

## Accommodating 'Mrs. Three-in-One': Homemaking, Home Entertaining and Domestic Advice Literature in Post-War Britain

### INTRODUCTION: READING ADVICE

Disregard for the sources through which domestic knowledge has been communicated has contributed to the marginalisation of women's domestic practices from the historical record. Recent work in social and cultural history and cultural studies has reassessed the significance of the everyday and domesticity and an increasing body of work has examined the media through which ideas about lifestyles are communicated.<sup>1</sup> This article contributes to these currents of inquiry an original critique of how domestic advice literature sought to provide solutions to the servant problem in the years following the Second World War.

Advice literature has been regarded as unreliable evidence for understanding life *as it was lived* by historians suspicious of its status as published ideal representations. An account of the problem is found in American historian Susan Strasser's preface to the 2000 edition of her 1982 study *Never Done: A History of American Housework*:

Beecher's books and other advice literature convey an ideology about housework, a set of doctrines about women's work to analyze in conjunction with information about technical change and economic development. Because I was eager to know what women in the past actually *did*, not just what they were told to do, I used advice literature carefully, mindful that it is intended to prescribe, not describe. Nineteenth-century manuals, magazines, and cookbooks tell neither more nor less about reality than the current issue of *McCall's* or the latest edition of *The Joy of Cooking*. Women do not necessarily believe everything they read, and the advice - a kind of reform literature - often contradicted their own experience, presented inconsistent ideas, or offered doctrines that were at variance with their cultural backgrounds. Fortunately the literature is shaped by these realities as much as it shapes them, and considerable information can be read between the lines.<sup>2</sup>

Strasser writes as a successful scholar sympathetic to feminist approaches to re-evaluating the experience of women, and the importance of domesticity. Even so, she felt that she needed to use advice literature 'carefully', 'in conjunction with information about technical change and economic development', thereby validating the feminine discourse of domestic advice through reference to the masculine discourses of technology and economics (notwithstanding the important work of feminist scholars and women in the latter fields). Domestic advice is dissociated from what women 'actually *did*, not just what they were told to do' but reading has also been one of the things women actually *did* and Strasser herself acknowledges the active nature of reading: 'women do not necessarily believe everything they read'. Strasser's conclusion, that 'considerable information can be read between the lines', damns the genre with faint praise and runs the risk of failing to realise the full historical potential of advice literature.

This article demonstrates the value of looking *at* advice, as well as *through* it, for understanding women's history. It opens with the changes in labour and domestic practices which increased the domestic burden of middle class women juggling multiple roles, like 'Mrs. Three-in-One' addressed by American etiquette expert Emily Post. The article examines a range of solutions promoted in domestic advice books following

World War II, during a period which extended until the end of the 1960s, as much of the social change occurring in that decade had its roots in the immediate post-war period.

The article examines a variety of advice sources united by the fact that they all address the home and they all appear in book format. Examples range from etiquette guides to home decorating guides produced by the Council of Industrial Design, later the Design Council. Magazines have not been used as part of the primary evidence for this study, but homemaking books produced under the auspices of women's magazines are included. I acknowledge that this distinction is artificial: many women who read domestic advice books would also have read magazines which addressed domestic issues. However, when compared with the neglect of domestic advice books, the related discourses of women's and consumer magazines have received relatively extensive, and continuing, scholarly attention. Therefore, this study takes as its focus only domestic advice literature published in book format. More expansively, the article analyses a blend of British and North American material because domestic discourse operated as a dialogue between these two geographic regions. Domestic advice literature is an especially self-referential genre and individual texts bear the explicit influence of writers from the other side of the Atlantic, sometimes through direct quotation and name-dropping and sometimes without reference to particular authors. Furthermore, and significantly, American domestic advice books were often published in Britain and vice versa.<sup>3</sup>

The solutions offered promote a feminised version of modernist design, with its emphasis on both practicality and comfort, simplicity and decoration, and revolve around either bridging or collapsing hitherto distinct domestic regions. The final section of the article critiques the solutions promoted as best servicing not the women who consulted such sources for advice, but rather the absent, leisured, but nevertheless dominant husbands. Just as readers could learn how to become middle-class from domestic advice, so as Nicole Tonkovich has noted, 'a major function of advice books has been to invent, prescribe and normalize gendered behaviours'.<sup>4</sup>

## **I. THE PROBLEM: FROM *LEISURE CLASS* TO 'MRS. THREE-IN-ONE'**

Notwithstanding the existence of something of a tradition of advice books aimed at the bourgeoisie and lower middle class who inhabited the suburbs, the influence of the aristocracy as tastemakers continued until the period after World War Two. In the post-war period, the ideals of homemaking and home entertaining offered by domestic advice writers relied less on upper class patterns of practice, and more on a reduced scale intended for the growing middle classes.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, the economic changes of the period allowed greater employment opportunities to women. While working class women had *always* worked, a new job market offered them alternatives to domestic service, which transformed not only their lives, but also the lives of those they had served. The extent of the employment of women as domestic servants has been questioned, and the extent of the shortage of servants has been challenged, but in post-war Britain that even women in a position to afford full-time live-in domestic assistance sometimes experienced difficulty finding

staff.<sup>6</sup> Those members of the middle classes who needed to revise their domestic practices as a result of being newly unassisted by staff *and* a new group of socially mobile readers keen to entertain in a manner different to the one they had known at home, perhaps those brought up within working class cultures who sought to participate in the newly enlarged middle class, were both the subjects of this shift 'from service to self-service'.<sup>7</sup> Domestic advice needed to address these concerns.

### **Before the Fall: The Interwar Hostess as Conspicuous Consumer**

Used long into the twentieth century as a way of understanding turn-of-the-century society, sociologist Thorstein Veblen's 1899 model of the *Leisure Class* is reflected in domestic advice books up to the interwar period, where the ideal hostess was presented as a conspicuous consumer of her husband's wealth and status, and of the great number of goods and services that formed her home, including the labour of her staff.<sup>8</sup> Before 1945, the hostess depicted in domestic advice was characteristically disengaged, as here in *The A.B.C. of Etiquette by a Society Lady* of 1923, published a year before the *Theory of the Leisure Class* first appeared in Britain:

When receiving callers, it is necessary that the lady should rise or lay aside the employment in which she may be engaged, particularly if it consists of light or ornamental needle-work, and politeness requires that any occupation which completely engrosses the attention, be abandoned.<sup>9</sup>

The hostess's occupation, needlework, is dispensable. The same source goes on:

The duties of hostess at dinner are not onerous; but they demand tact and self-possession in no small degree. She does not often carve. She has few active duties to perform; but she must neglect nothing, put all her guests at their ease, and pay every possible attention to the requirements of each and all around her. No accident should ruffle her temper. No disappointment ought embarrass her.

She ought to see her old china broken without a sigh, and her best glass shattered with a smile.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding her role in what has since been termed 'emotional labour',<sup>11</sup> here the hostess's success is dependent upon attentiveness to others and suppression of her own reactions: virtually her sole active role is in the procession to the dining room, a performance as much about manifesting status hierarchies among the diners as getting from one room to another. For Veblen, too, the notion of impassivity as a virtue was embodied in figure of the hostess.<sup>12</sup> *The A.B.C. of Etiquette* offers remarkably similar advice to guests as it does to hostesses and hosts: 'Should you break or upset anything, do not apologise for it. Show your regret by your facial expression. It is not considered well-bred to put it into words'.<sup>13</sup> Veblen also extends his treatment of passive status display to guests:

He consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is a witness to the consumption of that excess of good things which his host is unable to dispose of singlehanded, and he is also made witness to his host's facility in etiquette.<sup>14</sup>

Guests and hostess were united in passive consumption of the host's wealth and all relied for their impassivity on the labour of domestic staff. Veblen noted that at the highest levels of the leisure class, the male head of the household, too, engaged in conspicuous consumption, rather than production and again early twentieth-century domestic advice depicts a host with very little to do, except perhaps carve meat. Continuing Veblen's sociological emphasis on the importance of a leisured appearance, Goffman's discussion of a hostess engaged in 'secret consumption' and backstage labour vividly conjures the numerous hidden acts of social labour that the pre-war hostess was required to perform in constructing an illusion of ease.<sup>15</sup>

Just as hostesses were involved in impassive and self-effacing concern for their guests, so the hospitality shown in interwar advice literature was extremely labour-intensive. Dinner parties would have begun with drinks in the drawing room, followed by a formal procession to the dining room for a meal of five or more courses, after which the ladies withdrew leaving the men to their own amusements for a while, and subsequently joined them again. Lavish entertaining is described by North American Emily Post in her 'Blue Book' of Etiquette, first published in 1922 and repeatedly thereafter with successive editions appearing in London:

The perfect example of a formal dinner table of wealth, luxury and taste, which involves no effort on the part of the hostess of a great house beyond deciding upon the date and the principal guests who are to form the nucleus of the party.<sup>16</sup>

This text accompanying Post's image of a formal dinner [Fig. 1] overstates the lack of involvement of the assisted hostess, perhaps because she wishes to underline the grandeur with which some members of society entertained. Unless she specifically chose otherwise, the assisted hostess would have been held responsible for every decision about dishes served and equipment used and judged accordingly by her guests.

