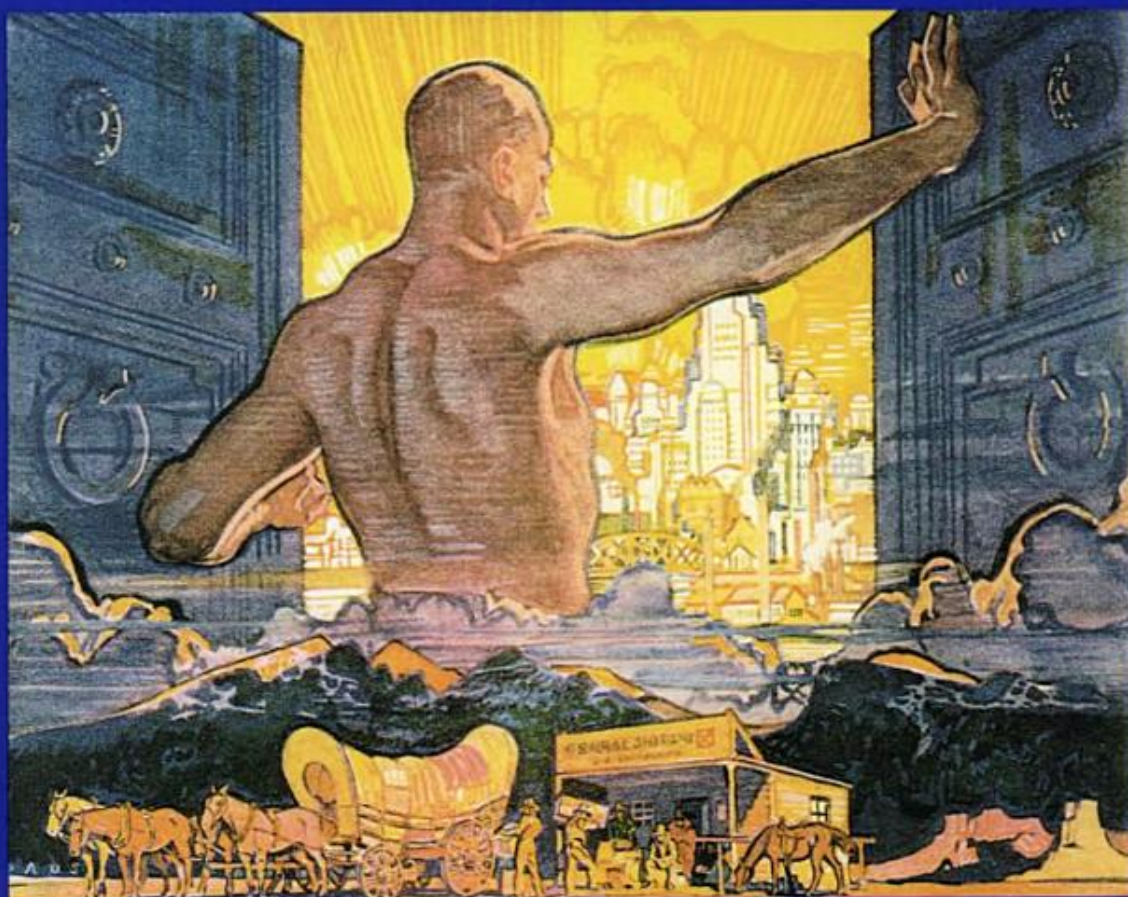


• ROLAND MARCHAND •

ADVERTISING THE AMERICAN DREAM



MAKING WAY FOR MODERNITY
1920 :: 1940

Autorių teisės saugomos



ADVERTISEMENTS AS SOCIAL TABLEAUX

The scene opens upon the covered veranda of a spacious country club. In the foreground, two women and a man are seated in large, smartly designed wicker chairs around a low table. They are carrying on a casual but obviously engaging conversation. A waiter in a white coat, black bow tie, and slicked-down hair stands near the table, opening a bottle. A golf bag rests beside one chair. The two women are seated with their backs to us, but their stylish cloche hats, their trim figures, and the slightly angular but nevertheless graceful way in which one leans forward toward the gentleman who is speaking unmistakably suggest fastidious demeanor and social confidence. The man faces us. He is impeccably dressed in a summer suit with his handkerchief precisely squared in his coat pocket. He has a tiny, trimmed mustache. As he speaks, he projects an image neither aggressive nor retiring, but simply confident and relaxed. His hands rest comfortably on his crossed knees.

The larger setting is opulent and refined. In the foreground and to the extreme right, a distinguished-looking man in knickers, seated in a wicker chair, serenely puffs a pipe and rests his book in his lap. He gazes out through the veranda's pillars toward the lawn, the boxed and sculpted trees by a low wall, and the golf course beyond. In the far background more waiters hover about several tables of genteel club members, as yet another couple emerges onto the veranda from the clubhouse doors. Everything suggests spaciousness as well as leisure. The central figures are well separated from each other with ample "talking room" and sufficient privacy from other tables. They are small, yet not dwarfed by the clubhouse. The pillars at the right, with several Italian cypress trees interspersed, open out for the entire length of the veranda, as far back as we can see, on the expansive open areas of the golf course. Several indistinct figures of golfers can be vaguely glimpsed. Although no color is apparent, the tiled floor of the veranda, the vines covering its roof and the grassy expanses convey a sense of vivid opulence. Tiny goblets on the table of the three characters in the foreground complete the image of fastidious restraint.

Having taken in the scene, we then learn something about the sprightly conversation that is unfolding at the table in the foreground and about some other characters soon to make an appearance: "A woman's laugh falls gaily upon their ears, and the company learns of a well-played match. The talk turns to yachting and a youth tells of winning the King of Spain's cup. Fleet horses engage their interest and a Master of Hounds recounts a thrilling hunt in Maryland."¹

The scene just described might have served as the opening tableau for a play, reproduced in precise detail from the instructions of a playwright who wished to convey an immediate impression of the characters and their society at the raising of the curtain. In fact, it appeared in a 1929 Canada Dry Ginger Ale ad from the *Chicago Tribune*. Advertising tableaux such as this confront us directly with the dilemma posed by the rather offhand but frequently repeated truism that "advertising reflects society."

We should recognize, first, that advertisements may be said to reflect society in several ways that have little relevance to the problems raised by the Canada Dry tableau. Advertisements depict and describe the material artifacts available for purchase at a given time. They reveal the state of technology, the current styles in clothing, furniture, and other products, and sometimes the relative prices commanded by various goods. Whereas archaeologists must deduce the probable social uses of the artifacts they unearth, and then interpret from them the economic and social structures of the society, advertisements provide us with ample guidelines to the social functions (or at least the suggested uses) of various products. They can supply this information about a society without depicting either a person or a social setting, merely by displaying and describing the products themselves.

Another way that advertisements can "reflect society" without actually depicting any social setting is through the testimonial ad. The endorser may be quoted without illustration; or he or she may be shown in close-up, with no suggestion of social context. But the choice of endorser will tell us what sort of person the advertising professionals, from their highly motivated study of popular attitudes and perhaps through sales or coupon tests, have determined that the public will best accept as an "authority." If the trend in testimonials moves away from business figures toward movie celebrities, we have glimpsed one reflection of attitudinal changes in the society.²

The Concept of a Social Tableau

But the advertisements we are most likely to think of when we speak of ads as "reflections of society" are those, like the Canada Dry ad, that may be defined as "social tableaux." Within this category fall all advertisements in which persons are depicted in such a way as to suggest their relationships to each other or to a larger social structure. The depiction of a single person may qualify if that person is placed in a setting suggestive of social relationships with others.

I have adapted the phrase "social tableau" from the term "tableaux vivants" or "living pictures," a genre of theater entertainment that enjoyed a moment of

popularity toward the end of the nineteenth century. The tableaux vivants were elaborately costumed and staged representations of familiar scenes, accomplished through the grouping of models who held sustained, motionless poses while the curtain remained open on the scene. Their entertainment value stemmed from the shock of recognition of a familiar scene suddenly "brought to life" in three dimensions with real persons. The scenes, therefore, had to be familiar to the audience. They usually consisted of famous paintings, historical or biblical scenes, or esthetically pleasing fantasies of "moonlight" or "springtime."³

Playwrights still occasionally employ the tableau technique to etch a scene vividly in the audience's memory. The actors are frozen in place as the curtain opens or the stage lights come on. They hold their poses for several seconds before the action and dialogue begin, so that the audience may take in the atmosphere of the stage set and the implications of the depicted social situation. These theater tableaux seem to me the genre most nearly analogous to printed advertisements that depict social scenes. Though both are static, both are as suggestive as possible of impending or arrested action.

