linked to the sociology of participation. By this is meant the sorts of people included in and excluded by different kinds of 'society'; the criteria for and politics of inclusion and exclusion; and so the kind of participation involved. Once again, the sociology of corporate bodies like guilds, colleges, and Inns of Court is easiest to trace practically (there are often membership lists) and in terms of its process: prospective members underwent particular training (apprenticeship, schooling), submitted to certain rituals (formal and informal), and usually had the backing of family, patrons, or charitable institutions. They tended to be male and from a middling background or upwards. One of the many things that perturbed contemporaries about the proliferation of Lilburne's 'true churches' was that, as Peter Lake has noted, the usual criteria for companionship – class, gender, and learning – was skewed (Lake 2001). That is not to say sectarian companionship was without participatory hierarchies and distinctions: there were very real differences between charismatic preachers, lay patrons, and zealous brethren. The same was true of other kinds of association. Becoming a corporal in Sir John Reresby's company was different to becoming a lieutenant; the four merchants who formed Richard Thompson and Company (the 'debtors') were distinct from the 'creditors' who invested 'the more Superfluous parts of their Estate for an income'. (As Thompson lamented, it was the Debtor who 'employs his whole Time, and Industry; binds his whole fortune; and which is more, exposes all his Reputation for Security to the Creditors' Humour, or Convenience' (Thompson 1677, 5)). Likewise the 'very good company' of Marmaduke Rawdon divided between his close 'friends' and his wider 'society'.

The institutionalization of particular kinds of social exclusion – for example, of women and labourers from most kinds of incorporated activity ('true churches' notwithstanding) – was one means by which the patriarchal and class inequalities of early modern England were sustained and reproduced. However, these general distinctions were the product of innumerable instances of everyday interaction and negotiation. Returning to England in the 1650s Rawdon assembled, for example, a 'company' to hire a coach and horses from Dartmouth to London 'wholly to themselves'. He recalled 'being on Monday morning betimes with some company in the kitchen drinking some burnt claret before they took coach' when a 'proper handsome young woman' approached with a 'great suit to him'. Rawdon 'desired her to sit down and drink a cup of burnt claret' and she explained how her husband required her to visit London immediately on urgent business; she had hoped to travel in the coach hired by Rawdon and his company but had been warned by the 'mistress' of the inn that they 'would not suffer any to go therein but their own company'. Rawdon then

> asked her what country-woman she was; she answered, Yorkshire. He asked her whereabouts; she said, Three miles from York. He asked her if she knew the Lady Jacques, she said she knew her, and some other of his relations he asked her for, very well. 'Well', said he, 'mistress, I am your countryman, and you shall not only have a place, but you shall have the best place in the coach' – 'by himself' – 'and she dined and supped constantly with them'. (Rawdon 1863, 70–1)

The interview nicely dramatizes the variety of criteria informing the woman's inclusion in this particular company: class and status (as reflected in her appearance and deportment) but also shared antecedents within a stratum of Yorkshire society. The experience of Ann Wintringham in the Yorkshire village of Wistow was altogether less salutary. It was testified by her neighbour, Simon Wright, how a group of neighbours met in the alehouse of George Morrett one evening to mark the move of another neighbour, Robert Shaw. Wright told the church courts (where the incident was recorded) that

> All the company then present met on purpose to drink a glass of ale and were merry and when Ann Wintringham in a very quiet and moderate manner came to request her husband to go home with her without giving any disturbance yet Mr Shaw without any provocation bid her husband turn her out of doors otherwise he would, whereupon she said if there was room for husband there was room for her. (BI 1691)

The situation then escalated into verbal and physical violence as the boundaries of the company were contested.

Fifth, companies and societies were defined by their language and culture. This was true in terms of the way people spoke or were expected to speak to each other. It was true in terms of the conventions and rituals which, in addition to hierarchies and roles, structured particular instances of social interaction. It was true in terms of the spatial logic of companies – the places in which different kinds of purposeful association were most likely to assemble – and their material cultures: the objects and things which marked and lubricated different kinds of companionship. And it was true in terms of the (albeit more amorphous) sense of ethos associated with particular types of interaction, network, institution, and corporation. This interlocking nexus of language, conventions, spaces, materials, and ethos was clearly axiomatic to the objective shape and subjective meanings of company. To take a clearly defined example: a 'free and open society of ingenious gentlemen' was formed by James Harrington and friends in the winter of 1659/60 in order to debate political questions in the manner of classical republicans. The discourse was structured accordingly. Participants were expected to read Harrington's pamphlet *A model of a free-state, or equall common-wealth* 'being proposed in Print, shall be first read and then debated by Clauses'; that 'such as will Debate, be desired to bring in their Queries upon, or Objections against the Clause in Debate, if they think fit, in writing'; 'that Debate being sufficiently had upon a Clause, the Question be put by the Balloting Box'. This highly ritualized conversation was conducted in a coffeehouse; if the ethos was classical, the ostensible purpose was not 'to determine of, or meddle with the Government of these Nations, but to discover the Judgment of this Society, upon the Forms of Popular Government, in abstract' (Harrington 1660). Samuel Pepys for one attended and enjoyed 'admirable discourse', especially an 'exceeding good argument against Mr Harrington's assertion that the overbalance of propriety was the foundation of government'. However, by February 1660 he thought the moment had passed; after a 'small debate upon the Question whether learned or unlearned subjects are the best, the club broke off very poorly, and I do not think they will meet any more' (Pepys 1660, 14, 17, 61).