During the interwar period, domestic advice writers continued to assume that the householders to whom they directed their advice would have permanent staff or would employ staff for the purposes of home entertaining. Servants were depicted in domestic advice books in order that readers may know how their staff should be presented and treated. In the post-war period, such an assumption became untenable, and domestic writers addressed both staffed and unstaffed circumstances or, increasingly, solely the latter. *The Housewife's Book* published in 1937 by the *Daily Express* for a mainstream, rather than privileged, readership, catered for both staffed and unstaffed households. As well as a 'Plan of work for mistress and one helper', with two variations for 'Housewife' and 'Helper' respectively, the book includes 'Plan of work for a small servantless house (3 or 4 in family)'.<sup>17</sup> [Fig. 2] Displaying the influence of scientific management and the new housekeeping, these schedules are followed with a chapter, 'Saving Labour' on appliances from vacuum cleaners to grapefruit scissors, illustrated with a cautionary photograph of a woman on her knees scrubbing a floor captioned: 'The backaching method of work should be avoided'. However, the book's cover features a woman identically positioned and smiling, in recognition of the extent to which housework should be enjoyed. *The Housewife's Book* is ambiguous in its treatment of the housewife both as assisted and unassisted, physically exhausted and smiling. This ambiguity accords with American Ruth Schwartz Cowan's observation that

housework was to be thought of no longer as a chore but, rather, as an expression of the housewife's personality and her affection for her family... The servantless household may have been an economic necessity for some people in the 1920s and the 1930s; but, for the first time, that necessity was widely regarded, at least in the public press, as a potential virtue.<sup>18</sup>

The unassisted hostess engaged a new set of ideals as economic and practical conditions led to novel ideological representations. The issue of the servantless household was to exercise the minds of domestic advice writers for the next half-century, until unstaffed lifestyles became the norm for the middle class.

### **'Mrs. Three-in-One', The 'Servantless Household', and 'Party Flurry'**

While the lavish hospitality presented in Post's 1922 *Etiquette* depended on a staffed household, and the figures depicted staff performing domestic duties, the fifth edition of 1937 contained a new chapter 'When Mrs. Three-in-One Gives a Party', 'addressed especially to the thousands of housekeepers who constantly ask about the various problems of running a house without the assistance of a servant.'<sup>19</sup> Post articulated a compelling problem for domestic advice writers when she introduced Mrs. Three-in-One - 'cook, waitress, and at the same time a tranquil and apparently unoccupied hostess' - into domestic discourse and her pre-eminence means that she has been credited with popularising this emergent character.<sup>20</sup> The multiple tasks by which Mrs. Three-in-One was defined had always been the lot of working class women, but her appearance in domestic advice literature signified a wider social shift towards unstaffed households for middle class readers and debate about the associated difficulties in contemporary guidebooks. Post may have neglected this constituency in her 1922 text because it was not thought to read, or buy, etiquette books, or because it was deemed to be too small a market, or as an oversight, perhaps derived from her motivation for producing the book, which was to preserve the old social order. The use of characters named after their behaviour was a signature technique of Post's writing, one that has been used to situate her work within a tradition of morality writing beginning with John Bunyan.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Mrs. Stranger, Mrs. Kindhart and Mrs. Oldname and other aptly-named characters from the pages of *Etiquette*, only Mrs. Three-in-One is accorded the distinction of an entry in the index.<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Three-in-One appears not only in her eponymous chapter, but also at a dessert bridge party in the preceding chapter and in *The Personality of a House*, published in four editions from 1930 to 1948, for both staffed and unstaffed householders.<sup>23</sup> Here it is suggested that outlines of utensils are drawn on walls and labelled for ease of use by others:

Not only are the "indicators" convenient for Mary Three-in-One herself, but necessary guides for willing guests who in their efforts to help their hostess would otherwise put the kitchen so out-of-order she has to search next day for every item that was used and put in its proper place.<sup>24</sup>

The 'others' who perform labour in the hostess's kitchen are guests, not staff and the same approach is recommended for 'her husband John's special tools'.<sup>25</sup> Post's approach to giving advice directly tailored for Mrs. Three-in-One was influential. Like Mrs. Grundy, Mrs. Three-in-One exists as an inter-textual cultural trope beyond Post's oeuvre and subsequent domestic advice books approached the same issues, albeit under different labels.

A British example is Anne Edwards and Drusilla Beyfus's *Lady Behave: A Guide to Modern Manners*, published and revised successively between 1956 and 1969.<sup>26</sup> The authors distinguish between the formal hostess with staff - 'Her job is to sit there keeping calm from the start, having a cocktail with her guests instead of flapping in and out of the kitchen' - and the cook-hostess who is 'the cook, the waitress and the washer-up' as well as hostess.<sup>27</sup> As well as giving the cook-hostess precedence (she appears in the first sections, the 'Cook-Hostess Dinner Party' and 'How to be a guest at the Cook-Hostess Party', of the first chapter, 'Dinner Parties') Edwards and Beyfus applaud her efforts: 'she can be found giving some of the best dinner parties', such as that detailed in the section 'Grand Cook-Hostess Dinner Party - Going to it and giving

it'.<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Three-in-One is here, albeit under a modified name, promoted to the opening chapter of an advice manual, as a result of her ability to sell books to a growing market of readers anxious about unassisted hostessing.

The difficulty of acting as Mrs. Three-in-One was manifested in the confused condition known as 'party flurry', which recurs across the literature. Here it is described in *Lady Behave*:

When the guests arrive [the unassisted hostess] is likely to be a flushed figure in the kitchen furiously beating up the whites of egg, wondering desperately how to manage answering the door-bell and graciously welcoming her guests and showing them where to take their coats off, when her mind is riveted on a sauce that will curdle in two seconds. The anxiety that furrows her pretty brow is whether she should stay with the guests and have another Martini or pull herself away from the party and baste the meat... The star dish can be any one of the courses, but there should only be one to flurry over.<sup>29</sup>

The hostess's labour must be invisible in order to avoid the embarrassment of both guests and hostess attendant upon being served and waited on by a peer, rather than by a subordinate. The pretence of ease, the opposite of party flurry, rendered labour acceptable by concealing it. Here it becomes clear that the two major potential vices of the post-war hostess existed in opposition to one another. A hostess must not enjoy her party too much, nor must she be seen not enjoying it: the virtuous hostess is impassive in the entertainment of others: 'Nothing damps the party spirit more than the sight of the hostess nervously gulping down her soup so that she can rush out to the kitchen and stir the sauce.'<sup>30</sup> Figure 3 is a humorous depiction of party flurry: our hostess has dropped her tray in surprise having noticed animals appearing at her kitchen window to eat her buffet. Given the shift from Post's Mrs. Three-in-One, who is 'cook, waitress and [...] hostess', to Edwards and Beyfus's 'cook-hostess', which implies that the role of waitress has been dropped, it is significant that it is the tray, as a symbol of the waitress role, which the hostess here lets go. The pivotal issue was how the lone hostess or host could bridge the discrete spaces of front and backstage to perform the labour previously carried out by staff, both cook and waitress, and hostess at the same time. Emotions have been neglected as a catalyst for social changes and for designed solutions alike, and the case study offered here answers that gap. A number of material solutions for the simultaneous performance of these competing social roles were offered.