The social tableau advertisement usually depicts a contemporary "slice-of-life" setting rather than a work of art or a legendary scene. But it still relies on scenes sufficiently stereotypical to bring immediate audience recognition. Just as the tableaux vivants were defined as "vivid" representations, so the advertising tableaux often enhance social scenes through their brilliance of imagery and intensity of focus. With a little imagination, we might even interpret the texts of those ads as analogous to the program notes or spoken narratives that sometimes accompanied the nineteenth-century tableaux vivants.

But did the social tableau advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s serve, as they might seem to promise, as "mirrors" of American society in those decades? They usually purported to depict real, contemporary social scenes. But the Canada Dry tableau, which was not entirely unrepresentative of most advertisements, seemed to "reflect" only one very narrow stratum of American society. Other social strata, as manifested in urban slums, or working class households, or even apartment-house dwellers and families with boarders, found no reflection in advertising's "mirror." So prevalent was a "class atmosphere" in these social tableaux that a historian relying exclusively on their manifest evidence could only conclude that most Americans of that era enjoyed an exceedingly affluent and leisured mode of life.

Thus, before we attempt to evaluate the "evidence" of these social tableaux, we must recall that "reflecting society" was not the purpose of these ads. The content of a social tableau advertisement was determined primarily by merchandising strategy. Its purpose was to sell a product. Within the boundaries set by that strategy, its content was further shaped by pictorial conventions and by the desire to provide consumers with a scene into which they could comfortably and pleasurably place themselves. Given the assumption of advertisers, constantly reinforced by their observations of popular culture, that people preferred to identify with portrayals of themselves as they aspired to be, rather than as they "really were," we must assume that most social tableaux aimed at depicting settings at least "a step up" from the social circumstances of the readers.

If social tableau advertisements are too unrepresentative of social reality to provide us a "slice-of-life" semblance of America, perhaps they can be salvaged as evidence by interpreting them as reflective of the "reality" of the social aspirations of American consumers. After all, the tableaux were reflections of *something*, even though that something is more accurately described as "social fantasy" than "social reality." Fantasy images of "a step up" may also conceivably be employed to estimate the reality of the step below. Even highly selective and idealized images of one elevated rung of the social ladder may provide information on assumptions about class relationships and social structure that ad writers believed their audiences would accept without dissent.

But these "reflections" in the ads must still be evaluated in the light of another possible source of distortion—the impact of the advertisers' mission as apostles of modernity. The social tableaux depicted an ideal modern life—one to which consumers presumably aspired, but also one specifically discerned by the eyes of ad creators. As we explore the social roles portrayed by the players in these tableaux, we will find instances in which the distortions created by merchandising strategies and by the occupational biases of advertising agents resulted in images that accurately reflect neither the actual lives nor the authentic aspirations of consumers. But we may also discover situations in which the tableaux, because they sought to relate products to social needs, did graphically reflect central social and cultural dilemmas of the age.

Modern Woman as Businesswoman: "The Little Woman, G.P.A."

The leading lady claimed the largest role in the advertising tableaux. Her qualifications for stardom were scarcely debatable; everyone acknowledged that she made at least 80 percent of all consumer purchases. To foster identification and illustrate consumer satisfactions, advertisers kept her in the limelight. Although stereotyped characters abounded in the tableaux, the portrait of the American woman that emerged from the ads of the 1920s and 1930s is striking in its complexity. No other figure in the tableaux shifted roles and appearances so frequently. Yet the ultimate boundaries on the leading lady's scope of action were so clearly drawn that this apparent diversity of roles eventually came to seem less impressive.

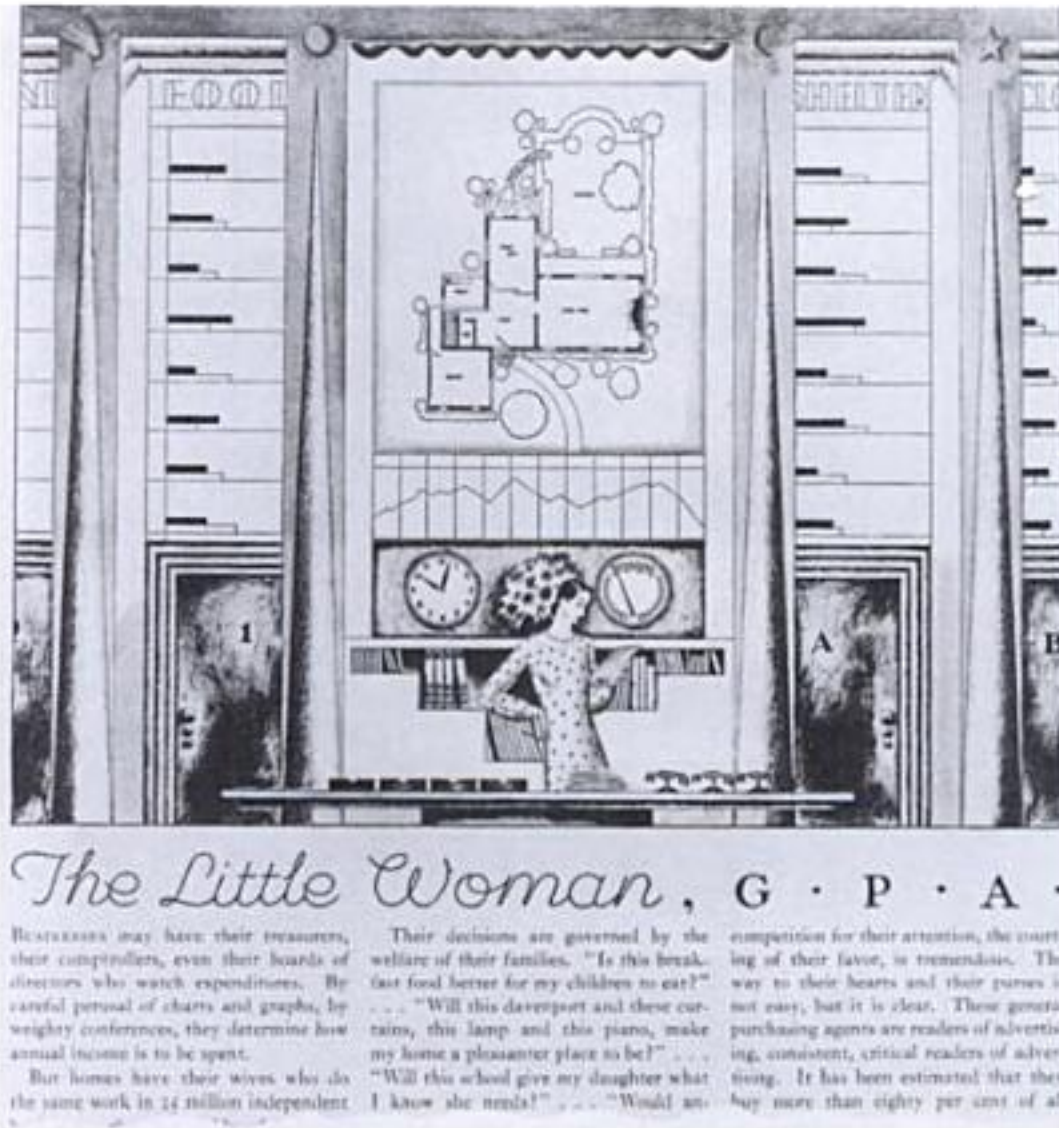
The decisive separation of workplace and home during the previous century had inspired extremely polarized conceptions of the proclivities and capacities of men and women. Man's proper sphere had been increasingly defined by a life away from home in a world of ambition, severe competition, and the efficient, unsentimental manipulation of people and objects. In compensation, the home, now defined as the woman's sphere, had assumed the character of a sanctuary. Here the woman preserved the "softer" and more "cultured" qualities of sentiment, beauty, and repose, while progress proceeded apace in the "real world" outside.⁴

The home and its perpetual occupant, the wife, had thus acquired an archaic aura. According to this convention the home was not an agency of modernization, but rather a buffer against the harsher thrusts and shocks of progress. The women who guarded these havens did not contribute to the progress of the modern world. Rather, they preserved those qualities that helped to soften the necessary dislocations caused by progress and to salve the psychological wounds they inflicted.

Most social tableau advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s perpetuated the notion of polarized sexual spheres. But advertisers strenuously resisted the implication that women represented archaic qualities. Jealous as they were of their self-proclaimed status as the most modern of men, advertising men still labeled women as the more modern of the sexes. Advertisers not only complimented women on their superior responsiveness to new ideas, they also made them *look* modern. Although Santa Claus retained his traditional girth and white hair in advertising tableaux and usually displayed an archaic, puckish charm, advertisers who employed "Mrs. Santa Claus" as a merchandising assistant insisted that she be a slim, chic, "modern little lady . . . who is up-to-the-minute on all present day matters."⁵

Once again, however, the ambiguities of the concept of modernity intervened to prevent women from gaining complete respect for their apparent superiority. Ideas of modernity carried connotations drawn both from the realm of modern business progress (efficiency, control, rationality, technological sophistication) and from the realm of fashion (expressiveness, changeability, extravagance). Advertising tableaux cast women in "modern" roles in both of these senses of the word. But women's modest attainments in the higher, business sense of the term "modern" never achieved sufficient scope or stature to compensate for the un-serious implications of their modernity in fashion. In fact, the more that women achieved recognition for their modernity in consumption, the less they qualified for any true equality in the broader quest for modern progress.