The cultural referents of The Rota were printed and explicit. In the case of most early modern company, however, discourse went unrecorded, conventions were tacit, spaces were contingent, materials unlisted, and the ethos can only be speculated. That contested by Shaw and Wintringham is a case in point. That it was recorded at all is because Wintringham subsequently sued Shaw for defamation: erstwhile companions were asked to recollect the evening for the arbitration of the Dean and Chapter in York. Because their recollections all focused on the moment of conflict, the cultural dynamics of the company are mostly implied. Deponents for Shaw emphasized that there were no 'ill words given, or any quarrel or disagreement among any of the company, until the said Ann Wintringham came into their company in a rude domineering and huffing manner two or three times'. The supporters of Ann agreed 'the company was very quiet' when she 'came into them' but that 'she came in a very orderly manner' and was 'immediately' threatened by Shaw. As such it is impossible to know whether local language and conventions conformed to the many jest-books and miscellanies dedicated to 'making merry' or, indeed, its representation in literature like sermons or plays. What the testimonies do suggest is that just as the coffeehouse almost immediately became the preferred location for 'abstract' forms of political debate, so the alehouse and tavern was the most likely place for male conviviality – in this instance, in a single room by the fire. They also hint at the material markers of companionship. According to supporters of Wintringham, Shaw harangued Ann – she should 'govern her tongue and her tail' – before throwing a candlestick 'which broke her head'. According to Shaw's supporters, Ann 'scolded' Shaw 'with very scandalous words' (accusing him of sexual incontinence) and then 'did tear his cravat from about his neck and get her hands into [his] hair and thereby pulled his head to the table'. When 'her hands were loosed' she began throwing 'tobacco pipes and other things [flagons] amongst the company'. Ann destroyed, in effect, the tools of male companionability (BI 1691).

The conflict between Shaw and Wintringham dramatizes the sixth and final dimension of company and society to be discussed here. This is simply that, in order to negotiate these environments successfully (and indeed manipulate them for their own interests and agendas) people had to develop a personal *modus operandi* that was appropriate to the company in question and their particular place within it. This ability (or inability) to act appropriately and according to context has usefully been termed an individual's *habitus* – the sets of bodily and intellectual 'skills' which allow people to accomplish particular social tasks in specific social settings (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65; Ingold 2000, 289–93). Such skills are assimilated tacitly, through doing and unconsciously copying, as well as learnt deliberately, through teaching and reading; although the resulting *habitus* is acquired and modified over the course of a life, it is the years of childhood and early adulthood that are usually most formative. It

follows that social and economic background, and the cultural opportunities they afford, is crucial to the development of the 'person'. The result is a *reflexive* aspect to behaviour, in the sense that gestures, tastes, and responses become almost instinctive and involuntary over time; and a *reflective* element, by which people are conscious and deliberate about their actions and words. Early moderns inherited a well-established vocabulary to describe precisely these faculties. People were known to have 'dispositions' (behavioural tendencies), 'reason' (practical intelligence), 'will' (the capacity for agency), and 'ability' (their social and cultural resources) (Withington 2005, 115). These were reflected and expressed through 'manners', an important medieval and early modern word which described at once the customary rules of behaviour in a particular society and a person's habitual behaviour or conduct, its moral aspects included (Ingram 1996, 51–5). More pertinently, humanist commentators were supremely conscious that, while men and women were certainly endowed with natural characteristics, their disposition, reason, will, and manners were learned – and controlled – socially. Indeed the whole origins of humanism as an educational and reformatory movement were rooted in the assumption that people were *made* as well as *born*.

Clearly what worked as appropriate behaviour in one company was not necessarily effective in another. Shakespeare's Falstaff was a lord of tavern drunkenness; he was helplessly adrift amid the civil (female) company of Windsor and a pariah of courtly society (Barton 1994, 75–84). Coriolanus was a military hero but a floundering politician: his tragedy was that when he switched from the company of soldiers to citizens he could not modulate his behaviour accordingly: his *habitus* stayed the same (Shrank 2003a). While Harrington was the starlet of The Rota he may well have found the company of Robert Shaw and the men of Wistow more challenging. Different again were the imperatives of 'utmost Industry and Fidelity' claimed by Richard Thompson and Company, 'the plainness and simplicity' professed by those men 'commonly (though unjustly) styled Levellers', or the '*Choice and general Rules for a Gentlewoman's observations on Conversation with Company*' outlined by the advice book on female behaviour, *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (Woolley 1673, 43). In each instance, 'company' laid quite significant expectations on the behaviour of companions – expectations that were often difficult to meet. According to one business partner, Thompson was 'altogether unfit and incapable of managing the joint affair'. Not only was he the very antithesis of industriousness and honesty; he was 'daily at the coffee houses and other public places' where 'he spent his time in public matters and hearing and telling news' (TNA, C7/581/73). Lilburne was well aware that the Levellers were perceived by many to be 'full of craft and worldly policy' rather than 'plain and simple'. In such circumstances he could only hope that 'by keeping our heads upright and our spirits sincerely public that every good man will [eventually] give us the right hand of fellowship' (Lilburne 1649c, 3). His emphasis on posture and gesture was telling (Braddick 2009, 10). Nor was it for nothing that Lady Sarah Cowper, a gourmand of books like *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, should confide to her diary in 1700 that 'I perceive great skill is required to make conversation profitable and pleasant' (Lewis 2008, 24).

Company and society can be regarded, then, as agglomerations of purposes, powers, structures, and roles. They were also sociological and cultural entities which people at once formed, joined, inhabited and interpreted on the basis of their reflective and reflexive selves – selves which were, in turn, the product of individual life-histories (and the particular experiences these entailed). The language of company and society denoted, in effect, an intersection of factors which determined the realities of social practice; and just as the words 'company' and 'society' proliferated from the second half of the sixteenth century, so their practice was integral to a range of activities and processes associated with early modernity. To take the economic sphere as an example: guilds, crafts, professional bodies, and combinations; joint-stock companies, monopolies, and trading partnerships; credit networks, banks, insurance companies, and friendly societies – these old and new forms of purposeful association were central to the changing organization of labour, expertise, capital, and credit over the course of the period. Cumulatively the economic consequences of these initiatives were profound, resulting in the emergence of an integrated market economy and a recognizably class-based and patriarchal society. Yet these and other developments cannot be properly appreciated in purely economic terms. Nor can they be removed too far from the associational contexts which, in conjunction with the family household, made them possible. On the contrary, the emergence of capitalism, consumerism, and class-consciousness were closely connected to the changing dynamics of associational life. As Richard Thompson and company no doubt appreciated, commercial success was inextricably linked to the practice of company itself – the interlocking dynamics of purpose, power, structure, participation, culture, and *habitus* of any given instance.