## II. THE SOLUTION: FROM SERVICE TO SELF-SERVICE

Early efforts at rationalising the burden of the homemaker without staff began with increasing specialisation of kitchen design. Ian Bullock has noted the development of gas-powered lighting and cooking as allowing the separation of food preparation from living quarters, and the subsequent replacement of the 'living kitchen', celebrated by architect and author Herman Muthesius among others, with the 'cooking kitchen.'<sup>31</sup> An emphasis on efficiency in the kitchen focussed on reducing the amount of movement and labour performed there by making the room itself smaller. As 'New Housekeeping' advocate Christine Frederick explained, in her *Household Engineering* of 1915, first published in Britain in 1923: 'We see then that a kitchen, or a place merely for food preparation, can be much smaller than was formerly the case when it was

used as a combined sitting room, laundry and general workshop.<sup>32</sup> Frederick's early foray into this territory stems from the relative rarity of live-in domestic servants in the USA during the early twentieth century. She offered a number of solutions for 'the servantless household' including an image of a 'Revolving Partition', which enabled a 'table to be set in the Kitchen and moved into [the] living room'.<sup>33</sup> Influenced by Frederick, Grete Lihotsky designed what has commonly been regarded as the first fitted kitchen for Frankfurt am Main city architect Ernst May in 1926. The design of this compact example ensured that all equipment and supplies were readily at hand.<sup>34</sup> However efficient, simple, and even elegant, the Frankfurt kitchen was deemed to be by reformers, it was a backstage kitchen, a laboratory rather than a social space. The New Housekeeping, and labour saving appliances, were useful attempted solutions to the problem of the unstaffed household. However, neither helped very much the dilemma of Mrs. Three-in-One in entertaining unassisted. Frederick, Lihotsky and their followers failed to address the fact that in performing the conflicting roles of both entertaining guests and cooking, the unassisted hostess was involved in both what Goffman has termed front and backstage regions of the home simultaneously.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding the difficulties of unassisted homemaking on a quotidian basis, it was during situations of home entertaining that the unstaffed condition of a household became most problematic as an additional set of tasks related to hospitality and appearances joined the practical challenges. Distinct from the solutions produced by followers of Frederick's New Housekeeping, were a range of solutions dependent not upon rationalisation, but rather upon the informalisation of domestic practices. These solutions brought the kitchen into the front stage through designs such as open plan, kitchen-diners and practices including al fresco dining. Home entertaining without staff thus became a key topic for domestic advice writers.

The difficulty of entertaining unassisted proved to be a continuing theme for domestic advice writers, as is exemplified by the fact even in 1965, almost forty years after Lihotsky's fitted kitchen, the *Esquire Party Book* oscillated between addressing the host with staff, either employed specifically for the party or generally, and the unaided host.

If the host must be the bottle-washer and the butler as well as the chef, moan not! Small loss of dignity – for he somehow contrives that the service be gracious, if informal. He substitutes gadgets and appliances and new equipment for extra hands. He organizes menus that demand less service, if more advance preparation. He manipulates courses and guests and eating places so that everyone is spared the awkwardness of inept service or plate-clearing.<sup>36</sup>

Part of a smaller body of literature addressed to the host, rather than the hostess (discussed further in part three), this text nevertheless displays an attempt to rouse enthusiasm for unassisted entertaining, in the face of implied anxiety on the part of the reader, common to domestic advice for readers of both genders. A widespread solution to party flurry was the scaling-down of culinary complexity in the number and type of dishes offered to eat. Multi-course place settings, often depicted as overwhelming for guests and hosts alike, may be contrasted with the arrival at a new standard of three dishes for the home cook, starter, main course and pudding, requiring simpler place settings. Sarah Maclean wrote in her *Pan Book of Etiquette* of the prevalence of the three course dinner parties.

Times have changed since Mrs Beeton's day when five courses - soup, fish, entrée, roast meat and a choice of sweets - was the accepted number at any small dinner party. Even at banquets now more than four courses is unusual, and three - something to start with, a meat or fish dish and a sweet - is the usual number at private dinner parties, including those given by people with money and servants.<sup>37</sup>

This exemplifies a general informalisation of home entertaining regardless of economic constraints and staffing. What has been accepted today as common sense may for hostesses of the interwar and post-war periods have seemed to fall short of proper hospitality. Entertaining had involved allowing guests the full extent of the quality and the quantity of one's pantry through the offering of complex, time-consuming dishes which, while not necessarily the product of the hostesses own hand, pointed to the expense, in terms of both ingredients and time, to which she was willing, and able, to support for her guests.

In general, the twentieth century trend in food preparation, in the USA and the UK, was towards convenience foods, shown in Fig. 4, an illustration by Seymour Chwast from the *Esquire Party Book* of 1965, and eating out, both of which have been associated with the increasing tendency for women to combine family with extra-domestic work. In the first half of the twentieth century, domestic eating was significantly altered by a number of developments: increased production capacity, the availability of dietary supplements and vitamins, the consolidation of supply into multiple retailers and the importance of refrigeration technology for the types of foods, their distribution and domestic storage. Additional advances in branding, marketing and packaging foods were aided by emergent materials and techniques such as cellophane and canning and by the development of television advertising from 1955 onwards. In spite of advancements in nutritional science, malnutrition persisted in both interwar and post-war Britain.<sup>38</sup> Public health scholar John Coveney has noted: 'During the 1950s and 1960s "convenience" foods were increasingly promoted as cooking in the "modern" way.'<sup>39</sup> A counter-trend, however, was the search for simple, authentic dishes characterised by Elizabeth David's *Mediterranean Food* of 1950.<sup>40</sup> The next year, the Festival of Britain introduced its visitors to the milk bar and the *Good Food Guide* was launched. Coffee bars and supermarkets proliferated with the latter shifting the balance of power away from manufacture to retailing. The effects of a demographic shift towards smaller households and, in Britain, the development of commercial food provision in motorway service stations from 1959, fuelled the spread of the ready meal in advance of the acceptance of microwave technology in the 1980s.

Post-war guests modified their expectations to suit reduced incomes and a lack of assistance to the extent that the concept of self-service encompassed guests. The increasing informalisation of home entertaining, influenced by the North American trends so stylishly discussed in Russel and Mary Wright's *Guide to Easier Living* of 1950, is shown in British sources in the recommendations for buffets. Figure 5, from *Today's Etiquette* of 1967, provides a jocular representation of the hostess's role at a buffet as the labels are left to offer a reductive mediation between the food and the guests, with the fruit bowl, for example, labelled 'Vitamin C'. In 1956, Edith Barber advised a modest involvement by guests 'often appetizers served in the living-room will take the place of the first course at the table. The guests may help to pass the appetizers'.<sup>41</sup>



In the same year, Edwards and Beyfus were similarly cautious in their recommendation of what guests might be expected to do for themselves: 'Most people without help find one way out is to leave the vegetables on the table for guests to help themselves and tell them to begin right away. Gravy and sauce are left on the table too...' <sup>42</sup> By helping with the serving, guests helped with the social role of hosting. Assistance from the guests was presented as socially beneficial, in placing all present on an equal and co-operative footing, as we see in the American *Esquire Party Book* published in Britain of 1963:

If one of your guests is shy or a stranger, or both, draft her as your assistant. If she has something to pass or to do, the shy one will be forced out of her corner and become part of the group in spite of herself. The same technique sometimes works wonders in breaking up cliques. You can call one or two people out of an overtime conversation to select records and to pass the hot tidbits (either food or gossip) then introduce new people to the old group. This should start it ticking again. <sup>43</sup>

This recommendation exemplifies the influence of American informality and youth culture, recalling advice such as this from 1961: 'If you want to have a kitchen party, at which everyone helps to prepare refreshments, you will not need to plan any other activity, since the preparation of the food itself is the activity.' <sup>44</sup> Space constraints offered another reason for recommending a buffet, as shown here in *The Woman's Own Book of Modern Homemaking* of 1967:

[Buffet parties] are great space-savers, so you can accommodate more guests at weddings, birthday parties, luncheon or evening parties... If the weather is fine, and you either have a patio, or can deck up a concreted area in the garden to look reasonably festive, lure people outside. This will save wear and tear on your carpets... Wine and cheese parties... require a minimum of preparation, provide plenty of variety and result in surprisingly little washing-up... Tea parties are an easy means of entertaining your friends. The cost is relatively low, the food can be prepared in advance, and can be served either at table or, more informally, handed round by the hostess, from a large side-table <sup>45</sup>