This is not to say that women gained no recognition from advertisers for their progress in business skills in the 1920s. Quite the contrary, copywriters constantly congratulated women for their presumed new capacities for management. But the proper field for these managerial talents remained the home. Nowhere did advertising men display so sincere a desire to flatter women for having achieved modernity than in the frequency with which they recast the old role of housewife as "family G.P.A." or general purchasing agent.⁶ To view the home, by analogy, as a business concern and the housewife as a business executive seemed, in a business-minded age, to banish the archaic aura of the home. As purchasing agents, women could command respect for exhibiting qualities previously honored primarily in men—capacities for planning, efficiency, and expert decision-making. In its ad "The Little Woman, G.P.A.," N. W. Ayer and Son stationed the housewife at the controls of a domestic communications center, and appended prestigious initials after her name in the same way that a professional man might add LL.D. or M.D. (Fig. 6.1). "Businesses may have their treasurers, their controllers," noted Ayer. "But homes have their wives who do the same work in 25 million independent businesses, the households of America."⁷ An appliance company congratulated "the modern homemaker" for running her home "quite as



6.1. When advertisers sought to dignify housework, they resorted to business analogies. Against a backdrop of graphs, charts, and telephones, the home's "General Purchasing Agent" acquired new prestige.

efficiently as her husband does his business—perhaps more so." Scores of tableaux disclosed the housewife planning expenditures or paying bills at her home desk and labeled her role "manager" or "executive."⁸

Social tableaux also frequently portrayed women demonstrating their new competence as purchasing agents in forays outside the home. In an ad headlined "Women know these things now," Veedol Motor Oils complimented women on their refusal to "rely on the men folk for every little thing as women did a generation ago."⁹ Similarly, Piggly Wiggly stores, the pioneers in self-service food markets, congratulated women for their "self-reliant" new skill in shopping. "The women of yesterday probably could not have done it at all," Piggly Wiggly began patronizingly. "For the woman of today it is both easy and pleasant. Her new, wide knowledge of values, her new ability to decide for herself, is one of the wonders of the world we live in." By selecting products off the shelf with "no clerk to persuade her," proclaimed Piggly Wiggly, "she has astonished her husband . . . and the world."¹⁰

If her husband was astonished, still he suffered no loss of traditional dominance. If his wife was the home's purchasing agent—and thus analogous to a business

the other she had washed at home with her electric washer. . . . Then she balanced her cost—operating cost of machine, maid's time at 50 cents an hour, . . . machinery depreciation."¹³ For a somewhat less self-reliant but still eagerly scientific young housewife, Old Dutch Cleanser provided a white-coated scientist with a stop watch to measure her cleaning speed (Fig. 6.2).¹⁴

Leisure—For What?

The merchandising strategies of manufacturers of foods, soaps, waxes, disinfectants, and similar products usually dictated tableaux that elevated the standards for respectable housekeeping. Like the home economists, whom they often employed, these advertisers exalted "homemaking" as a career. As Ruth Cowan remarks, the image of housework changed: "it was no longer a trial and a chore, but something quite different—an emotional 'trip.'"¹⁵ And if the positive rewards of scientific perfection were not sufficient, there was always the goad of possible failure. "By Their Floors Ye Shall Judge Them," admonished one floor polisher ad. "It is written that floors are like unto a mirror, reflecting the character of the housewife."¹⁶ But emphasis on higher standards of housework was not the main thrust of ads to women in the 1920s and 1930s. Scores of advertisers, including the producers of new home appliances, promised that their labor-saving products and services would bring women the most fulfilling reward—leisure time.

It is in the delineation by social tableau advertisements of these new self-fulfilling activities for women that we discover one of the purest instances of advertising as a social mirror. The particular merchandising bias of the advertisement for a time-saving home service or a drudgery-removing appliance was largely exhausted in the argument that it could, in fact, produce the desired increase in a woman's "free" time. How the leading ladies in these tableaux *used* the new discretionary time represented the best estimate by advertising copywriters and artists of the uses of discretionary time that women would find most attractive.

Many of these ads now *showed* the housewife enjoying her leisure—with the picture of the product absent or subordinated. The desirability of the depicted substitute activity was the very essence of the ad's appeal: to show women using their free time for gardening when most actually longed to go shopping for clothes would be an advertising blunder. If advertising men ever faced a situation in which their overriding task was to depict exactly what the audience wanted, uncontaminated by their own or the manufacturer's ulterior motives, these portrayals of the uses of leisure would seem to have offered that occasion.

Using these assumptions, we can attempt to reconstruct the aspirations of women readers of mass-circulation magazines in the 1920s from the advertising campaign of the American Laundry Machinery Company. This campaign stressed the time saved by sending family washing to a commercial laundry and described the activities women might choose in their free time. Each ad usually included three or more illustrated testimonials in which women described the particular joys of their expanded leisure. Since the ads included a large number of

examples, we may be able to infer from them not only which activities women most desired, but also the boundaries of such desires. What these ads did *not* include may be as significant as what they specifically portrayed.

What uses of leisure time did the women in these ads find most appealing? A compilation of all activities described or depicted in eight of these ads in 1926 reveals that leisure for reading and for spending more time with their children far outranked all other choices, with twelve mentions each. Participation in club activities gained six mentions; golf, sewing, and part-time work outside the home numbered five each. Visits with friends, concerts and plays, home decoration, music, motoring, and sports other than golf all appeared in at least three testimonials or lists of possible leisure activities. No testimonial mentioned a career. Civic affairs gained only a single reference, and shopping and charity work each appeared only twice (Fig. 6.3).¹⁷

A survey of ads for other labor-saving devices and services between 1926 and 1928 reveals an even heavier emphasis on "more time to devote to your children" or "companionship with your children" as the most desired benefit. Visits with friends, clubs, reading, golf, the theater, and bridge received lesser attention; part-time work, shopping, and civic affairs received none. Several years later, a *Woman's Home Companion* study of women's use of free time resulted in "a list so long and a range so wide that even we staunch believers in feminine progress were surprised." But the magazine still implicitly preserved certain outer boundaries of women's proper sphere by noting that the gamut of leisure activities extended from "kitchen to golf course—nursery to club room."¹⁸

This evidence could support the argument of Ruth Schwartz Cowan and others that new theories of child care—which called for expanded, expert attention to the child and the cultivation of a feeling of companionship between child and mother—had persuaded many women simply to shift their time from house maintenance to child nurture. Certainly advertisements seemed calculated to encourage that process. Social tableaux regularly offered warm scenes of mothers sharing their children's enjoyment of a book, a picnic, or a romp through a field of wildflowers (see Figs. 5.29, 8.18). Ads warned that during children's early "plastic years . . . when they need 'mothering' most," a woman had precious little time to exert that crucial influence that would guide her children "safely through the shoals and narrows of childhood" and fortify them against the multitude of competing influences and attractions that might later induce them to "drift away."¹⁹

The social tableaux will not tell us, however, whether these visions of a new companionship with children actually came to pass. Nor will they reveal whether these choices for leisure time were authentic reflections of women's real attitudes. We must still take into account possible refractions in advertising's "mirror image." The testimonials may have revealed women's notions about praiseworthy uses of leisure time more clearly than it showed their real preferences. Certainly it is striking, despite mounting box-office figures and frequent comments in the trade press about the movie-madness of the age, that no women in these tableaux confessed to using their new leisure time to go to the matinee.

The American Laundry Machinery testimonials were undoubtedly edited by copywriters to avoid undue repetition and to establish the range of alternatives they wished. The resulting priorities may well have represented a judgment by

"Might-have-been hours"...how many of them are YOURS?

"I MIGHT have done that"—"I might have gone there"—there are so many "might-have-been hours" in every woman's life! All because some household task—washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning—demands attention.

But how to take care of these duties, and still have time for the "might-have-been" pleasures? Electricity and all the servants it puts at your command will shorten much of your daily work. And the modern laundry, greatest time-saver of all, will actually give you a whole day of leisure every week.

Think of the many things you can do with this new time. Perhaps, like Mrs. Schwinn of New York City, you will use the time for music; or, like Mrs. Jones of Covington, Ky., you may devote the time to school and civic activities; or maybe, like Mrs. Looker of Hollywood, Calif.,



the time can be used to improve your health and your finances.

Home, husband, children, books, the theater—myriad happy duties and pleasures await you.

Today, just phone a modern laundry in your city—they will tell you about a washday service exactly suited to your needs, at a price within your reach. Then try this service—at least for one day every week, the laundry will take the "might" from your "might-have-been hours."