Viewed in these terms, the hundred or so years after 1570 mark an important moment in the history of company in England. Political parties, joint-stock companies, and journeymen combinations were first established and consolidated. So, too, were evangelical sects and

societies, gentleman's clubs, theatrical companies, learned societies, and professional companies of soldiers. Although some of the key institutions of medieval 'fellowship' – such as monastic institutions, religious fraternities, and the manor – suffered permanent decline, others not only survived but thrived in collaboration with the Protestant commonwealth and state. Notable in this respect were craft and trading guilds, educational and charitable institutions, the parish vestry and urban corporations. These developments were undoubtedly significant. Whether they warrant the tag 'early modern' is, as always, more open to question. All historical epochs are marked by processes of continuity and change; and given the associational fecundity of both the medieval and Enlightenment eras it is not necessarily obvious why the centuries 'in between' deserve extraordinary recognition (Slack 1999,151, 165; Collinson 1988, 58–9). The 'early modern' tag becomes more warranted, however, once it is remembered that this particular moment in the history of English associational life coincided with the introduction of 'modern' and 'society' into the vernacular. It becomes more meaningful still once it is appreciated that the dialectic with the ancients which those terms denoted was likewise applied to the normative *habitus* of associational life. This was done through concepts of 'civility' and 'wit'.

Civility and Wit

In his 1538 dictionary Thomas Elyot defined *civilis* as 'that pertains to a citizen'; *civilis homo* as 'a man expert in those things appertaining to the ministration of the common weal'; and *civilitas* as 'courtesy, civility' (Elyot 1538). The civic overtones of civility were significant: for early moderns as for ancient Romans, the skills of civility were largely the same as those required for good governance and living in a commonwealth: that is of citizenship (Bryson 1996, 50–1; Withington 2009b). Indeed, the first appearance of 'civil' on a printed title-page was the translation of the German humanist and Lutheran Phillips Melanchthon's *A Civil Nosegay* in 1550. This purported to contain 'not only the office and duty of all magistrates and judges but also of all subjects . . . in this our time' (Melanchthon 1550). However, as striking was Elyot's conflation of civility with 'courtesy' and the implication that 'civil' also described the cultivation of good manners more generally. Elyot took his lead from Erasmus, who had coined the term to describe the art of appropriate social conduct in his hugely influential *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium*.

This had been translated into English as early as 1532 by the Lichfield schoolmaster Robert Whittington as *A Lytell Booke of Good Maners for Children*. Whittington quickly followed this with a translation of Cicero's *De Officiis*, the major classical authority on civility in its broader sense (Cicero 1534). The wider application of 'civil' was entrenched in the vernacular thereafter (Bryson 1996, 29, 51–4). Conduct books were important in this respect. Prestigious texts like Thomas Hoby's translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, Robert Peterson's translation of Della Casa's *Treatise of the Manners and Behaviours*, and Stefan Guazzo's *The Civil Conversation* (which was translated by George Pettie and Bartholomew Young) were the tip of a popular literature advising people how to behave civilly in various contexts (Castiglione 1561; Della Casa 1578; Guazzo 1581). As tellingly, civility was learned at schools and the universities; through the prescribed procedures of local and national governance; and by direct experience of 'society civil' (Richards 2003, 15–16). Both in print and in practice especial emphasis was placed on the communicative dimensions of sociability: 'conversation' in its broadest sense (Muldrew 1998, 151; Withington 2005, 127–9). By the beginning of the seventeenth century Robert Cawdrey could define 'civil' as simply 'honest in conversation, or gentle in behaviour' (Cawdrey 1604).

The discursive success of civility stemmed in the first instance from the patronage of England's social and cultural elite. When Peterson noted in his *Treatise of Manners* that his 'patron' was himself 'so civil, so courteous' as to be 'the pattern to express any courtesy therein contained' he was referring to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (Della Casa 1578, 4; Bryson 1996, 49). Thomas Smith, Thomas Cecil and the network of Cambridge humanists who wrestled with concepts of commonwealth in the mid sixteenth century likewise extolled and practised civility as the appropriate medium of social relations. Their interest was inherited by subsequent generations, not least Gabriel Harvey and his friend Edmund Spenser (Richards 2003, 16–19). Notions of 'civility' and 'commonwealth' after *c.*1570 stemmed from the same reformatory impulse; and just as the humanist conception of 'commonwealth' was forcibly transposed onto earlier meanings of the word, so 'civility' and the Old French term 'courtesy' were used interchangeably for much of the sixteenth century. The ascendancy of 'civility' over 'courtesy' after 1600 was, in turn, 'an index of major conceptual change'. Whereas 'courtesy' was rooted in the chivalric honour system of the medieval nobility – and all that implies – 'civility' reflected a fundamental concern for both 'the rules of social form and technique' informing sociability and 'the application of virtue and

reason' to navigate those rules (Bryson 1996, 57, 54). These concerns emanated in large part from the Ciceronian notion of *honestas*, which Jennifer Richards has usefully defined as 'the self-restraint of potentially domineering speakers' (Richard 2003, 2). This required people to exhibit 'decency', 'decorum', 'modesty', 'circumspection', and 'order', in their dealings with others. They were also expected to develop the requisite 'discretion' to know what to say and do when, where, and to whom. By developing social acuity they could negotiate, in effect, the many dangers of 'conversation', whether with inferiors, peers, or superiors. In this way they served their personal interests as effectively as possible while respecting the socio-legal structures that protected each from the 'will' of others: 'to commune', as Thomas Starkey put it, 'such gifts as be to them given, each one to the profit of the other, in perfect civility, and not to live their own pleasure and profit' (Skinner 1978, I, 219).

The implications for the *habitus* were considerable. Not only did civility demand the acquisition of particular sets of reflexive habits, gestures, and responses. It also encouraged pronounced degrees of self-reflectivity. People were expected constantly to interpret company and their place within it and also learn the appropriate and most efficacious ways to act (Baldwin 2001, 364). The menace of Awdelay's *Fraternity of Vagabonds*, published as the same time as the translation of Castiglione by Hoby, stemmed precisely from the potential manipulation of these skills for immoral purposes. A 'Courtesy man' could befriend 'some handsome young man cleanly apparelled, or some other honest Citizen'. He could 'behave himself mannerly, for he will desire him that he talks withal, to take the upper hand, and show him much reverence, and at last like his familiar acquaintance will put on his cap, and walk side by side' (Awdelay 1575, Aiv). Yet he did so only to persuade his victim into giving him money. 'Cheaters' were, in turn, 'such kind of idle Vagabonds as scarcely a man shall discern, they go gorgeously, sometime with waiting men, sometime without'. Their 'Trade' was to 'fain society, in one place or another' while identifying social innocents and 'very courteously to bid him to breakfast'. 'Cheaters', 'Fingerers', and 'Helpers' would be waiting at the designated tavern, each man disguised and pretending to know 'none in the company'. Once the gentleman had been persuaded into playing a game of cards, the 'Fraternity' contrived 'by signs and tokens, without speech commonly, but sometime with far-fetched words' to cheat and so 'get money out of the others purse' (Bi–Bii). These men were, in effect, consummate social actors. They formed an invisible company within society; and they had acquired the *habitus* capable of feigning the *habitus* that 'society' required.