The recommendation of *à la fresco* dining relates to an emerging continental influence in British eating, spearheaded by Elizabeth David as mentioned above. However, notwithstanding the widespread advocacy of buffets, British advisor Sarah Maclean warned ominously that that assistance from guests could be more hindrance than help. <sup>46</sup>

### **Bridging the Regions: Oven-to-Tableware**

The party flurry associated with Mrs. Three-in-One centred upon her need to occupy two regions, front and backstage, dining room and kitchen, simultaneously:

Dinner parties should be planned so that the hostess is detained in the kitchen as little as possible. Nothing is more embarrassing to guests than a flurried hostess darting into the dining room between long absences at the cooking stove. <sup>47</sup>

As well as making the meals themselves easier to prepare and serve, the ideal hostess who performed the conflicting roles of both entertaining guests and cooking, was directed to use a range of objects, all of which functioned to 'bridge' the front and backstage regions. A basic example of this trend is the recommendation of simple, sturdy designs for ceramic or Pyrex oven-to-tableware, which eased the burden of the unassisted hostess by saving time that would otherwise have been spent plating food into presentable dishes. <sup>48</sup> Also relevant here is the 'Party Susan' marketed by Tupperware, with a lid to keep food fresh, six compartments and for separating foods and a handle which allowed it to be carried between kitchen and buffet location as well as offering something of the flexibility of the 'lazy Susan', a turntable which allowed food to be passed

between diners easily.<sup>49</sup> More complex solutions were marketed, however. Readers of post-war domestic advice were encouraged to employ gadgets and appliances to ease their burden.<sup>50</sup> Adrian Forty reminds us that the assumption that gadgets replaced domestic staff does not hold true for Britain during the period prior to 1939, when domestic staff were not in short supply, appliances were bought for use by servants, and only those wealthy enough to have servants could afford the appliances.<sup>51</sup> However, during the war, 'the selling point of household commodities becomes time saved to be used for war work'.<sup>52</sup> For the post-war period in the USA, Lynn Spigel makes the point that 'living without an array of machines meant that you were anachronistic, unable to keep up with the more progressive Joneses'.<sup>53</sup> In *More Work for Mother*, Ruth Schwartz Cowan describes how domestic labour increased as a result of societal pressures on women based on an increased emphasis on hygiene enabled by so-called 'labour saving' devices aimed at the U.S. post-war housewife.<sup>54</sup> Writing on the British case, Tim Putnam has pointed to the way in which such devices are no longer marketed as labour saving but rather associated with 'leisure, pleasure and higher standards of consumption'.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to actual practice, then, these representations endow appliances with the promise of labour saving, timesaving and modernity.

Electric plate-warmers and hot plates that enabled pre-preparation importantly freed the cook-hostess from having to co-ordinate the simultaneous readiness of meal components and assisted serving by allowing food to be left out for guests to help themselves. The Design Council publication, *Tableware*, of 1969, makes a clear connection between the use of spaces within homes and the devices made to bridge them, arguing that a role remains for the plate warmer:

With smaller houses, better planning of kitchens in relation to eating-serving, and the growing tendency to eat at least some meals in the kitchen, keeping food hot is no longer the problem it was when protocol and several flights of stairs separated kitchen from dining room. Nevertheless there are occasions when equipment for keeping dishes hot can be useful: for invalids where food may be prepared in advance and left by a bedside; for parties to save constant trips to and from the table; for eating out of doors; for keeping coffee and other drinks hot.<sup>56</sup>

The concern for 'smaller houses', and thrift displayed in this quotation from a Council of Industrial Design publication, *Tableware* points to the democratising function of domestic design in the post-war period. *The Woman's Own Book of Modern Homemaking* displays a modern plate warmer, in tubular metal on a table set with lace place mats, showing that utilitarian forms associated with modernist design were combined with the more traditional trappings of comfort for a dining situation. [Fig. 6] The caption to this image draws attention to the 'translucent china in plain white' uniting utility and elegance. This is typical of the way in which domestic advice literature presents modernist design, with its emphasis on rational efficiency, in combination with the traditional domestic values of hospitality and comfort to produce a feminised modernity.<sup>57</sup>

But while the plate warmer merely preserves what has been achieved in the kitchen, the use of portable cooking equipment at the table turns the dining area into a temporary kitchen. The *Esquire Party Book* promotes appliances as allowing entertaining to occur away from the kitchen and the dining room:

The whole family of electric appliances serves beautifully outside, too, if they can but reach an outlet. An electric griddle, its temperature set at 200, accommodates several small saucepans or casseroles. Electric skillets, fryer cookers, and roasters may all be used for accessory cookers, as well as warmers. And if outlets are limited, candle warmers keep dishes up to heat, when they've come directly from the oven in a heavy bake-serve pan.<sup>58</sup>

Fondue is another example of cooking at the table, associated with the fashionability of continental European modes of entertaining which gathered momentum in the post-war period, in which guests prepared their own food. For *The Woman's Own Book of Modern Homemaking*:

Cooking at the table – by electric skillet, rotisserie or a thermostatically controlled cook-and-serve unit – is certainly one way of keeping the hostess in the conversation when tricky things like pancakes or soufflés are on the menu. But when the cooking involves fat or strong flavours such as onion and the dining room has no extractor fan, it can create its own problems with the decorations.<sup>59</sup>

While electrical appliances which allowed cooking at the table were suited to entertaining, this guidebook advised that such items must be used regularly, not just when guests are present, in order to repay their purchase price.<sup>60</sup> For domestic advice writers, electric plate warmers and associated cooking devices literally bridged the gap between front and backstage for the purposes of self-service by providing a microcosmic kitchen in the dining room.

The hostess trolley functions as a bridging device to varying degrees: while a simple trolley eases the transition from kitchen to dining room, a more complex model can function almost as a portable kitchen. The *Esquire Party Book* promotes trolleys as tools of assistance when serving food in the garden:

Serving carts, with big wheels for navigating rough bricks and slates, are at least as useful as six more hands, both for serving and for cleaning up. If the cart's top has a built-in heating surface, so much the better, for keeping hot things hot is at least as much of a problem outdoors as it is indoors.<sup>61</sup>

The hostess trolley received Council of Industrial Design recommendation in Geoffrey Salmon's 1967 book, which depicts a 'possible' trolley with closed storage for keeping plates and food hot [Fig. 7] and in a later contribution to the same Design Centre series, *Tableware* of 1969, where Elizabeth Good warns that 'Electrically-heated trolleys are undoubtedly practical, carrying as they do the complete meal and equipment, but unfortunately most of them are hideous and more evocative of the operating theatre than the dining room.'<sup>62</sup> In contrast, the trolley Good depicts is 'laid for a buffet supper'<sup>63</sup> - while this trolley saves steps, it is nevertheless set as meticulously as a formal table thereby lessening its labour-saving value. Similarly, the *Esquire Party Book* advises that whatever modifications are made to the conventional dinner party, the traditional values of hospitality be maintained.

Whether "dinner" means pot-luck with pot roast at the picnic table – or filet en brioche on the Spode – the fact that it is dinner guarantees certain niceties. Different niceties, we'll grant you, than they were a generation ago, but niceties withal! It may no longer be served in a dining-room, but the sun-room or loggia or garden that substitutes will be alive with flowers and paintings and music to dramatize the meal. It seldom steps out onto white damask anymore, but the heavy place-mats or colored cloths that appear instead are no less handsome for all their modern practicality.<sup>64</sup>

In this paean to informalisation, the modernity promoted is democratic but not at odds with the display of home comforts in the form of flowers, paintings and coloured cloths or place mats.