How three women took the 'MIGHT' from their "might-have-been hours"



"My husband is a teacher in the high school and naturally I am supposed to attend the receptions and parties at the school, and to take part in civic activities. Yet for years I couldn't seem to find time for such things. Then I sent my washing to the laundry, rearranged my weekly schedule and discovered that I had plenty of time for all my social and civic obligations."

Mrs. M. M. Jones,
Covington, Ky.



"From childhood I have been fond of music. I even used to dream of a 'career'! Then I married and said goodbye to my music. I had no time for it. But I couldn't longer it. Finally, I turned my washing over to the laundry and gave the time that used to music. With my new leisure, I have been able to practice piano, take voice lessons, and even sing in company and at church."

Mrs. D. L. Stearns,
New York City

"I can't begin to tell you what a wonderful help the laundry has been to me, both from a health and from a financial standpoint. The time the laundry gives me I have used in cultivating a vegetable garden. The open air exercise has been absolutely beneficial to me—doctor bills are a thing of the past—while the vegetables I have grown have more than paid my grocery bill in full."

Mrs. A. Looker,
Hollywood, Calif.



Published in the interest of the public and on behalf of the Laundry Industry by The American Laundry Machinery Company, Executive Office, Cincinnati, Ohio

6.3. The vignettes of golf, the theater, and reading to children in this prototype American Laundry Machinery Company ad reflected advertisers' assumptions about women's preferred and proper uses of leisure.

Just what is it to be A Good Wife in this MODERN AGE?

DEEP down in your heart—in the heart of every woman—is that eager, wistful wish to be a good wife—a partner in your husband's plans; his cheery companion in leisure hours.

You realize that in this advanced age your husband needs a mate as modern-minded as himself; a wife whose tastes and temperament are attuned to the present-day pace. He is moving ever forward. You can not afford to lag behind.

In the world of Business, men have banished the dragon of Drudgery. But what of your world? Are you still hampered by heavy household tasks that take your time and sap your strength?

Does the weekly washday take its heavy toll of hours that you could spend so joyously, so profitably in other ways?

TUNE IN ON LAUNDERLAND



Hear the lady and ladies of *Launderland* broadcast for all the family every Saturday evening at 8:30 o'clock, Eastern Time and at 9:00 o'clock Pacific Time. Tune in on your favorite station of the National Broadcasting System for a real musical treat.

in on your favorite station of the National Broadcasting System for a real musical treat.



Are you passing up enjoyable, stimulating, youth-bringing pleasures and pastimes because of this heavy burden? It is no wonder then that washday steals more of Youth and Beauty than the other six days can restore!

Washday in your home is doomed—a day of rest and recreation is assured—if you will decide now to get the facts; to see for yourself just what the modern laundry has to offer. In place of drudgery you are given a full day of freedom; happy hours for those pleasant pursuits—those gracious arts—that make one a truly good wife—a worthy companion of the twentieth century husband.

You will find there is a laundry service that *exactly* meets your needs; one that fits snugly into your Family Budget. Moreover, in this progressive day, the laundry can be relied upon to wash clothes clean and make them last long. The health of your family is safe-guarded with every scientific aid. Modern laundry service really *saves* in the long run.

At the other end of your telephone there is a laundryowner who will gladly continue this story. Talk with him—this morning. Let him send you the delightful journey booklet of "Alice in Launderland." It's the next thing to visiting the laundry yourself.

LET THE Laundry DO IT



SPONSORED BY THE
LAUNDRY OWNERS NATIONAL

ASSOCIATION OF THE
UNITED STATES AND CANADA

6.4. A woman needed leisure simply to fulfill her obligation to remain a stimulating evening companion with modern tastes. Her husband was "moving ever forward." She must not "lag behind."

male copywriters about what women *ought* to want. Finally, although these ads addressed women of middle-class status and above, the class and educational biases of advertising men still had a distorting effect. Whether golf really played so substantial a role, even in these women's *fantasies* of leisure, is certainly open to question. The extraordinary emphasis on reading may have been influenced by copywriters' own association of reading with enjoyable leisure, and by the frequency with which their trade journals bombarded them with clichéd pictures of the faithful woman subscriber to the advertised publication intently reading in her chair.²⁰ This emphasis may also have arisen from the traditional convention of depicting the stereotyped woman-at-leisure as reposing in a chair or reclining in a chaise longue, with one hand holding a book or magazine and the other poised over a box of chocolates nearby.²¹ In short, I suspect that female readers of these advertisements harbored real desires that were less refined, less intellectual, less golf-oriented, and perhaps even more consumption-minded than the ads suggested.

Many of the advertising tableaux presented women's new leisure pursuits as acts of individual self-expression. One American Laundry Machinery Company ad, having contrasted "Mrs. Weary Wife at Home" and "Mrs. Wise Wife at Liberty," suggested an open-ended, self-justifying notion of "female freedom" in a world of recreation and amusement where "there is so much to learn, so much to do, so much to see and hear."²² But more common were the tableaux that brought women back full-circle to their traditional roles: the new range of activities made them "better wives and mothers."

In the modern, bureaucratized, less provincial business world, the ads warned women, their husbands might quickly outgrow them in sophistication, class standing, and breadth of tastes and experiences. To retain their husbands' affection, modern wives had to find time to educate themselves to be stimulating social and intellectual companions. They needed to preserve their youth so that they could beautify their husbands' lives and keep pace with them during evenings of dancing and theater (Fig. 6.4). The Laundry Owners Association promised "the woman who could never think of reading *like this* on washday" that with her wash at the laundry, her new leisure would keep her "young-minded, fresh, and radiant." You will be, they told her, "a real partner in your husband's interests; a true companion to your children; an even better homemaker than you have ever been."²³

In the crucial endeavor of becoming good companions and partners to their modern husbands, the tableaux further suggested, women's business efficiency in the home held value only as a necessary means. The new woman must apply the time saved through modern management to the cultivation of broader interests and a youthful, modern look. Diversification of her activities and her mastery of business methods did not alter the reality of a woman's "world." It was a world, in Roland Barthes' phrase, "entirely constituted by the gaze of man," one in which "man is everywhere around, he presses on all sides, he makes everything exist." Lady Esther Face Cream expressed the idea more hauntingly: "Men's eyes are magnifying mirrors."²⁴ Borrowing from a tradition well established in art, advertising illustrators generously supplied their female subjects with mirrors as surrogates and symbols of those judgmental gazes of the world outside the boudoir

Let your gift carry *le charme Parisien*...
with *Djer-Kiss* Gifts of Beauty

What gift can you choose so precious as the gift of beauty? The gift that does not age—no does a drop of the lovely Parisian Djer-Kiss; the gift that beautifies wearers—as does the use of Eau de Toilette Djer-Kiss! The gift that makes a woman enchantingly lovely—as do Djer-Kiss Face Powder and Rings! You pay tribute to a woman's loveliness when you send her a Djer-Kiss Gift Box—you also reveal your own knowledge of & desire to be in the correct use of Toilettes all having the same value! Djer-Kiss offers you its beautiful Gift Sets from \$2.75 to \$11.50. Even the most modestly priced set is very carefully set in an elegant gift box!

Djer-Kiss
KARLOFF-PARIS

6.5. The omnipresent mirror reminded each woman of her central "duty"—to be beautiful. See also Fig. 6.9.

(Figs. 6.5, 6.6). Some advertisements clearly conveyed the idea that in presenting the formulaic scene of the woman seated before her dressing-table mirror they had captured the essence of "Woman" (Figs. 6.7, 6.8). For the male copywriter or illustrator, the mirror served to epitomize women's supposedly unrivaled addiction to vanity; for a woman, it served as a reminder of an inescapable "duty" beyond that of efficient homemaking—the duty "to catch and hold the springtime of her beauty."²⁵

Advertisers insistently reminded women that they might lose the very opportunity to embark on their "great adventure" of homemaking or fail to hold their treasured positions as companions unless they repeatedly won these privileges in the ongoing "beauty contest of life." The warnings could be positively intimidating. "What Do Men Think When They Look at You?" asked one Camay soap ad. "You against the Rest of Womankind; your Beauty . . . your Charm . . . your Skin," warned another. "Someone's eyes are forever searching your face,

[illegible]

WOMAN

The distinguished New York woman reads the Woman's Page of The Sun because it is completely women for women. She finds there, timely information and interesting, helpful features on a wide variety of subjects that are close to her heart and mind.

She finds aid in solving her home problems through articles written by experts on interior decorations, the care of children, and other matters which contribute to the happiness of the home and the comfort of the family. She finds the clearest, best advice on how to become the better mother, the authentic and responsible, and if she wants money, she is looking for a course she finds everywhere suggested in the pages of successful women which are so abundantly on the Woman's Page. The modern woman has selected her favorite activities and in these phases of social, political and business life. And The Sun reports all these interests with rapid chronophotography. The Woman's Page is one of the reasons for The Sun's popularity among women and for its strength in these classifications of advertising that appeal particularly to women.