It is easy to see how skills intended to preserve the common good could also serve more sceptical and cynical purposes. Indeed Richard Tuck has gone as far as to argue for the rise of a new culture of cynicism and scepticism – a discernable shift from 'old humanism' to 'new humanism' – from the 1570s onwards (Tuck 1993, 5). Awdelay's little book also demonstrates that whereas 'courtesy' was the preserve of the royal court and nobility, civility was socially expansive. In their translation of Guazzo's *The Civil Conversation*, Pettie and Young explained that they intended to reform 'the manner of Conversation, meet for all persons, which shall come to any company, out of their own houses, and then of the particular points'. Civility 'ought to be observed in company between young men, and old, Gentlemen and Yeomen, Princes, and private persons, learned and unlearned, citizens and strangers, religious and secular, men and women' (Guazzo 1581, 49; Bryson 1996, 55). Historians once assumed that this agenda remained largely the preserve of the aristocracy and gentry (James 1986; Bryson 1996, 24, 6). It is now clear, however, that the 'better sorts' of England's localities increasingly used their perceived capacity for 'honesty', 'discretion', 'modesty', and the other attributes of civility to both define the parameters of community and distinguish themselves from their 'meaner' and 'poorer' neighbours (Herrup 1987, 97, 193–5; Muldrew 1998, 151–2; Barry 2000, 190–2; Wrightson 1982, 226–7; Hindle 1996, 218–19; Shepard 2008). The social penetration of civility mirrored, in effect, the participatory depth of the Elizabethan 'monarchical republic'.

While historians have long associated early modernity with 'the civilizing process', the simultaneous valorization of 'wit' as a quality of the self has received much less attention. This is perhaps because 'wit' was an Old English term to denote (in the words of Samuel Johnson) 'the powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellect' (Johnson 1775). This 'original signification' continued into the sixteenth century, providing to some extent a Gothic counter-point to the burgeoning hegemony of civility; sheer mental adeptness was not, after all, a product of classical learning, though it could certainly aid and abet it. That is not to say that 'wit' escaped the gloss of the ancients. Even as Elyot defined *civilitas* as 'courtesy, civility' he also introduced *ingeniosus* as 'wyttye' and *ingenium* as 'the proper nature of a thing. Also wytte' (Elyot 1538). The tendency was continued by Cawdrey, who took *ingenious* 'to be quick-witted', and by Edward Phillips, who suggested 'ingeniousness, wittiness' as one of the definitions of *ingeniosity* (Cawdrey 1604; Phillips 1658). Johnson himself defined *ingenious* as 'witty, inventive, possessed of genius';

ingeniously as 'wittily, subtly'; and *ingeniousness* as 'wittiness, subtly, strength of genius' (Johnson 1775; Greene 1981, 227–30). This conflation of wit and ingenuity made for a powerful conception of the self that was rooted less in classical emulation and more in resourcefulness, inventiveness, imagination, 'quickness of fancy', and natural intelligence. The first appearance of both words on a printed title-page encapsulated the kind of characteristics invoked. This was the perennially popular 'histories and fables of Aesop', which was first translated by William Caxton as early as 1484 and republished regularly thereafter. Aesop, the unlikely hero of ancient Greek morality tales, was quintessentially 'uncivil': physically 'deformed and evil shaped' – 'great head', 'short neck', 'crooked back', 'large feet' – as well as 'dumb/and could not speak'. That he prevailed in every social situation in which he found himself was because he 'had a singular wit, and was greatly ingenious and subtle in calculation, and pleasant in words after he came to his speech' (Aesop 1570). These served a powerful personal morality to which Aesop always adhered.

The conflation of 'wit' and 'ingenuity' is an important (and neglected) feature of early modern social prescription. While proponents did not create the notion of the resourceful and inventive self they nevertheless made space for it alongside the more familiar demands for civility and godliness. 'Wit' in this sense could characterize all manner of activities, from the 'art' and skill of the craftsman to techniques in arithmetic to domestic work and tasks (Record 1557). However, the most significant strand of 'wit' insofar as 'company' and 'society' were concerned was the capacity to be entertaining in general and humorous in particular. The various accounts of early modern civility – from the civilizing process to the spirit of capitalism to the Puritan reformation of manners – tend to make for a dispiriting and humourless story of social and personal discipline. Yet humanists had always emphasized 'mirth' as a vital component of the human condition. Laughter was a source of mental and bodily health as well as a vital skill of the pedagogue, rhetorician, companion, and friend. During the sixteenth century the word 'wit' was used to reflect this awareness and its implications. Just as Aesop's fables were pleasurable as well as edifying, so Ralph Robinson added 'witty' to advertise Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1556 (in 1551 it was simply a 'pleasant' work). Likewise Thomas Blage justified the publication of his commonplace book, *The School of Wise Conceits*, on the grounds that 'as every conceit hath wit, so the most have much mirth'. The 'conceits' in question 'were translated out of divers Greek and Latin writers' and designed for both personal consumption and performance in company (Blage 1569).