### **Collapsing the Regions: From Hatches to Kitchen-Diners**

While a number of solutions to the difficulty experienced by Mrs. Three-in-One, at having to negotiate separate regions in the home, focussed on bridging those discrete spaces, an equally compelling range of solutions revolved around the collapsing of distinct regions. The impassive ornamentalism of the hostess, the emphasis on self-effacement and attentiveness to the needs of her guests, are connected to a much wider association of woman and home, which has been articulated theoretically in the increasingly-challenged trope of separate spheres.<sup>65</sup> In this model, women are relegated to the domestic sphere to the extent they become part of the home just as it is part of her. Mirroring the larger 'separate spheres' of home, as feminised, and outside world, as masculinised, in Victorian Britain, so Victorian conceptions of the home were stringently demarcated into different zones, the social regions displayed to guests and the hidden, working parts of the home inhabited by staff. Such separateness continued in the reforms of the New Housekeeping where a small, efficient 'backstage' kitchen was completely removed from the social areas of the home, and the same regions were later termed front regions and 'backstage' by Goffman. Inhabitants generally welcomed the space-saving fitted kitchens of interwar and post-war homes as improvements on their previous circumstances. However, while their size and arrangement made these fitted kitchens exemplary of Taylorist ideas about efficiency, by maintaining the separation between front and backstage, they maintained the burden of Mrs Three-in-One. The same interwar and post-war homes that featured an efficient backstage kitchen also often contained an L-shaped living room, so that the smaller region could house a dining table and chairs. But again, notwithstanding its flexibility and suitability for a newly enlarged middle class market, the living-dining room did little to assist Mrs. Three-in-One. A final solution to the physical difficulties of self-service for the hostess is that the guests should go to her. The burden of Mrs. Three-in-One had been exacerbated by the maintenance of distinct regions of the home for food preparation and food service. These distinct regions blurred, during the mid-twentieth century, so that public and private parts of the home combined into multi-functional and flexible spaces, in a material manifestation of the informalisation of domestic entertaining, as here from 1967:

Architects and builders, with housewives jogging their elbows, are now providing more space for kitchens, usually double the area they thought adequate in the 1930s. They are bringing them out of the back regions into the main part of the house, giving them a chance of sunshine and a good view from the sink. Walls between kitchen and dining room are coming down and being replaced by counters and cupboard units. Sometimes the kitchen is moved into the area once occupied by the traditional "front room", or it is linked with the open plan living-room so that whatever she is doing about the dinner, the hostess is never shut out from the conversation or the television news.<sup>66</sup>

The service hatch was a transitional solution to the problems of self-service, like a horizontal relative of the 'dumb waiter'. Sitting between the backstage kitchen and the social parts of the home, it rendered the boundary more porous. Like the vacuum cleaner, the hatch was originally developed for use by servants in the 1920s and popularised with the interest in Taylorist efficiency and New Housekeeping exemplified by

Frederick's *Household Engineering* published in London in 1920. Hatches were noted by the social satirists at *Punch* magazine in 1926, in which a cartoon of a maid climbing through a hatch with the caption "Do I have to come through this hole every time?" pilloried the efficiency movement as much the target as the maid herself, as her stupidity is used to question how a hatch would save time.<sup>67</sup> By the 1950s, the hatch was a feature of new homes and a commonplace improvement in old ones. Writing in 1962, E. S. Turner associates the hatch wholly with servants:

In outer suburbia, where hundreds of thousands of bungalows and small houses were going up, builders incorporated "service hatches" between kitchen and dining-room - just in case the householder was fortunate enough to find a maid. They continued to do so long after it was obvious that no maid could be found. A distinguished architect has described the survival of the serving hatch as a notable example of snobbishness. "It is an arrangement that overlooks the fact that everyone knows there are no maids in the kitchen, and that men have at last been allowed into the kitchen to do the washing-up."<sup>68</sup>

Turner ignores the use of the hatch by the newly unassisted hostess, even though by 1962 she was a familiar character in domestic advice literature and magazines. In addition to their capacity for 'saving steps', social historian Christina Hardyment suggests two benefits of the hatch: it obscured labour or its material evidence in the kitchen from guests, and it 'catered to the growing feeling that it was somehow not quite right for mum to be shut away in the kitchen'.<sup>69</sup> Although developed for use by servants, the hatch was therefore a useful interim solution for the unassisted hostess. In retrospect, the hatch can be seen as a transitional design element that sprang from the same compulsions and prefigured the kitchen-diner and open-plan living solutions that were to follow.

Notwithstanding E. S. Turner's disparagement, hatches did not disappear through disuse, or misuse as *Punch* would have it, but rather they were incorporated into more ambitious architectural solutions. Howard Robertson's *Reconstruction and the Home* of 1947 shows an interwar example of a hatch built in to a storage unit dividing kitchen and dining room, called a 'buffet-dresser fitting'.<sup>70</sup> [Fig. 8] Readers are told that 'on the dining room side the sliding doors are of glass in metal frames' while the fact that the doors are opaque on the kitchen side is neither mentioned nor explained as being a way of maintaining the invisibility of domestic labour. This design saves labour by allowing equipment to be stored from the kitchen side following washing, and used directly from the dining side. In 1955, Americans Mary and Russel Wright's *Guide to Easier Living* presented similar open hatch solutions, allowing greater interplay between food preparation and dining areas. One image from the Walker Art Center's *Idea House II* – built in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, in 1947 - shows a peninsular breakfast bar, which allows serving directly from the kitchen and easy return of crockery, although it was probably not intended for anything other than family dining, as the seating is in a linear rather than conversational arrangement. In 1955, Eric Bird and Kenneth Holmes showcased a 'Dining-Kitchen', designed by Frederick Gibberd, in their book *Decorating for the Amateur*. [Fig. 9] Here, a peninsular unit acts both as a display case and as a way of maintaining a discrete dining area separate from the kitchen:

The two halves of this dining-kitchen are separated by a cupboard fitting which has doors on both faces and which houses glass, china and cutlery. The pictures and decorative curtain show that meals in the kitchen need not involve absence of comfort and elegance.<sup>71</sup>

The emphasis on display and 'comfort and elegance' suggests that this might conceivably be used for entertaining. The peninsular unit contains closed cupboards in the lower half, a counter accessible from both sides, like a hatch, and glazed display and storage shelves in the upper portion, with a kitchen behind. This is a transitional example, which uses a storage unit as a partial screen between the preparation and eating areas.

The logical successor to the hatch, and the hybrid kitchen and eating spaces, was entertaining in the kitchen. This involved the party moving to the hostess-cook for her convenience, illustrating the importance in home entertaining of maintaining her composure. Domestic advice literature of the late 1960s depicts the kitchen as a potential site for interaction with guests. Examples include peninsular tables that are both part of the kitchen itself and by intersecting the domestic space function as dividing forms, not unusually depicted with formal place settings for dining.<sup>72</sup> Just as the distinct roles of cook and hostess had been combined into one, so the stringent demarcations of the home into 'front regions' and 'backstage' became blurred in a material manifestation of the informalisation of domestic entertaining. Social problems can thus be seen to determine material solutions.

The prevalence of the kitchen-diner by the end of the 1970s represented a radical deconstruction of the Victorian ideal home, in which separate rooms for discrete functions had been enshrined as standard, but domestic advisors presented even more flexible solutions. Joyce Lowrie is not alone in recommending that that the hall be used as 'a tiny, formal dining room for grown-ups'.<sup>73</sup> [Fig. 10] Published in Elizabeth Good's *Tableware* of 1969, Ilana Henderson's ingenious revolving kitchen is just one of a number of examples (most notable among them Joe Columbo's 'Mini-kitchen of 1963) which negate the existence of the kitchen as a discrete space and redefine it as an object for use in any room.<sup>74</sup> [Fig. 11] Henderson's example was developed with Bird's Eye foods, and associates the company with a future of convenience food and the decline of a more traditional ideal kitchen. Elsewhere in her text, however, Good recommended that 'Few methods of storage for pottery are better than the traditional dresser' in a blend of old and new which typifies the domestic advice genre.

In advising the newly unassisted hostess, domestic advisors modified the conventions of home entertaining initially by bridging and later by collapsing the space between kitchen and dining room. In an era in which broader influences of food preparation and consumption from the Mediterranean allowed a redefinition of home cooking as creative, Post's 'Mrs. Three-in-One' and Edwards and Beyfus's 'Cook-Hostess' increasingly left behind the more subordinate role of waitress, as Constance Spry and Rosemary Hume put it: 'The contemporary cook-hostess has the best of it, for she sees her efforts appreciated and hears the dishes discussed, which is a pleasant innovation'.<sup>75</sup> However, just as her waitressing duties were eased by the

solutions offered, the collapse of front and backstage produced a situation of greater visibility and continuous performance for the cook-hostess, thereby increasing her social labour.