The Sun
The Newspaper of Distinction in its Reading, its News and its Advertising
NEW YORK



WABC
NEW YORK

WBBM
CHICAGO

WKRC
CINCINNATI

WISV
WASHINGTON

WBT
CHARLOTTE

KMOX
ST. LOUIS

WCCO
MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

WPG
ATLANTA, GA

WFBL
BIRMINGHAM

DON LEE
CALIFORNIA STATIONS

"FOR THE PROPER CARE OF YOUR SKIN"

MAKE UP HER MIND
WHILE SHE MAKES UP HER FACE

Use **RADIO SALES** Stations to make up her mind about your product—**AT THE POINT OF USE**. In the breakfast in the kitchen, and in the living-room—morning, afternoon and evening—your message will get in her at the five star month and save your—or your competitor's—product. Whether you want to defend or expand your market **RADIO SALES** Stations will do it, at a lower cost and actual customer than any other medium. **RADIO SALES** Stations deliver you the maximum audience (more millions, by audited count) in 12 major metropolitan markets.

* * *

RADIO SALES, INC.
441 MADISON AVENUE • NEW YORK CITY
401 NORTH WICHMOND AVENUE • CHICAGO

RAZIO SALES, INC. SUPPLIES A COMPLETE SERVICE FOR LOCAL AND "SPOT" BROADCASTING OVER THE MAJOR COLUMBIA NETWORK STATIONS LISTED ON THIS PAGE

6.6. By surrounding women with mirrors, advertisements reinforced each reader's sense of living constantly under the world's judgemental gaze.

6.7. The Sun bluntly equated multiple mirrors with the very essence of "Woman."

6.8. Radio Sales, Inc., suggestively associated a woman's narcissism with the ease with which others could "make up her mind."

The Eyes of Men... the Eyes of Women Judge your Loveliness every day



You may be sprightly and sixteen; fair and forty; or serious and sixty, yet you cannot deny that every pair of eyes that looks at you commends your beauty or regrets its lack. For life is a Beauty Contest for every woman. And she whose skin is soft and fresh has a wonderful advantage.

THE SOAP OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

To possess a lovely, clear complexion take infinite care in choosing your beauty soap! Use gentle,

creamy-white Camay, the Soap of Beautiful Women! Its lather is rich as cream... luxuriant in any kind of water. Camay is made of pure, delicate oils, safe for the most delicate feminine skin.

NEW LOW PRICES

Never in all your lifetime have you known a soap of such exquisite quality to cost so little! The price of Camay is now so low you will want to buy a dozen cakes today!

CAMAY
THE SOAP OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

You can hardly glance out of the window, much less walk in town but that some inquiring eye searches you and your skin. This is the Beauty Contest of life. Not even a queen escapes it. And a modest country girl can win it... if her skin is lovely and deserving.



★ Make a rich lather with Camay, a soft suds and warm water, gently massaging it into your skin. Rinse well with cold water. Then note how soft and fresh your skin feels.



★ This is creamy-white Camay, the famous beauty soap that thousands of lovely women use for their complexion, for their hands and on their bath. A finer, gentler soap is never made!

Copyright 1935, The J. M. Davis Co., New York, N. Y.

6.9. Life was a "Beauty Contest," the advertisers frequently reminded women. "Not even a queen escapes it," but with the product's help, "a modest country girl can win."



"I'M STARTING YOUR BEAUTY PLANS NOW"

SIXTEEN years from now, Mary Ann, you'll be pondering your nose for your first real party! Now cuddle up and listen to your mother—I'll tell you why Ivory Soap will help you keep your lovely complexion!

You'd be the ugliest baby alive if you didn't use more of Ivory Soap. Why, when you were 16 hours old, he knew that a woman also needs a pure soap!

Don't let your mother find you experimenting with colored or perfumed soaps. For it's precious to your complexion to remember that Ivory is pure.

Besides, mother's own, I have proof for you that Ivory is the real beauty soap. Smoothe your cheek against mine.

Why, Ivory is a beauty soap that has been in our family! It has been taking care of my complexion since I was a baby!

You're too small a chick now to realize what a clear sparkling complexion will mean to you some day. But I promise you that a lovely skin starts here available with soap. And if you don't believe me, ask your father!

Keep a baby-clear complexion with the baby's beauty treatment • Ivory Soap • 99% pure

IVORY SOAP

6.10. If a woman's life was to be simply a never-ending "Beauty Contest," it only made sense to train for the competition early.

comparing you with other women."²⁶ (See Fig. 6.9.) A corset manufacturer added that the "beauty contest of life" was an equal-opportunity competition, in which women must acquire beauty "as a personal achievement . . . not a birthright." Ivory soap rushed to the aid of mothers seeking to protect their daughters from failure in the most important "battle" of their lives. To gain a headstart on the competition, the mother in an Ivory tableau told her infant daughter, "I'm Starting Your Beauty Plans Now" (Fig. 6.10).²⁷

Grotesque Moderne

Exactly what "look" women should adopt to play their modern roles was defined less by the close-ups of soap and cosmetic ads than by the stances, silhouettes, and accessories of women in the whole range of social tableau advertisements. The "Fisher Body girl" established the normative image for women in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The creation of illustrator McClelland Barclay, this



*Of all those
who express motor car body
preference . . . 95% Prefer "Body by Fisher"*

An investigation made by a disinterested agency and reaching into every county of every state in America, has revealed that the vast majority of motor car prospects select a car with its body attributes foremost in mind. It also established that 95 per cent of all motor car buyers who are influenced by the body in purchasing a motor car, prefer Body by Fisher.

When the American people—who know motor cars—exhibit

CADILLAC • LA SALLE



such solid and pronounced preference for any automotive product, there is only one answer: *That product must be unmistakably superior.*

As a matter of fact, the super-quality and super-value of Body by Fisher have been evident from the first. So evident, that Bodies

by Fisher were early demanded by the manufacturers of the finest motor car chassis. Inevitably, Fisher thus became associated years ago in the public mind not only with better

bodies—but with better motor cars as well.

Note the result: When General Motors gathered the finest motor car in each price class into one great organization, these better cars were already equipped—had long been equipped—with Body by Fisher. That is one reason why today the emblem "Body by Fisher" is the unfailing guide to the better motor car in every price field—a fact which is very plainly apparent when you glance at the list printed below—of cars equipped with Body by Fisher.

BUICK • OAKLAND • OLDSMOBILE • PONTIAC • CHEVROLET

6.11. Whether attended by maid or male escort, the Fisher Body girl accentuated her angular lines by indulging in self-dramatizing stances and gestures. See also Figures 4.10, 4.11, and 5.3.



6.12. Mothers looked “softer” than the norm for modern women and rarely indulged in dramatic poses or gestures. They were shorter, rounder, more likely to appear in soft focus. Compare Figs. 6.10, and 6.12 with Figs. 5.4, 5.14, 6.13, and 6.14.

heroine of the Fisher Body ads was slender, youthful, and sophisticated. Her finely etched facial features formed a slightly aloof smile, suggesting demure self-confidence in her obvious social prestige and her understated sexual allure. Attired elegantly, but not exotically, she stood tall and angular, her fingers and toes tapering to sharp points. In her role as a model of the proper feminine look, she gained credit for attracting the attention of women as much as men (Fig. 6.11).²⁸

In one direction, this modal image of modern woman shaded off into that of the housewife and mother. Her outlines were usually softer and slightly more rounded than the Fisher Body girl. Her posture was less self-consciously canted or accentuated, her neck and limbs slightly shorter (Fig. 6.12).²⁹ In the other direction, the divergence from the Fisher Body model moved more abruptly toward striking “high-fashion” extremes, until the “modern woman” approached the status of a geometric abstraction.

It was in the increasingly abstract portrayals of this “high-fashion” version of the American woman that advertising men effectively propagated their contention that the “beloved buying sex” must also be the most modern.³⁰ Men were sometimes depicted in modernistic illustrations. But never did advertising artists distort and reshape men’s bodies as they did when they transformed women into Art Deco figurines. Women in the tableaux, as symbols of modernity, sometimes added more than a foot to their everyday heights and stretched their elongated

6.13. The modernity of an "accomplished hostess" was immediately recognizable in her elongated neck, stiletto fingers, and towering height. See also Figs. 5.1, 5.4, 5.13, 5.27, 8.48.

THE QUEST FOR BEAUTY GOES ON

To the accomplished beauty of her Silverware must be an essential ally in her quest for beauty. The elegance of silverware is the same as the look of a fine model. Community Plate gives her that assurance in the Power to be an ally of her distinguished presence. And such is the subtle distinction of Power that Community Plate gives her the same assurance. You may have a Community Service for her as little as five to ten. For her, a three-piece matching Tea Set for her to enjoy in her Silverware.