Blage's text was an early example of the remarkably popular and diverse range of genres which came to provide readers with the ammunition for 'witty' company (Smyth 2004a). Early moderns in search of 'wit' could turn from Robert Allott's *England's Parnassus,* with its rich digest of quotable (and classically modelled) modern poesy, to its prose equivalent, the contemporaneous *Politeuphuia, or Wit's Commonwealth.* Initially compiled under the direction of the London grocer John Bodenham, *Wits Commonwealth* was published at least twenty-seven times between 1597 and 1700 and was one of the few texts to retain 'commonwealth' on the title-page after 1660 (Ling 1598; 1669). Assembled in the format of a commonplace book, it represented an 'old and new garden of wit: new in this form and title, though otherwise old, and of great antiquity' (Ling 1598). Bodenham looked to supply his 'courteous readers' with 'grave sentences' and 'a bundle of counsels against vice'. This more serious conception of conversational 'wit' vied with the 'jesting' tradition which, in its printed forms, can be traced at least to the early sixteenth century and Andrew Boorde's collections of 'witty mirth and pleasant shifts' (Shrank 2003a, 64, 224). It was then that 'jeer' was invented as a term of humorous derision and that 'jest' – taken from the Latin *gest* – acquired its humorous connotations. Whereas early uses of jest simply described 'a narrative of exploits' or 'an idle tale', it now became specifically associated with laughter: as 'a mocking or jeering speech'; 'a witticism, joke'; a 'ludicrous event or circumstance'; 'the opposite of earnest'; 'merriment, ridicule'; a 'practical joke'. More to the point, humanists like Boorde and Robinson were central to this semantic shift (*OED*). Initially justified as a 'preservative against melancholy' – that is for 'avoiding pensiveness' and encouraging 'honest mirth, especially mirth used at dinner and supper' – Boorde's *Merry Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham* and *Scoggins Jests* continued to be published well into the seventeenth century alongside more contemporary collections such as Robert Armin's *Fool Upon Fool* and *A Banquet of Jests* (Boorde 1655; 1684; Armin 1600; Anon. 1630). By 1619 readers in search of both kinds of 'wit' could turn to compilations like *A Help to Discourse, or: A Miscellany of Merriment* (1619). This promised 'witty, Philosophical and Astronomical Questions and Answers' alongside 'Epigrams, Epitaphs, Riddles, and Jests' (Anon. 1619).

The vernacular origins of 'wit', and its intimation of a natural as opposed to cultivated intelligence, meant the word was never merely a term of classical emulation like 'civil'. As Thomas Smith noted in *A Discourse of the Commonweal*, governance should be inclusive precisely because 'the gifts of wit be so divers' (Smith 1549, 11). The

continued emphasis in advice books on 'experience' as well as 'theory' – in books on early modern medicine, for example, or early modern war – echoed the same sentiment (Bullein 1559; Riche 1598; Barrett 1598). However, for certain social groups at least there was a creeping conflation between 'ingenuity' and literariness – a conflation which inevitably placed the ancients to the fore. *A Help to Discourse* claimed, for example, to constitute 'wits' Monopoly'. It told its reader to 'Be then advertised, this *Help to Discourse,/* Bespeaks thy future good, 'twill gently force/Knowledge into thee, and the generous wise,/ Will know thee fit for all societies'. The alternative was that 'Others will speak whilst thou with shame sit dumb'. This enclosure of 'wit' was part of a more general appreciation of the power of 'Books', which was to 'increase knowledge, confirm judgement, compare the times past with the present, and draw use out of both for the future, to bring forth the dead speaking and conferring their knowledge to the living' (Anon. 1619, 209). Books were 'the most sweet, commendable and delectable household stuff in the world': 'dead, yet living companions' that 'purge out the dullness of natural capacity'. The positioning of books and the 'wit' they contained at the epicentre, so to speak, of the dialectic between ancient and modern was empowering for some but deeply exclusive for others: 'Yet from this sweet and excellent society, what a part of the world are exempted and live in darkness' (230 (mis-paginated; should be 210)). Viewed on these terms 'wit', like 'civility', was a source of cultural distinction – a faculty that only the educated or (at the very least) the literate could access directly.

It is on these kinds of grounds that historians have argued for the bifurcation of elite and popular culture, with the 'newly literate 'middling sort' and a 'minority of their social inferiors' forming 'a reading public from the start' (Wrightson 1982, 199). However, it is important to stress that literary or classically inspired 'wit' was not necessarily sanitized – civilized – in either its *content* or *performance*. A cursory glance of Armstrong's 1630 collection of 'Modern Jests', 'Witty Jeers', 'Pleasant Taunts', and 'Merry Tales' alone suggests that the subject, style, and audience of 'modern' humour was much more complex than Thomas's model of 'polite' and 'folk' streams of humour allows (Anon, 1630). Like other genres of popular print, jest books were cultural amalgams: of customary and classical, verbal and slapstick, cruelty and pathos, Romance and realism (Capp 1979; Watt 1991; Jenner 2002; Smyth 2004a; McShane 2007; 2010). Even the most classicized forms of 'witty' society – that is modes of interaction based entirely on Greek and Roman precedents – need not eschew bawdiness, lewdness, and degeneracy. On the contrary, the most

striking appropriations of 'wit' over the period leant precisely in those directions. After 1580 generations of young men at university, the Inns of Court, the royal armies, and (by the 1630s) 'the Town' adapted the full range of associational templates derived from the ancients – from the *symposium* and *convivium* to the *hetaireia* and *komos* – in order to emulate not simply 'civil conversation' but also repartee and banter, drunkenness and excess, libertinism and burlesque (Turner 2002, x–xii). Thereafter the language of 'wit' was used by certain sections of the English masculine establishment to denote these structured and stylized instances of insouciance, toasting, ribaldry, and 'ritualized degenerate behaviour' (Raylor 1994, 71). The cumulative result was not, needless to say, a 'reformation of manners'. Rather it was a 'complex *habitus* in which young men could learn and practice ways of speaking, dressing and modes of behaviour that distinguished them within a wider society of gentlemen' (O'Callaghan 2007, 13). Or, as *A Help to Discourse* helpfully explained, 'the Laws [for the] order of drunkenness among the Romans' involved: '1. Not to trip in speech; 2. Not to vomit; 3. To drink most in one sup; 4. Not to breathe in the draught; 5. To leave nothing un-drunk, if, to cast on the ground' (Anon. 1619, 153–4; Smyth 2004b).

The evidence of printed title-pages confirms that the companies and societies of early modern England were witty as well as civil. Figure 6.1 charts the appearance of the terms and some related words between 1500 and 1700; Figure 6.2 shows the same figures as a percentage of all printed title-pages.

