



---

## Don't miss the cut

---

*Social severance is a long-practised art. The perfect snub is a covert strike that'll leave your acquaintance reeling*

---

**I**t's the summer of 1813, and Beau Brummell – the inventor of the suit and the man described by Lord Byron as the 'greatest gentleman' of his time – is putting on a ball in the vaunted Argyll Rooms of St James. As the evening commences, the Prince Regent, guest of honour and heir to the British throne, trots (note the word) down the line of bowing gents. As he gets to Brummell – his best friend, sartorial advisor and gambling partner – he stops. But instead of the usual nod and badinage, the Prince simply fixes his host with a blank and stony stare.

Brummell was another victim of The Cut, that peculiar act – alive today as ever – of pretending that you don't know someone who you almost certainly do. And it can be just as painful as it sounds. His temper piqued by the Prince's slight (and at his own ball, no less!), Brummell addresses, quite literally, the elephant in the room. 'Alvanley' he asks of the man to his right: 'Who's your fat friend?' For the porcine Prince Regent, this Cut to the belly is a cut too far. The next day, Brummell found himself an outcast to the beau monde, a slide that would lead, in the order named, to the debtors prison and the insane asylum. If manners can make the man, then they can sometimes break him, too.

When the stakes are this high, you'd be well advised to know the rules of the table. The Cut, our Dandy friends tell us, comes in four forms. And like a set of

finely-honed Japanese chef knives, each blade has its time and place. First comes The Cut Direct. The meat cleaver of social severance, this devastating blow – the very obvious, face-to-face shunning of an acquaintance – is what poor old Brummell felt back in the Argyle Rooms. Next comes The Cut Indirect, where one looks the other way and pretends not to have noticed the subject. Oh you've used that knife, alright.

The Cut Sublime, meanwhile, is to admire the top of some far away object – perhaps today the aptly-named Cheesegrater or the Shard – and feign to have missed your prey. Finally, The Cut Infernal: a deep analysis of one's shoelaces at the cost of the passing acquaintance. It's particularly tough to pull off in loafers.

What you'll notice, then, is that The Cut almost always straddles the line between intention and accident. And it's a line that can be used to cheese-

“  
*The Cut Infernal is a deep analysis of one's shoelaces. It's tough to pull-off in loafers*  
”

wire effect. Making his way across the platform at Waterloo station, the Anglo-American playwright Edward Knoblock was accosted by a female acquaintance. 'Do you know you cut me three times at Woking?' she asked. 'Really?' he replied: 'I only saw you twice.' And while that's pretty sharp from the old playwright, it does violate one of The Cut's founding principles: that 'there are no circumstances under which a gentleman may "cut" any woman who, even by courtesy, can be called a lady.' I'll let you decide whether that rule still holds today.

And how about the rest? Well, the taxonomy might have gone extinct, but the beast itself is still at large. The Cut Indirect is now met in the teenage principal of 'blanking' someone, while the tip of the tower or the loop of the shoelace in The Cuts Sublime and Infernal have been replaced by the more conceivable – but less elegant, perhaps – smartphone screen. And as for the good old Cut Direct? Well, how many times have you heard – as a fresh acquaintance introduces himself to a gathered party – the following: 'Oh, we've met before, actually?' And that's before you even get to the world of social media, with its messages 'seen' and its friend requests ignored and its photos untagged. Friends, we cut each other now more than ever.

But some of us might just have a valid excuse. In the middle of the last century, a German neurologist named Joachim Bodamer began to examine the remarkable case of a soldier who had survived a bullet wound to the temple. The young man lived a life largely unimpaired by what, to most of us, might be something of a deal breaker. Except for one small problem: he couldn't for the life of him recognise a single face. As soon as Bodamer published his findings, identical cases flew in from all over the world. Very soon, there was a name for this condition – prosopagnosia (remember it, this may very well come in useful) – and a best-selling book on the subject with a title that would have delighted the modish Brummell: *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*.

A self-diagnosis of prosopagnosia might well get you out of a sticky situation or two, but you'd be wise to use it sparingly. As Christopher Hitchens – borrowing from that other razor mind, Oscar Wilde – frequently said, 'A gentleman is someone who is never rude by accident.' With that in mind, The Cut Direct might well be the finest sword left in the gentleman's armoury. Would you really want to blunt it? **GJ**