THE DEANVILLE DESIGN

COMMUNITY PLATE

eyes, fingers, legs, arms, and necks to grotesque proportions (Figs. 6.13, 6.14). The proportions of some women in the tableaux suggested a height of over nine feet. In deference to the geometric motifs of popularized modern art in the 1920s, women's legs sometimes extended in cantilevers or absolutely straight lines from thigh to toe. Their pointed feet and toes appeared to have emerged fresh from a pencil sharpener. Foot-long fingers similarly tapered into icy stilettos. As for their legs, one advertising writer observed that they were "just as long as the artist cares to make them, and evidently he is paid by the running foot."³¹

Thus the woman of high fashion—and, by implication, all women of high social status—appeared in advertising tableaux as physically distinct from the woman of lower social position. By a Lamarckian process of natural selection, the lady of high class had acquired an elongated neck to accentuate her pearl necklace and her hat, and a body tall enough for the artistic drape of an evening dress. Her sculpted head evoked images of Grecian culture and aristocratic poise; her brittle, tapered appendages conformed to Thorstein Veblen's specifications for the look of conspicuous leisure. So extreme were some of these distortions that a comparison of advertising drawings with contemporary advertising photographs is often startling, even though the photographs themselves were often taken at



MISS GERTRUDE LAWRENCE

HER CLOTHES BY LUCIEN LELONG

HER WATCH BY LUCIEN LELONG
AND ELGIN

Even her dearest enemy would concede that Gertrude Lawrence is one of the smartest women who ever stepped across a stage or a drawing room. Naturally she goes to Paris twice a year for clothes. To the salon of Lucien Lelong, favorite couturier . . . and personal friend. Although she goes to Paris for Lelong originals she didn't have to go to Paris for a Lelong original in a watch. The usual situation reversed . . . you need not go to Paris, for Paris has come to you. For ELGIN retained nearly every important Paris couturier to design Parisienne cases . . . sheathed ELGIN quality in Paris style. Ask your nearest reliable jeweler. He will show you Parisiennes by Lelong, Gallot, Agnès, and by nearly every other famous couturier. And many other ELGINS . . . from \$15 to \$650 in every mode and manner.



Maybe when is her lucky night. For here she is again in a white dress by Lucien Lelong. Again is probably the watch, since the first time this season, now her she wears a watch from her Lelong which singing her famous song "I Don't Know." And the dress too was named "I Don't Know," after the song she sang. She has played in "Candlelight," "The Birds of Paris," a telling picture, "Charles's Room," "The Treasure Girl" and "Oh, Kye!" This picture especially painted by M. Reynolds Rags, celebrated Parisian artist. Observe the Parisienne watch, used against the whiteness of the gown.

6.14. The "smartness" of actress Gertrude Lawrence, like that of the Oneida hostess (Fig. 6.13), was revealed in bodily proportions that suggested a height of at least eight feet.

FAMOUS FEET

how they're kept
free from corns

ALICE WHITE'S
Famous Feet

"A motion picture actress can't keep on her toes, if they are adorned with corns. That's why I keep Blue-jay in my make-up kit" . . . so writes this lovely film-land favorite.

Painless feet! The feet of famous dancers, athletes and stage stars. What price would be too great to relieve them of corns? Yet Blue-jay does it in a trifling cost, gently AND SAFELY. No risk of infection, as with careless razor-cutting. No guessing how much to use. The amount of medication is fixed and standard in every Blue-jay; it's just the right amount. Stops the pain at once; then melts the corn. As all drug stores, for calluses and bunions, ask for the larger size Blue-jay.

Blue-jay

THE SAFE AND GENTLE WAY TO END A CORN



The
Eureka
Man
leaves you

Health —
Happiness —
Home Satisfaction



EUREKA

5"

6.15, 6.16. Despite the photographers' use of flattering angles, women in full-length photos utterly failed to live up to the ad artists' models of the modern woman. Compare Figs. 5.4, 6.13, 6.14, and 8.48.

extreme angles, in an effort to approximate the fashionable ideal. Even next to the moderately high-fashion drawings of the retail advertisements, women in the advertising photographs look squat, neckless, and beefy (Figs. 6.15, 6.16).³²

What relationship did the modern woman of these illustrations bear to social realities? Certainly the physical resemblance was meager. Fashion economist Paul Nystrom estimated in 1928 that only 17 percent of all American women were both "slender" and over 5 feet 3 inches in height.³³ The emphasis on youth and slimness, however, did reinforce the notion of women's new freedom of physical activity; and like the cut of women's clothes, the stance of fashion models, and the postures of modern dance, it fostered the image of the woman in actual or impending motion—the woman on the move.³⁴ The tubular shapes and angular lines also suggested a rejection of the traditional motherly image. In fact, advertising tableaux that cast women in maternal roles with children usually modified the modern image appreciably, rounding out the figure, bringing the proportions back toward normal, and softening the lines (see Fig. 6.12). Perhaps significantly, mothers looked like women of more modest social status.

If extreme height and exaggerated "artistic" postures gave the modern woman of the ads a certain claim to elegance and prestige, still she gained stature mainly in comparison to other, non-fashionable women. In relation to men, as Erving Goffman has intriguingly suggested in *Gender Advertisements*, distortions of women's shapes and gestures often convey messages about social subordination. Women, Goffman argues, appear in poses that are more "canted," more exaggerated and grotesque, more off-balance and tentative than those assumed by men. These stances and gestures imply a sense of dependence on the man for stability



6.17, 6.18. No men appeared in advertising art in postures so grotesque or canted as did women. Only women could appear so unserious and purely decorative. See also Figs. 5.21, 6.6, and 6.33

and balance, a willingness to make oneself into an interesting “object,” and a greater vulnerability to the caprices of a dominating emotionality (Figs. 6.17, 6.18).³⁵

Particularly common in the illustrations of the 1920s and 1930s is the contrast, which Goffman noted in the 1960s, between the predominance of a solid, firmly planted stance for men and an unbalanced stance for women. Men in the tableaux usually balanced their weight on both feet. Women placed their weight on one foot while the other leg indulged in a “bashful knee bend” or complimented the supporting leg and foot by posing at an artistic angle (see Figs. 9.10, 10.3). If such off-balance and tentative stances implied, as Goffman argues, a status of dependence and a “foregoing of full effort” to prepare for assertive, self-reliant action, then illustrators of the 1920s and 1930s certainly exaggerated these qualities in depicting the modern woman.³⁶

Advertising illustrations thus reinforced the tendency to interpret woman’s modernity in a “fashion” sense and to define the status of “decorative object” as one of her natural and appropriate roles. Women took on the contours and angles of their modern art backdrops more decisively than men, suggesting their pliability in the service of art. In some tableaux, women with less distorted shapes and postures still functioned as decorations for the depicted room, as much as did the sculptured art objects or the curtains (see Fig. 5.23).³⁷ Even the distortions of body proportions, which elevated women of fashion and status to awesome heights of eight or nine feet, served more to accentuate their decorative potential than to suggest their commanding presence as new women of broader capacities and responsibilities.

Anticipations of Superwoman: Finessing the Contradictions of Modernity

The compulsion of advertising men to relegate women's modernity to the realm of consumption and dependence found expression not only in pictorial styles but also in tableaux that sought to link products with the social and political freedoms of the new woman. Expansive rhetoric that heralded women's march toward freedom and equality often concluded by proclaiming their victory only in the narrower realm of consumer freedoms. In "When Lovely Women Vote," an immaculately groomed modern woman, well-educated and active in civic affairs, gazed idealistically outward and upward in the pose more recently adopted for political candidates with "vision." However, the question on which she was asked to vote was "What toothpaste do you use?" (Fig. 6.19).³⁸ Cannon Mills recalled that since women had first exercised the vote for political candidates in 1920, "that year we decided to let them vote on towels too."³⁹ The frequent conflation of consumer and sociopolitical freedoms found provocative expression in a 1930 *Chicago Tribune* ad entitled "Feminine Values": "Today's woman gets what she wants. The vote. Slim sheaths of silk to replace voluminous petticoats. Glassware in sapphire blue or glowing amber. The right to a career. Soap to match her bathroom's color scheme."⁴⁰

Although a devotion to matching soaps might seem trivial to some, women's responsibility for home decoration was linked with a much more significant issue. Whatever range of outside activities they might enjoy, women still bore full responsibility for maintaining the "saving atmosphere" of the home. In an age of rapid tempo and distracting amusements, women needed to respond to such centrifugal forces by making their homes adequate counter-attractions. Only by making her home a haven of beauty and cleanliness, and herself an energetic and alluring companion, could a wife shoulder that "burden of making a marriage successful [which] must always be chiefly on the woman."⁴¹ Ads for products ranging from laxatives to varnishes agreed that "one person" alone was responsible for the family's happiness. No tableau ever portrayed a housewife enjoying golf, a club meeting, or even a frolic with the children at the *expense* of her homemaking responsibilities. Nor did any tableau exempt her from the responsibility of beautifying herself and her surroundings. Men, the tableaux reiterated, fell in love, and stayed in love, with the beauty-minded, and ultimately home-oriented, "womanly woman." "Watch that you don't disappoint him," they warned.⁴²

Thus the chain of women's roles in the tableaux came full circle: from the "business modernism" of the efficient home manager to the personal modernity afforded by leisure time and outside activities, then to the fashion modernism of the decorative object, and finally back to the hearth as home-beautifier and anchor against the winds of modern distractions. A woman's enthusiasm for stylistic modernity revealed a proper instinct for beautification, but it also inspired suspicions about her helpless susceptibility to the whims of change. It was not a modernity that contributed to significant social and economic progress.