### **III. THE PROBLEM WITH THE SOLUTION: *MORE WORK FOR MOTHER***

In *The Making of the Modern Kitchen*, June Freeman has noted the 'emergence in the early years of the twentieth century of a revisionist ideology that shifted the emphasis away from getting women out of the home to easing the work of women within it.'<sup>76</sup> But how successful were the attempts to ease women's domestic roles? In the case of 'labour-saving' appliances, Ruth Schwartz Cowan has argued that ensuing higher standards of cleanliness militated against the lessening of the domestic burden. And in reviewing ideas on kitchen design, Nicholas Bullock has critiqued responses by architects to the new housekeeping as the imposition of a middle class ideal on largely working class communities.<sup>77</sup> Traditional ideas about gender continued to exert a decisive influence on the divisions of domestic labour as Jean-Claude Kaufmann has shown.<sup>78</sup> In her study of the ways in which hygiene and scientific management were harnessed in order to inculcate scientific consciousness into women through the appliance of science in the kitchen, Susan E. Reid has pointed out that advice published in Soviet Russia in the post-war period concerning the ways in which a woman might make the double burden of work and home easier, functioned to strengthen the idea that such a double burden was hers.<sup>79</sup> Joanna Bourke has argued that domestic education validated working class women's domestic labour: 'domestic education was a way they actively sought to redefine their status as women within the household'.<sup>80</sup> By emphasising their domestic expertise, women employed "'risk-averse" forms of resisting' male dominance in the home.<sup>81</sup> It might equally be argued, however, that domestic education is a method of restricting working-class women and girls, in particular, to their place in society, and in portraying ideal familial roles, domestic advice literature functions as a discourse of dominance, to naturalise inequality.<sup>82</sup> This analysis of British and American domestic advice literature demonstrates that solutions offered therein warrant a similarly sceptical view.

#### **Ebullient Bachelors: Domestic Advice Literature for Men**

As Jennifer Loehlin has pithily put it, even in the 1970s: 'Many [women] preferred to work part-time, since their increased work outside the home was not matched by their husbands' increased work inside the home.'<sup>83</sup> Here, prescription is consistent with practice, as representations of men are comparatively absent from domestic advice literature, in a manner akin to the 'invisible men' in Claudia Nelson's study of representations of fatherhood.<sup>84</sup> Where it occurs, homemaking advice directed specifically at men concerns their leisure. It must be assumed that those men seeking domestic advice from channels other than familial, experiential, instruction consulted books ostensibly directed at women. Just as Veblen's ornamental hostess denoted her husband's wealth, so the post-war leisured host perhaps implied his wife's domestic prowess and ability to cope alone. Representations of men's domestic contributions are more prevalent in do-it-yourself magazines marketed to a largely male audience.<sup>85</sup> Bourke has argued that interwar and post-war suburban housing improvements and higher levels of home ownership for working-class families distanced men from

their paid work, and offered greater space and motivation for domestic hobbies such as maintaining allotments and carpentry.<sup>86</sup> Boys received elementary school training in manual skills and gardening designed to dovetail with the domestic education given to girls.<sup>87</sup> A critique of the association of women with domesticity as neglecting men's domestic involvement has been mounted by both Joanne Hollows, whose analysis of the cookery column in *Playboy* magazine challenges a conformist middle class, 'feminized and suburban domestic ideal', and by Bill Osgerby, whose study of the domestic spaces promoted for bachelors in *Playboy* makes clear the expression of masculinity through home decorating.<sup>88</sup> However, in seeking to rehabilitate male engagement with domesticity, Bourke, Hollows and Osgerby fail to distinguish adequately between quotidian household labour and leisured domestic involvement. This distinction is thrown into relief in the pages of domestic advice books.

Those relatively few advice books to have addressed domestic matters for a male readership focus on the special case of home entertaining rather than the daily practices of homemaking. This is consistent with the appearance of men in general domestic advice texts as absent or leisured. As an example of domestic advice for men, the ebullient *Esquire Party Book* of 1965 proclaimed the virtues of self-service to lone male hosts as adding positive qualities not available to staffed entertainments:

Once upon a time when you wanted to give a party, you called Ye Olde Family Retainer and said "Dinner for 12, please, James." BUT THAT WAS LIGHT-YEARS AGO. NOW when you want to give a party, it's on *you*. You plan it; you shop for it; you cook it; and nine times out of ten, you serve it... For the joy of today's entertaining at home is the chance it gives YOU to make each party your own – *your* style, which is after all the best style for you... Your welcome is the Prime Meridian – the starting point from which to reckon the success of each party – so try to open the door yourself for each guest.<sup>89</sup>

The repetition of the word 'you' emphasises the pivotal role of the host and the opportunity his party offers for self-expression. The confidently humorous tone of this text belies the concern for which it caters and may be seen to result from its address to bachelors rather than housewives. Hostesses are mentioned occasionally, usually where the menu requires assistance, and this dual address is reflected in Seymour Chwast's book jacket, which shows a waiter on the front and a waitress on the reverse. Another example of domestic advice literature directed at men is Desmond Briggs's *Entertaining Single-Handed* (1968), which also employs a bullish voice distinct from that of many domestic advice books and similarly emphasises self-expression in home entertaining.

... you must compose your menu with the care of an impressionist, so that nothing clashes, everything blends yet contrasts with piquancy. Equally you should dip your culinary brush into a palette made up of the delicious, the strange, the provoking, the fresh and the humble.<sup>90</sup>

Here, the act of home entertaining is aggrandised by comparison with the expertise of a fine artist. The cover features an image of a cook hiding behind the kitchen door while serving crowding guests from a saucepan. Even this depiction of party flurry can be interpreted as a complement to the cooking. The absence of male characters in domestic advice literature, and their leisured disengagement where they do appear, results in a grossly unequal distribution of labour. For example, Edwards and Beyfus are typical in advising unequal distribution of labour along gender lines:



If there is no reliable man around the house or children of a sensible age, detail someone to help with the serving. Decide who is to do what. Men usually fix the drinks and do the carving, while the hostess serves up the food and clears it away.<sup>91</sup>

### **By Women, For Women?**

While much domestic advice literature to have addressed the unassisted hostess was produced *for* women, *by* women, and contains a great deal of positive supportive advice, domestic advisors can nevertheless be seen functioning conservatively by attributing to women the greater part of domestic labour, thereby perpetuating the home as a space of leisure for men. In 1962, Sarah Maclean delivered the following pithy dictum in her *Pan Book of Etiquette and Good Manners*: 'if you find yourself enjoying your own party, it's ten to one your guests aren't'.<sup>92</sup> Maclean refers to the amount of work undertaken by the hostess to secure the pleasure of others and thereby perpetuates the disengaged nature of the passive, ornamental hostess of 1923, even while post-war models of home entertaining required considerable labour. That this book is aimed at a female readership is denoted not only by the choice of author, a journalist for *Woman* magazine, but also by its cover design in which a young, pensive female protagonist is shown wondering about a number of points of etiquette including 'the right food and drink to serve'. [Fig. 12] Much later in her *Party Planners Book*, of 1986, Lady Elizabeth Anson argued, persuasively, that 'there is surely very little point in giving a party unless you, as the host or hostess, can enjoy it too'.<sup>93</sup> Anson's philanthropic concern for her readers' pleasure must be qualified by the aim of her book, to promote the services of her party planning company, thereby returning the hostess to a consumer of the labour of others. These examples - of a heavy domestic workload, of women not enjoying themselves 'too much' and of the representation of women as consumers rather than producers - demonstrate how domestic advice literature, as a discourse by women for women, has missed the opportunity for a more radical solution and essentially reproduced patriarchal conditions.