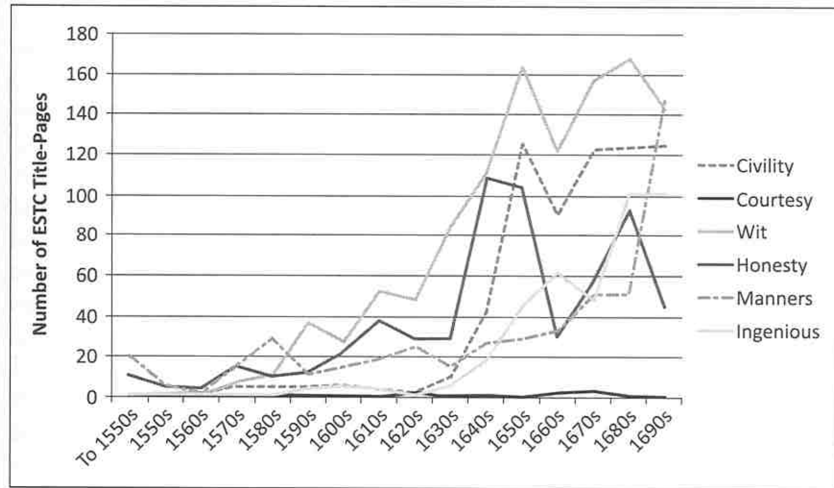

Figure 6.1 Vocabularies of Sociability, 1500–1700.

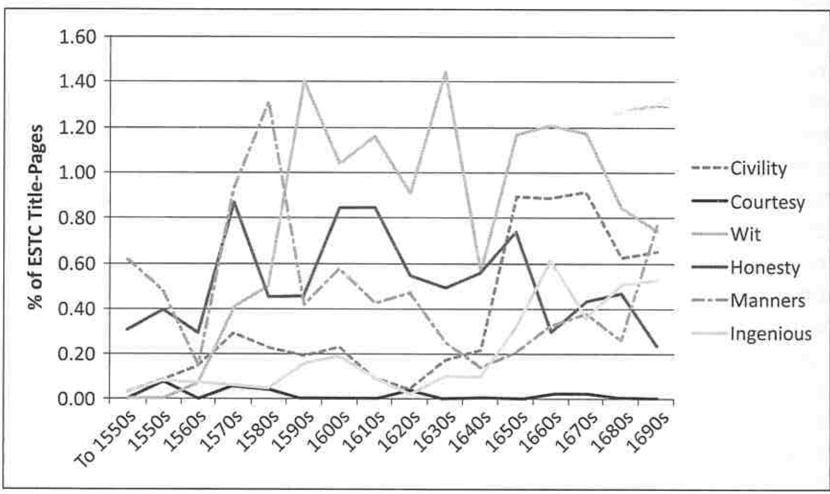

Figure 6.2 Vocabularies of Sociability (%), 1500–1700.

The first point to note is the relative absence of 'courtesy' from the public domain: like 'fellowship' this keyword of medieval culture was hardly ever used to advertise early modern texts. Second, both charts confirm the discursive importance of the 1560s and 1570s insofar as the language of sociability was concerned. While well-established terms like 'manners' and 'honesty' experienced unprecedented increases in visibility, 'civility' and especially 'wit' were propelled into the public eye for the first time. Insofar as title-pages were concerned, only 'ingenious' and 'courtesy' remained (so to speak) in the discursive basement. In the third instance, by the 1590s 'wit' was by far the most prominent of the words sampled; it remained so until 1700 (when the literature of the Society for the Reformation of Manners revived public awareness of that term to levels not seen since the 1570s). A less spectacular increase in the use of 'ingenious' initially accompanied the proliferation of 'wit'; though never as prominent as the Old English term, the Latin synonym enjoyed surges in use during the 1630s and 1650s and was deployed with increasing regularity thereafter. Fourth, 'civility' was much less prominent than either 'wit' or indeed 'honesty' until the 1640s, when texts about the 'civil war' and also attempts to distinguish 'civil' affairs from ecclesiastical matters gave the word unprecedented visibility. While this trend continued into the Restoration, 'honesty' became proportionately less visible – a reflection, perhaps, of its appropriation by parliamentary supporters during the civil war to delineate 'the honest party' and 'honest men'

(Collinson 1988, 146; Withington 2005, 260). The upshot was that by 1700 'wit', 'manners', 'civility', and 'ingenious' were the most prominent of these terms of social description, 'honesty' – like 'commonwealth' in the previous chapter – the most curtailed. More to the point, over the preceding 120 years it was 'wit' rather than 'civility' which had been discursively dominant.

Two advice books for women indicate at once the social extent and semantic complexity of these developments by the 1670s. *The Gentlewoman's Companion; or a Guide to the Female Sex* was first printed in 1673. It promised to provide 'Directions of Behaviour, in all Places, Companies, Relations, and Conditions, from their Childhood down to Old Age' and was re-issued in 1675 and 1682 (Woolley 1673). *A Supplement to the Queen-Like Closet, or, A Little of Everything Presented to Ingenious Ladies, and Gentlewomen* was published as a free-standing text in 1674, 1680, and 1684 and as an appendix to *The Queen-Like Closet* in 1675, 1681, and 1684 (Woolley 1674). Both books were ostensibly written by Hannah Woolley, a prolific author of female advice literature and one of the first women to publish regularly under her own name. However, a recurring theme of *A Supplement* was that large sections of *The Gentlewoman's Companion* had been effectively ghost-written under the direction of the bookseller Dorman Newman and were not, in fact, the work of Woolley at all (Woolley 1674, 131–2; Hobby 1988, 172–6; 1995, 181). The result was two accounts of normative behaviour from contrasting perspectives and for different sorts of women. *The Gentlewoman's Companion* was written as a learned discourse for the privileged female elites with time on their hands. *A Supplement* as a practical manual for the working female classes in which the arts of sociability were indistinguishable from the skills of domestic work more generally.