When lovely women vote

To thousands of women of this type—charming, educated, well-to-do, prominent in the social and civic life of her city, we put this question: What tooth paste do you use?

To our delight, the majority answered Listerine Tooth Paste. Certainly to women of means, the price of 25¢ could not possibly have been a factor in deciding upon a tooth paste. Obviously, the quality of the dentifrice itself and the brilliant results

it accomplished were responsible for their choice.

Won't you try Listerine Tooth Paste? See how thoroughly it cleans. How swiftly it erases blemishes and discolorations. How gleaming white it leaves the teeth. How it refreshes the mouth and sweetens the breath. Bear in mind, incidentally, that it costs you but half of what you would ordinarily pay for tooth paste of equal quality. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE the quality dentifrice at 25¢

6.19 Listerine blithely introduced the theme of woman suffrage only to flatter the majority of women on their choice of toothpastes. Consumption was the true realm for a modern woman's decision-making.

A Man's Castle is Woman's Factory !

MODERNIZE WITH THE 10 BEST HOME SERVANTS

1. **Refrigerator** - Keeps food fresh and cool.
2. **Freezer** - Keeps food fresh and cool.
3. **Stove** - Cooks food quickly and efficiently.
4. **Dishwasher** - Cleans dishes quickly and efficiently.
5. **Washing Machine** - Cleans clothes quickly and efficiently.
6. **Dryer** - Dries clothes quickly and efficiently.
7. **Iron** - Irons clothes quickly and efficiently.
8. **Vacuum** - Cleans floors quickly and efficiently.
9. **Radio** - Provides entertainment and information.
10. **Television** - Provides entertainment and information.

GET THE ONES YOU LACK

6.20 An efficient housewife might create more leisure, but she could entertain wider aspirations only in defiance of authoritative warnings: "Men are judged by what they accomplish—women by the homes they keep."

In tableaux with titles such as "Her home is still her castle . . . but it has a drawbridge now," advertisers celebrated a woman's new freedom of activities.⁴³ But the drawbridge also led back into a castle (sometimes called a woman's "factory" in other tableaux) in which she was to continue to play the roles of queen and castellan (Fig. 6.20). A truly modern woman would be so efficient as a "home manager and hostess" that she could blithely tee off at the fourteenth hole at four o'clock and still arrange a "dinner at seven for eight."⁴⁴ Sacrificing none of her former responsibilities as housewife, doting mother, and vision of loveliness, this modern superwoman would simultaneously display her talents as sportswoman, clubwoman, hostess, sophisticate, and home decorator. In advertising's fond reflection of "progressive" American ideology, she could attain every promise of the new while sacrificing nothing worthwhile of the old. Advertising men, it appeared, were not only apostles of modernity; more significantly, they were mediators who counseled women on how to adapt without cost to a consumption-oriented modernity that was appropriate for feminine instincts and capabilities.

The Businessman as Generic Man

In contrast to the women of the advertising tableaux, most of the other characters played less striking and less ambiguous roles. Men appeared almost as frequently as women, but often in nondescript, standardized parts as husbands or as businessmen at work. When the advertising message called for it, men appeared in a much larger variety of occupational roles than women—an accurate reflection of social realities. As doctors, dentists, or business executives, they might endorse



This worker scorned Safety Goggles—

SAFETY Goggles, huh? Don't need 'em, Boss. Been working with bare eyes for ten years, and I

During talks in the State of Pennsylvania about eye safety, I told 'em not to get it.

6.21. Dave, the protagonist in this American Optical Company ad, was not even a foreman. But on his return home he became a consumer and, thus, presumptively middle class. No man in overalls and cap could be a consumer surrogate.

the product; as truckers, delivery men, house painters, or mechanics they joined the tableaux to demonstrate the product's manufacture or use. But working-class men never appeared as consumers; an unspoken law decreed that the protagonist (and consumer surrogate) in every ad must be depicted as middle class (Fig. 6.21). Not one motorist in a thousand, for instance, ever appeared in anything but a suit, tie, and hat or elite sporting togs.

When merchandising strategy did not call for a particular occupational function, the leading man, as Everyman, tended to conform to a single stereotype. Whenever his occupation was revealed, the man who played the role of husband was almost invariably identified as a businessman. Advertisers sought to flatter their male readers by opening the sales argument with "You are a business man." Remedies for nerves, fatigue, and constipation regularly attributed such ills to the "stress of business."⁴⁵ Among hundreds of thousands of advertisements in the 1920s and 1930s, I have yet to discover a single one in which the husband or the ambitious young man is defined as a factory worker, policeman, engineer, professor, architect, or government official, and I found only one in which he is a lawyer. Even doctors and dentists appeared only in their functional roles—not as typical husbands. As a *McCall's* advertisement put it, in an offhand manner that reflected the conventionality of this advertising stereotype: "The average man is just a business man."⁴⁶

Within the role of businessman, some slight differentiations emerged. Older men were likely to be cast as business executives. Young men were often salesmen, aspiring to the popular intermediate step of sales manager on a stereotyped business ladder. When husbands telephoned their wives to expect a dinner guest, they always brought home either a "sales manager" or a "client." Whatever his level of achievement in business, advertising's Mr. Everyman always left home bound for "the office," never for the shop, the factory, the garage, the courthouse,

One collar manufacturer, seeking "to avoid the obvious danger of effeminacy" when women were introduced into collar ads, found a way to emphasize sexual differentiation by displaying the girl in color with many decorative accessories. She was looking at a man in a black-and-white photograph whose portrait, with its severe lines and matter-of-fact atmosphere, stood out in "virile contrast to the feminine charm of the girl and her colorful surroundings."⁵⁰ Edgeworth Smoking Tobacco even suggested that the growing number of women smokers had effeminized cigarettes; men should respond by turning to pipes. In a rare but strategically understandable display of pique at the recent advances of women, Edgeworth proclaimed: "A man looks like a man when he smokes a pipe."⁵¹

Men could dress conservatively, avoid distorted, modernistic poses, and return to traditional habits like pipe smoking because they did not have to *prove* themselves modern. All middle-class and upper-class men were businessmen, the tableaux implied. A businessman exemplified efficiency and control. If a woman's modernity was primarily decorative, a man's was primarily functional. In modeling the typical man on themselves, advertising men distorted the realities of occupational and class structures. By refusing to give men a distinct "look" as consumers, they preserved the assumption that dominant male instincts for production and functional modernity would counter any decadent tendencies of the consumption ethic.

Supporting Players

Of the supporting actors and actresses in the social tableaux, few were more stereotyped than the children. Two children invariably meant a boy and a girl, never two girls or two boys. Virtually never were children described or depicted in such a way as to suggest distinctly individual personalities. Except when the selling message specifically dictated otherwise, children were healthy, fastidiously groomed and attired, and impeccable in behavior. Magazines of the 1920s often conveyed "an image of youth out of control."⁵² Not so the advertising tableaux. Except on the few occasions when children or young people were called upon to influence the family's buying decisions through pleading or protest, they happily deferred to parental authority.

The elderly found their leading roles largely limited to ads for life insurance and grave-vaults; occasionally they gained "sit-in" parts as grandparents. Older men enjoyed a little greater latitude, since a silver-haired man could still find occasional work as a business executive, doctor, or experienced craftsman. Women whose hair had whitened found parts only as widows or grannies. Nothing so uniformly characterized the tableau roles of the elderly as a seemingly compulsory seated position. An observer from another century might well conclude, from studying advertisements alone, that men and women of the 1920s and 1930s lost the power of locomotion and upright stance after the age of fifty-five. Grandmothers sometimes still did handwork and both grandmothers and grandfathers held young children or read to them. Grandmothers bestirred themselves once or twice a year to put holiday turkey in the oven, but aside from that, most of them apparently

did little more than daydream about the past (Fig. 6.23). As if to confirm their distance from modernity, the elderly never appeared in explicitly urban settings.⁵³

If American films of the era, as Martha Wolfenstein has argued, placed their spotlight entirely on the younger generation and emphasized the discontinuity between present and past, advertising did so even more emphatically.⁵⁴ The elderly were not model consumers. Their needs and desires were less pressing than those of the younger generation and their ideas and habits were out-of-date. Usually, and perhaps mercifully, advertisers either removed them from sight or allowed them to sit quietly by the fire, rather than parading them on center stage as horrible examples. It would be easy to interpret a neglect of the older generation, and the prevalence of families with only one or two children, as an accurate reflection of certain social realities of the age: certainly nuclear families increasingly lived apart from grandparents, and the middle and upper classes adopted the ideal of the small family and practiced contraception.⁵⁵ But we must remember that the tactical considerations of advertising played as large a role as social realities in shaping such illustrations.