In discussing male authorship of advice, Jennifer J. Popiel has argued that the domestic role ascribed to women, particularly mothers, has been positive:

While this rhetoric of domesticity may appear manipulative and demeaning to a modern eye [...] Men's relegation to professional advice givers, one step removed from domestic duties, guaranteed women a free hand within the domestic interior. [...] The women addressed by these treatises were not expected to be particularly self-abnegating or generous in daily practice. Rather, the manuals demonstrated the ways in which compliance would be greatly to a woman's advantage. When women found a new place within the home, their constraints increased in ways that were not negligible, but they also gained new forms of freedom and respect. [...] many of these women were themselves practically motivated in adopting this ideology as their own; and second, the enunciation of a seemingly repressive refrain of "separate but equal" may have helped to pave the way for the modern enunciation of equality *tout court*.<sup>94</sup>

Here, Popiel accepts the fact that the manuals presented their solutions as advantageous to women, and the fact that many women adopted 'this ideology as their own' as evidence that the texts presented advice that was of benefit to the intended female readership. Popiel's analysis gives inadequate consideration to the domestic advice genre as multivalent, and as presenting advice as being of benefit to the reader while also, perhaps primarily, serving another, hegemonic, group. While providing a counterpoint to the sustained

criticism of domestic discourses by feminist scholars, Popiel avoids the extent to which such advice may also have benefited men in the household.

In her study of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, Jennifer Scanlon has noted a 'balance between the fostering of anxiety that draws readers to seek out advice and the offering of positive messages that encourage them to return the following month'.<sup>95</sup> Incomplete and unfulfilling advice is characteristic of the serial form of which Scanlon writes, rather than of the definitive nature of the book-length volume under analysis here, which may have more to gain from solving reader's problems than generating them. Nevertheless, Scanlon's observation may be taken as a reminder that domestic advice sources may be in the business of arousing anxiety in order to market solutions and that, as well as providing solutions that advisors thought women needed, such sources also accorded with broader social norms and pressures.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This article has examined some of the solutions presented by domestic advisors in response to the emergence of a readership who wanted advice on how to entertain without domestic staff, be they newly unassisted middle-class hostesses, aspirational working class women or the materially reduced upper class.

Representations of the unassisted hostess in domestic advice literature suggest that far from fitting the production-to-consumption model, the work of the hostess may equally be expressed as the reverse.

Domestic advice literature presented the pre- and interwar- hostess as a lady of the leisure class acting in a largely symbolic capacity, consistent with Veblen's model of conspicuous consumption, and underplayed her domestic duties due to their hidden nature. The new character of Mrs. Three-in-One, and the consequently undeniable engagement of the hostess in active labour, severely hampered the expression of existing virtues, although attempts at the continuance of the ornamental hostess persisted.

Domestic advisors promoted the novel domestic solutions of modernist design, with its virtues of space-saving, flexibility, multifunctionality, informality and practicality. Accommodation of the newly unassisted hostess was recommended through modifications to the design and layout of the ideal home. Front and backstage regions were bridged by trolleys, hatches, appliances and oven-to-tableware. Discrete kitchens, sitting rooms and dining rooms - popularised prior to the twentieth-century - were collapsed in preference for a return to multi-purpose flexible rooms such as living-dining rooms, and ultimately the open-plan kitchen-dining space and the kitchen dinner party. These material solutions enabled the coterminous performance of competing social roles and minimised the most subordinate and least essential component of Mrs. Three-in-One's trio of labours, that of waitress. The implication is that such solutions were ostensibly more democratic because it was thought that by demolishing the physical boundaries between front and backstage, public and private, place of leisure and place of work, so the unequal division of social labour among family and guests would be similarly dismantled. Just as it has been argued that domestic advice literature is incapable of changing social relations and therefore is doomed to replicate them<sup>96</sup> so the material

solutions proposed for the redesign of the home in response to new social problems can be seen as similarly ineffectual, notwithstanding the fanfare with which they were promoted to readers, as this article has shown.

Following the departure of regular domestic staff, the domestic labour involved in creating and maintaining a space suitable for home entertaining and the preparation and serving of food and drinks was added to the traditional social tasks of the hostess, welcoming guests, introducing them to one another, keeping conversation flowing and attending to their needs. Domestic advisors of the post-war period offered visual and textual representations which ostensibly solved the problems of the unassisted hostess, while also constructing an ideal in which women competently performed multiple simultaneous roles. The close reading presented here demonstrates that these solutions functioned in the service of an absent and unhelpful husband as labour previously performed by staff fell wholly upon the hostess, rather than being equitably shared with the host. By promoting solutions to the tri-partite burden of the newly unassisted hostess centred upon 'bridging' devices and flexible spaces, the design solutions offered promoted the juggling of multiple, competing roles and domestic advice writers thus avoided the more radical and effective proposition that labour might be distributed more equally within the household. Furthermore, by opening up the backstage space of the kitchen to the front stage spaces of reception areas, such solutions created more social labour for the unassisted hostess as her performance in the kitchen was exposed to the gaze of her guests.

Through modelling the use of advice discourses for historical understanding of the role of domestic design within a socially-embedded context, this article has revealed social issues, design problems and problems in the giving of domestic advice to be inextricably related. Domestic advice is an ideal discourse articulated in response to social realities, and it is inherently ideological. By looking *at* domestic advice in close textual and visual analysis, it is possible to conclude that while promising self-improvement, and self-help, domestic advice literature has not always functioned in the best interests of women. Advice books that promised *Easier Living* actually promoted *More Work for Mother*.<sup>97</sup>

## References

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- <sup>9</sup> A Society Lady (1923) *The A.B.C. of Etiquette by A Society Lady* (London: Drane's) p. 14
- <sup>10</sup> Society Lady, *A.B.C.*, p. 38.
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- <sup>12</sup> Veblen *Leisure Class*, p. 68.

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<sup>13</sup> Society Lady, *A.B.C.*, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Veblen, *Leisure Class*, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> E. Goffman (1990) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin) p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> E. Post (1922) *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls) chapter 14, caption to plate between pp. 236-7.

<sup>17</sup> D. Jeremiah (2000) *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-70* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) pp. 104-5 selectively refers to two of these plans to illustrate the long hours worked by housewives, but ignores both the plan for the 'helper' and the monthly plan of seasonal work in the home.

<sup>18</sup> R. S. Cowan (1989) *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (London: Free Association Books) p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> Post, *Etiquette*, p. 817. These readers are, in addition, directed to the chapters 'Simple Party Giving' and 'Modern Dinner Giving'.

<sup>20</sup> Cowan, *More Work*, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> D. E. Robinson and D. F. Strong (1970) review of E. Post (1969) *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls) 1922 Replica Edition, with 'A New Preface to an Old Edition', and E. L. Post (1969) *Etiquette*, Twelfth Revised Edition (New York: Funk & Wagnalls) in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July, pp. 173-174, p. 173.

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<sup>23</sup> E. Post (1948, 1930) *The Personality of a House: the Blue Book of Home Charm* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company) p. 397.

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- <sup>32</sup> C. Frederick (1923) *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* (Chicago: American School of Home Economics) p. 19 cited Bullock, 'First the Kitchen' p. 180.
- <sup>33</sup> Frederick, *Household Engineering*, pp. 377-416, caption to plate between pp. 376-377.
- <sup>34</sup> S. R. Henderson (1996) 'A Revolution in the Woman's Sphere: Grete Lihotsky and the Frankfurt Kitchen', in D. Coleman, E. Danze and C. Henderson (Ed.) *Architecture and Feminism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) pp. 221-253.
- <sup>35</sup> Goffman, *Presentation*, p. 110, p. 114.
- <sup>36</sup> Editors of *Esquire Magazine* with S. and R. Welch (1965, 1935) *Esquire Party Book* (London: Arthur Baker Ltd.) p. 127.
- <sup>37</sup> Maclean, *Pan Book*, p. 140.
- <sup>38</sup> D. J. Oddy (2003) *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990* (Woodbridge: the Boydell Press).
- <sup>39</sup> J. Coveney (2000) *Food, Morals and Meanings: the Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (London: Routledge) p. 133.
- <sup>40</sup> E. David (1950) *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (London: John Lehmann). See S. Jones and B. Taylor (2001) 'Food Writing and Food Cultures: the case of Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4, pp. 171-188, p. 172. Also opposed to the informalisation of eating was the traditionalism of Constance Spry and Rosemary Hume's Cordon Bleu cookery school - see C. Spry and R. Hume (1956) *The Constance Spry Cookery Book* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons) and (1961) *Hostess* (London: Dent).
- <sup>41</sup> E. M. Barber, (1956) *Short Cut to Etiquette* (Kingswood: The World's Work Ltd.) p. 32.
- <sup>42</sup> Edwards and Beyfus, *Lady Behave*, p. 7.