Both texts propagated notions of civility, wit and ingenuity; however, they did so in ways suited to the material circumstances of their intended audience. *The Gentlewoman's Companion* acknowledged its debts to 'the concurrent advice and directions of the most able Professors and Teachers, both here and beyond the Seas'; to 'my thirty years Observations and Experience'; to the 'Pagans of old' who 'may teach our Christian Parents a new lesson' (Woolley 1673, A4, 2; Hobby 1988, 174). As a conventional application of this humanist tradition it perpetuated the idea that 'ingenuity' and 'wit' were synonymous with learned and literary discourse. As the Introduction famously announced, 'I am induced to believe, we [gentlewomen] are debarred from the knowledge of humane learning, lest our pregnant Wits should rival the towering conceits of our insulting Lords and

Masters' (2). The author seethed that, even as 'the fertile ground of their Daughters lie fallow', parents 'yet send the barren Noddles of their Sons to the University' (2). Given the unlikelihood of a 'bitter Rebellion' in the foreseeable future, the best source for female 'wit' was books: on the one hand 'Books of Piety', on the other one hand 'such Romances which treat of Generosity, Gallantry, and Virtue, as *Cassandra, Celia, Grand Cyrus, Cleopatra, Parthenissa,* not omitting *Sir Philip Sydney's* Arcadia' (9). It was explained that 'Reading furnishes them with agreeable discourse, and adepts them for the conversation of the most ingenious, without which I know not how the fancy can be supplied with what is acceptable to the Auditor'. More to the point, it was the 'want of which hath made so many Country-Gentlewomen stand like so many Mutes and Statues when they have happened into the company of the ingenious' (7). In *A Supplement,* in contrast, 'ingenuity' was firmly rooted in the skills of women's work. Woolley herself was a 'Servant to Ingenuity' on two counts – because she expressed publicly her particular 'genius' (for writing handbooks) and because she made various skills (or 'secrets) available to the ingenuity and wit of others. This first sense of the term reflected a more general, early modern confusion between 'ingenious' and the Latin translation 'ingenuous': that is 'sincerity, frankness of speech or dealing; a natural openness and sincerity always to acknowledge the Truth' (Greene 1981, 227–8; Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 131). In words that strongly echoed George Wither's conception of his inner self Woolley explained that

> My study was to impart to others free/What God and Nature hath informed me/I must not hide that Talent God me gave /Content I am others a share should brave . . . Servant to Ingenuity I'll be/Such Ladies shall command all Arts from me.

As she also noted: 'Let them [girls] learn whatever they are capable of, or that you have opportunity for the learning and especially what their genius is inclined to for that to be sure they will be excellent at' (Woolley 1674, 142).

The Gentlewoman's Companion was as conventional in its concept of 'Civility, or gentle plausibility' as it was in its understanding of 'wit'. Civility was 'nothing else but the modesty and handsome decorum, to be observed by everyone according to his or her condition'; the 'Rule of Civility' was 'nothing but a certain modesty or *Pudor* required in your actions': 'it is a Science for the right understanding our selves, and true instructing how to dispose all our words and actions in their proper and due places' (Woolley 1673, 44–5).

When 'practised by Persons of Quality' this 'modesty or Civility we speak of [was] little else but Humility': 'the framing and adapting our actions to the satisfaction of other People' (54). Thus 'the first things I judge most necessary; and do wish, with Socrates, were in you Ladies, as he desired in his Pupils, are Discretion, Silence and Modesty'. 'When', for example, 'it comes to your turn to speak to intelligent Ladies, entertain them not with things you understand but imperfectly'.

> If you find the company more facetious and witty than your self, leave the discourse to time, and be silent, contenting your self to be an attentive hearer; if you will run the hazard, be smart and pithy, comprehending much in few words, and be not the vain Imitatrix of those who affect the whole talk. (49)

This was merely part of a vast set of considerations – '*viz.*, 'Gesture, Look, Speech, and Habit' – that would not have been out of place in a Jane Austen novel (written, of course, over a hundred years later). *A Supplement*, in contrast, ignored the 'science' of civility and dwelt instead on its practical benefits for working women. Although the essential humanism of the advice is barely discernable it is there nonetheless. Woolley advised women to be 'humble', 'modest', to 'keep the middle way' as they sought success and independence in life (Woolley 1674, 146, 144). Serving maids were to be 'careful' at their work because 'that by doing so you may oblige [the mistress] to be loving and kind to you, and cause her to speak well of you' (146). Mistresses were, in turn, to avoid cruelty and 'encourage [maids] by giving them good words, and bestow some small favour on them'. This was the way to insure good work. Words ill-chosen or expressed inappropriately (whether in speech or letters) were 'ridiculous', 'impertinent', 'tedious', and 'foolish'; Woolley instead urged women to communicate 'that it may be effectual in what you shall desire, and also acceptable to those you write to' (148–50). Girls were to grow up 'decent and neat in their Habit, not at all Extravagant' and 'have a care what company they keep'.

For 'Gentlewomen' and 'Mistresses', therefore, civility amounted to the reflective performance of authority. For women lower down the social scale it offered the means of survival, self-respect, and solidarity. Indeed the formidable Woolley had no time for 'Another sort [of woman] which have little in them; yet none but great places will serve [satisfy] them; which when they have wearied themselves to find . . . they are ready to run any extravagant course still to purchase fine clothes, than to conform to any Civility and Manners, or take

advice of those who would assist them.' Of this sort, those 'with apt Wits, and that dame Nature hath been favourable to, they are courted to be Players: some other of them to Bawdy Houses'. Woolley professed instead 'to love such with my heart' women endowed with 'Civility and Manners': 'those diligent to get wherewith to feed and clothe themselves by some honest employ or other, till such times as it shall please God better to provide for them, and keep close to their business'. These 'ingenious and honest minded Persons' 'shall never want my assistance, if it lies in my power to help them' (133). To this end Woolley gave 'any Person desiring to speak with me' the opportunity to meet her at her son's house 'in the Old Bailey in Golden Cup Court'. She promised that 'if I see that they are Ingenious, and deserving, or obliging in their disposition; neat and cleanly in their Habit; not too costly, yet decent; lively spirited, not bold' then she would commend them 'to some Friend or other of mine, who may want a servant'. What she offered, in effect, was the enabling power of her company.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued two things. First, it has suggested a set of interlocking factors which can be used to consider and compare instances of purposeful association historically. These include the aims and functions of company; the powers monopolized and harvested by particular forms of sociability and organization; the social roles and hierarchies which, to lesser or greater degrees, structured inter-personal relations within company; the participatory politics of companionship (in terms of the boundaries, inclusions, and exclusions of particular societies); the prevailing ethos or culture that characterized specific kinds of company; and the 'dispositions' or *habitus* expected of – and learnt by – companions within different social contexts. Second, it has pointed to two strands of Renaissance humanism which made for distinctly 'modern' forms of sociability from the 1570s onwards. The first of these was civility. In *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, for example, the full weight of humanist prescription was explicitly brought to bear on privileged female sociability. Likewise in *A Supplement* the tenets of 'civility', though removed from their cultural origins, characterized the normative behaviour of working women. Historians of eighteenth-century politeness and urbanity tend to regard the resulting culture as recent and unheralded (Borsay 1989; Klein 1994). However, these texts