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- <sup>43</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, p. 3.
- <sup>44</sup> M. S. Barclay and F. Champion (1961) *Teen Guide to Homemaking* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc.) p. 170.
- <sup>45</sup> (1967) *The Woman's Own Book of Modern Homemaking* (London: George Newnes Ltd.) p. 324...p. 329...p.337.
- <sup>46</sup> Maclean, *Pan Book*, p. 148.
- <sup>47</sup> *Woman's Own Book*, p.332.
- <sup>48</sup> For example, 'Hamilton oven-to-tableware designed by Tarquin Cole and John Minshaw. Design Centre Award 1966. Govancroft Potteries Ltd.', E. Good (1969) *Tableware* (London: Macdonald and Co. (Publishers) in association with the Council of Industrial Design) p. 23.
- <sup>49</sup> For a discussion of Tupperware in general see A. J. Clarke, (1999) *Tupperware: the Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press).
- <sup>50</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, p. 127.
- <sup>51</sup> A. Forty (1986) *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980* (London: Thames and Hudson).
- <sup>52</sup> J. Leman (1980) "'The Advice of a Real Friend': Codes of Intimacy and Oppression in Women's Magazines 1937-1955", *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3, pp. 63-78, p. 74.
- <sup>53</sup> L. Spigel, (1990) 'Television in the Family Circle: the Popular Reception of a New Medium' in P. Mellencamp (Ed.) *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press and London: BFI Publishing) pp. 73-97, p. 81.
- <sup>54</sup> Cowan, *More Work*.
- <sup>55</sup> T. Putnam (1993) 'Beyond the Modern Home: Shifting the Parameters of Residence', in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner (Ed.) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge) pp. 150-165, p. 157.
- <sup>56</sup> Good, *Tableware*, p. 53.
- <sup>57</sup> P. Sparke (1995) *As Long as It's Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora).
- <sup>58</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, p. 155.
- <sup>59</sup> *Woman's Own Book*, p. 85.

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- <sup>60</sup> *Woman's Own Book*, p. 85.
- <sup>61</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, pp. 154-5.
- <sup>62</sup> Good, *Tableware*, p. 53.
- <sup>63</sup> Good, *Tableware*, p. 62.
- <sup>64</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, p. 127.
- <sup>65</sup> L. K. Kerber (1988) 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: the Rhetoric of Women's History', *The Journal of American History*, 75, pp. 9-39; J. A. McGaw (1989) 'No Passive Victims, No Separate Spheres: A Feminist Perspective on Technology's History', in S. H. Cutcliffe and R. C. Post (Ed.) *In Context: History and the History of Technology (essays in honor of Melvin Kranzberg)* (Bethlehem and London: Lehigh University Press and Associated University Presses); Forum: 'Women's History in the New Millennium: Rethinking Public and Private', *Journal of Women's History*, 15 (2003).
- <sup>66</sup> *Woman's Own Book*, p. 59.
- <sup>67</sup> 'New Maid (emerging from service-hatch), "Do I have to come through this hole every time?"', *Punch*, 1926 reproduced in M. Ward and N. Ward (1978) *Home in the Twenties and Thirties* (London: Ian Allen Ltd.) p. 43.
- <sup>68</sup> E. S. Turner (1962) *What the Butler Saw: Two Hundred and Fifty Years of the Servant Problem* (London: Michael Joseph) p. 284, quotes E. Lyons, reported in *The Daily Telegraph* (12 September, 1961).
- <sup>69</sup> C. Hardyment (1995) *Slice of Life: the British Way of Eating Since 1945* (London: BBC Books) p. 57.
- <sup>70</sup> H. Robertson (1947) *Reconstruction and the Home* (London: The Studio) pp. 31-32. The kitchen image is captioned 'The kitchen side of a dresser in a pre-war Continental house'.
- <sup>71</sup> E. Bird and K. Holmes (1955) *Decorating for the Amateur* (London: The Studio) pp. 86-87. The caption read 'The pictures and decorative curtain show that meals in the kitchen need not involve absence of comfort and elegance'. The design is by Frederick Gibberd.
- <sup>72</sup> 'There's no better space and time-saver than the island unit', *Woman's Own Book*, plate 11, between pp. 128-9.
- <sup>73</sup> J. Lowrie (1965) *Practical Homemaking* (London: Oldbourne) p. 18.



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<sup>74</sup> Good, *Tableware*, 1969, p. 57. Other relevant examples are Joe Columbo's 'Mini-kitchen' of 1963, limited production by Boffi, in (September 1964) *Domus*, 418 and E. Ambasz (1972) *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* (New York: the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Centro Di, Florence) p. 123, and John Prizeman's 'Sketch for Add-on Cooking Post' in F. Leslie (2000) *Designs for 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Interiors*, (London: V&A Publications) plate 47, p. 92.

<sup>75</sup> Spry and Hulme, *Cookery Book*, quoted in Hardyment, *Slice of Life*, p. 56.

<sup>76</sup> J. Freeman (2004) *The Making of the Modern Kitchen* (Oxford: Berg) p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Bullock, 'First the Kitchen', p. 188. The adoption of new housing strategies was relatively limited until after the Second World War. J. A. Loehlin (1999) *From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption and Modernity in Germany* (Oxford: Berg) p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> J-C. Kaufmann (1998) *Dirty Linen: Couples and their Laundry*, trans. Helen Alfrey (London: Middlesex University Press) originally published as (1992) *La trame conjugale: analyse du couple by son ligne* (Editions Nathan).

<sup>79</sup> S. E. Reid (2005) 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, pp. 289-316.

<sup>80</sup> J. Bourke (1994) *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge) pp. 68-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>82</sup> See D. Attar (1990) *Wasting Girls' Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics* (London: Virago); A. Davin (1979) "'Mind That You Do as You Are Told": Reading Books for Board School Children, 1870-1902', *Feminist Review*, 3; C. Dyhouse (1981) *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul); J. Purvis (1985) 'Domestic Subjects Since 1870', in Ivor Goodson (Ed.), *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum* (London: Falmer); A. Turnbull (1987) 'Learning Her Womanly Work: the Elementary School Curriculum, 1870-1914', in Felicity Hunt (Ed.) *Lessons for Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).

<sup>83</sup> Loehlin, *Rugs to Riches*, p. 176.

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<sup>84</sup> C. Nelson (1995) *Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals, 1850-1910* (Athens, Georgia and London: University of Georgia Press); R. LaRossa (1997) *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) and (2004) 'The Culture of Fatherhood in The Fifties: A Closer Look', *Journal of Family History*, 29, pp. 47-70.

<sup>85</sup> S. M. Gelber (1999) *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press); C. M. Goldstein (1998) *Do It Yourself: Home Improvement in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press and Washington D.C.: National Building Museum).

<sup>86</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*, p. 85.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid p. 96.

<sup>88</sup> J. Hollows (2002) 'The Bachelor Dinner: Masculinity, Class and Cooking in *Playboy*, 1953-1961', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 16, pp. 143-155, p. 142; B. Osgerby (2001) *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg); G. Wagner (1996) 'The Lair of the Bachelor', in D. Coleman, E. Danze and C. Henderson (Ed.) *Architecture and Feminism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) pp. 183-219; K. Snyder (1998) 'A Paradise of Bachelors: Remodelling Domesticity and Masculinity in the Turn-of-the-Century New York Bachelor Apartment', *Prospects*, 23, pp. 247-284.

<sup>89</sup> *Esquire Party Book*, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> D. Briggs (1968) *Entertaining Single-Handed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) p. 66. Drawings by Anton.

<sup>91</sup> Edwards and Beyfus, *Lady Behave*.

<sup>92</sup> Maclean, *Pan Book*, p. 151.

<sup>93</sup> E. Anson, Lady (1986) *Party Planners Book* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson) p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> J. J. Popiel, (2004) 'Making Mothers: the Advice Genre and the Domestic Ideal, 1760-1830', *The Journal of Family History*, 29, pp. 339-350, p. 345-6.

<sup>95</sup> J. Scanlon (1995) *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York & London: Routledge) p. 5; See also Leman, 'Advice of a Real Friend'.

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<sup>96</sup> N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse eds. (1987) *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality* (London: Methuen).

<sup>97</sup> R. Wright and M. Wright (1954, 1950) *Guide to Easier Living: 1,000 Ways to Make Housework Faster, Easier, and More Rewarding* (New York, Simon and Schuster); Cowan, *More Work*.