were only the most recent contributions to a century of cultural dissemination and change articulated through a host of institutional and discursive sources – a process that involved not only the proliferation of 'societies' and 'companies' but also unprecedented attempts to impart the skills of civility as the normative basis for social practice. Although much less studied by social historians, 'wit' and its synonyms denoted a second and contemporaneous set of conventions and skills which privileged spontaneity, ingenuity, and humour. While these characteristic were recognized as innate to the person, for certain sorts of people they were increasingly associated with textual knowledge and learning. Qualities of wit and ingenuity often complemented the civil imperatives of modern sociability. Woolley's women were endowed with a sense of their 'ingeniousness' that was empowering, expressive, and consistent with a civil disposition. Likewise the discursive idiom of the Rota Club, the Royal Society, and the coffeehouse ideally combined civil and ingenious conversation (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 130–1; Shapin 1994; Cowan 2005, 256; Withington 2007a, 1032–5). However, civility and wit could also diverge dramatically. From the 1580s onwards, complaints about debauched, libertine, idle and 'uncivil' behaviour centred not simply on the lower orders but also the 'witty' and 'ingenious' society of gallants, profligates, graduates, lawyers, poets, soldiers, royalists, courtiers, country gentry – companies of men who continued to draw on Greece and Rome for their inspiration and claret, sack, tobacco, and punch for their lubrication (Harvey 2008, 208–9). The recurring campaigns for a 'reformation of manners' were one manifestation of the civilizing process; a 'modern' aesthetic of masculine excess, consumption, and singularity another.

In what ways does the preceding argument make for a 'sociable self' in the early modern era? Most obviously, companies and societies were sites for *learning* social skills. Early modern commentators were well aware that it was 'in company' that people learned how and what to speak; to move and to look; to gesture and to listen; to think and to respond; to participate in habitual routines and tasks; to recognize hierarchies and conventions – all according to place and context (Shepard 2003, 11–12; Withington 2009b). Allied to this, companies were a primary setting for the *performance* of the self, or at least the public personas that the self was capable of presenting. Such performances might confirm, reproduce, supersede – manipulate even – the expectations of company. They might be awkward and inappropriate performances lacking the requisite 'local knowledge' and tacit assurance. They might be performances which, whether subtly or violently, subverted and dissented from

expectations – especially when asymmetries of power and/or ideological conflict were involved (Braddick 2009; Walter 2009). Either way, it was through the symbiotic process of learning and acting that skills were embodied and the self constructed (Ingold 2000, 290–1, 361, 325). Obviously enough, skills learnt in one sort of company informed behaviour in others. Local civic governance placed enormous emphasis, for example, on the capacity to debate and 'counsel' civilly – skills which proved eminently suitable for public discourse in alternative and 'modern' settings like the coffeehouse (Withington 2007a). Second, certain types of early modern society were not simply *de facto* loci for learning and performance; rather their *primary purpose* was the reformation and reconstruction of the self. This was true of the Society of Jesus, which monopolized title-page usage of 'society' at the end of the sixteenth century. It was also true of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, which had a comparable discursive profile in the 1690s. The intervening decades witnessed an extraordinary reformatory energy directed at personal 'manners' which was never more potent than when 'societies' of evangelicals gained control of the public infrastructures of local governance (Wrightson 1994, 198–222; Slack 1999, 29–52). This use of public power should not obscure either the 'social' genesis or personal focus of their campaigns – a point clearly recognized by Josiah Woodward. Reviewing the historical precedents for the Society for the Reformation of Manners, Woodward argued that 'those manifold Combinations of Persons, piously inclined, in various parts of this Kingdom' showed 'it is not only requisite, but even natural for Pious Persons to associate with those of the same Dispositions, especially where considerable Bodies of Men of contrary inclinations join together to oppose them'. More to the point, this was 'the first cause which induced them to unite into *Political Bodies*, and 'tis this which cements them together to this day; which demonstrates the Necessity of *Religious Association*, in order to a general *Reformation* of Manners'. The evangelical appropriation of 'political bodies' was 'a full Vindication' for a new phase of reformation – 'the Societies hereafter described' (Woodward 1699, 24–5).

Woodward's allusions to 'the same dispositions' and social efficacy indicate a final aspect of the sociable self worth noting here. Society enabled solidarities of interest, often to the detriment of the interest of others. It could also transmute the isolated and ineffective 'will' of individuals into what contemporaries understood to be a corporate personality – a legal and fictional 'self' which could 'do' things in the world. Both these tendencies were characteristics of medieval corporatism and continued – indeed flourished – during the early modern era; and it was guilds and urban corporations which provided many of the templates for the associations, clubs, professions, and voluntary societies which were central to the formation of social identities in the eighteenth century (Wahrman 1992, 53; Corfield 1995, 205–6). The process was never better demonstrated than by the emergence of trade combinations and early trade unions at the end of the seventeenth century. As Malcolm Chase has observed, 'Much of the tone, trappings and vocabulary of the guilds were carried over into the waged workers' associations'; the 'artisan ethic' so appropriated included a sense of hierarchy within the trade, the 'common bond of fellowship', rites of initiation and ritual, the moral worth and 'profound solemnity' of work, the property of skill, and the central importance of apprenticeship (Chase 2000, 27, 24, 23, 28; Thompson 1991, 57–64). This 'Artisanry's sense of status was critically defined by the frontier of skill that separated it from the labouring poor'; it was also deeply masculine (Chase 2000, 25). The pressures of collectivism on the one hand and exclusion on the other nicely capture the conflicted nature of the early modern sociable self. The complex antecedents of workers' associations are, moreover, indicative of a broader lesson central to this book. Writing in 1898, Beatrice and Sidney Webb influentially depicted trade unionism as the product of industrialization – a movement that epitomized the chasm between the modern and pre-modern worlds (Webb 1902; Thompson 1991, 58). Viewed historically, the story is somewhat different.