Children or the elderly usually gained parts in the tableaux for the limited purpose of conveying a single visual message—such as “family” or “child” or “extended family.” Children appeared frequently, but in numbers no greater than needed to convey the required message. Only rarely did a family with more than two children appear, even in ads by newspapers and magazines that stressed the buying power of their subscriber families. Nor was the three-generation family called upon to convey an image of family buying power. Part of the reason stemmed from a law of artistic economy: don’t clutter the picture with several figures when one child will adequately say “family” to the audience, and when a boy and a girl with parents will symbolize the whole universe of possible nuclear-family roles. A desire to focus the viewer’s attention could lead to the decision to employ only a single child. Then, with the eyes of both mother and father turned solicitously toward the child, readers would be induced to look where the parents looked. (See Figs. 7.11, 8.15.) Such a focus of attention also carried the side effect of emphasizing the child’s right to the parents’ attentive concern.⁵⁶

The other reason for limiting the number of children and the appearances of grandparents was more attuned to social realities—or at least to the real attitudes of advertisers. To the upper-middle class, with its ideal of the smaller and more “democratic” family, a picture of a family with three or more children might suggest an absence of middle-class status. And the presence of three generations—except in the formulaic holiday dinner scene—might indicate an overcrowded and less affluent household. Social tableau families were the idealized families of artistic economy and social aspiration. Grandparents were removed from sight and mind and a favored child or two might receive doting attention.

Ethnic and racial minorities found virtually no employment in the advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s. The names and facial features of the central and supporting figures in the tableaux never suggested Southern or Eastern European origins. The names given to “typical” families or other leading figures tended heavily toward such standards as Brown, Anderson, Smith, Morton, and Jones. (Among these fictional names, the most suggestive of ethnic diversity I have encountered were Dougherty and Joyner.) Two rare tableaux allowed Italian men

that blacks played in the society and the extent of their satisfaction in servile positions, but the occasional presence of blacks did offer one perspective on the spectrum of social classes in that era. Perhaps if we turn from the predominantly stereotyped individual roles of the advertising tableaux to their broader delineations of classes and class relationships, we will find images more reflective of reality in advertising's "mirror."

Social Class in Advertising Tableaux

In *People of Plenty*, when David Potter defined advertising as the characteristic institution of an affluent society, he also suggested indirectly the affinities between advertising and a society of high social mobility and insecure social status.⁶⁰ Expectations of mobility create the necessary openness to change; insecurities suggest an avenue of advertising appeal. It was particularly in a society of shifting relationships, without a fixed social hierarchy or authoritative standards, that products most readily served as an index of status.

Judging by the social tableaux of the 1920s and 1930s, advertisers had evidently concluded that American consumers hungered for an authentic, certified social aristocracy against which they might measure their own gains in status. For women, who constituted the huge bulk of consumers, the pursuit of modernity offered fulfillment only if it brought secure social status in reasonable proximity to an authentic social aristocracy. The tableaux steadily promised such fulfillment in scenes of ornate hotel ballrooms, exclusive restaurants and cabarets, and country club verandas like the one presented in the Canada Dry Ginger Ale tableau described at the beginning of this chapter.

These tableaux, and many others of less pretentious social scenes, disclose a society that saw differences of social class more distinctly than we do now—and a society that often spoke frankly about them. Frankness, of course, is not a salient quality of advertisements in situations where the advertising writer or art director has any reason to suspect that it will provoke even the slightest negative reaction. But advertisers in the 1920s and 1930s apparently had no qualms about flaunting the image of an opulent, exclusive, and clearly defined elite class before their audience. According to the tableaux, "society", in the narrow, elitist sense of the word, deserved popular veneration. Illustrations pictured an American social aristocracy; advertising texts unflinchingly labeled it as "high society." Although illustrations of mansions, liveried chauffeurs, and polo matches would seem to have been sufficient to create the desired impression, copywriters sometimes bluntly underlined the point by referring explicitly to "the rich" and "the wealthy." In the depths of the depression, staff members of one advertising agency voted a preference for advertising copy for a baking powder that claimed the patronage of 36 out of 39 "millionaires in one square mile" over copy that simply implied the same thing by referring to homes in "the finest residential section of Brookline."⁶¹

The "society" of the wealthy, moreover, was an organized society. As revealed in advertisements, it had distinct boundaries and standards of admission. People who were "in society" could be confidently labeled as such; others could be

Palmolive Soap sought expert testimony in Europe they chose an ample number of doctors and beauty advisors who were "graced by royal patronage."⁶⁴

Although endorsements by prominent American socialites drew gratifying responses in advertising coupon tests, the public seemed to prefer authenticated nobility. A study of the "pulling power" exerted by the various endorsers in Pond's Cold Cream ads in 1925 showed that European royalty and nobility held three of the top four positions, with Princess Marie de Bourbon well on top. Another study four years later revealed a commanding lead for the Duchesse de Richelieu, with Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt narrowly edging out the overworked Marie, Queen of Romania, for second place. Given this bias for titled Europeans, advertisements regularly cast the mantle of aristocracy over rich American socialites by gossiping about their social intimacy with European nobility.⁶⁵

Yet few European duchesses or aristocratic American socialites dared appear before the consumer audience merely as grande dames in static, courtly tableaux. Despite their fastidious demeanor, they were also horsewomen, golfers, and tireless travelers, living activity-filled lives, fully in pace with the tempo of the age. The "gay round" of one "charming cosmopolitan," the audience learned, included "Newport for the brilliant summer season . . . a whirl of early autumn festivities in New York, then on to Melton Mowbray, England, for the fox hunting, winter in Italy or Egypt . . . spring in Paris."⁶⁶ Thus the dignity of inherited social eminence was fused with expertise on the up-to-date and fashionable. Moreover, any taint of decadence that might have been attached to unproductive, pleasure-seeking women of wealth and title was deflected by the strenuous activity they undertook. In seeming anticipation of the "fun morality" that Martha Wolfenstein discerned in American popular culture in the late 1940s, copywriters made their duchesses and debutantes work extremely hard at keeping up with the hectic pace of high society. Perhaps advertisers felt more comfortable glorifying these prototypes of a triumphant consumption ethic when so much "hard work" was involved.⁶⁷

Having conferred upon America's wealthy the qualities of aristocratic stature and a sensitivity to the pace of modern life, advertisers then added a few finishing touches before setting them before the public as models and advisers. The wealth these people enjoyed, the advertisements pointed out, enabled them to choose products without regard to price; their social lineage gave them an "instinctive" sense of taste. Their fastidiousness and discrimination made them the "best people" in every conceivable sense. Thus the aristocratic rich were always the first to recognize products of quality; news of their choices gradually trickled down to influence the consumer masses. Advertisers found no reason to imagine that this picture of a superior social elite as supremely "in the know" might provoke skepticism or resentment in the broad consumer audience.

The word "fastidious" in an advertisement was always the highest compliment; it never suggested an irreverent snicker, as it might today. The fastidious ones were "people who know their way about in the world," people "with whom excellence in all their material possessions is a fetish." Canada Dry never doubted that "our best people" had the discrimination to select the best ginger ale. Camel cigarettes assured readers that "those who live well" easily recognized those "subtle differences in flavor . . . lost on some people." Kotex bluntly and repeti-



The Dentifrice of the Rich

Results—out goes the deciding factor

It is not only the rich who use Listerine. It is the women of the better walks of life who use it. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their smile. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their life. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their love. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their future. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their happiness. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their life. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their love. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their future. They use it because they know it is the deciding factor in the success of their happiness.

Let this tooth paste buy you a hand bag

LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE

25 cents



To the manner born

A glimpse through diamonds being with spirit velvet... a glance across a glowing purple face... and one sees instantly, in the person or that, something genuine, something authentic, as indefinable as it is apparent... And it is this quality in Camel Cigarettes which sets them definitely apart in the minds of discerning people... They are so evidently, so delightfully, to the manner born.

CAMEL

GUARANTEED PURE TOBACCO
CIGARETTES

6.26, 6.27. These ads appeared not in *Vogue* but in *True Story*, where working-class readers, these advertisers concluded, preferred glimpses of the rich to reflections of their own lives.

tiously told readers both in upper-class women's magazines and in *True Story* that "women in the better walks of life" or "better class women" had overwhelmingly adopted Kotex. (See Fig. 1.11.) So blithely did they assume that all new products of any quality must gain acceptance by the general public through the example of their social betters, that advertising writers greeted the success of vivid colors in Cutex nail polish as a surprising new phenomenon—a product that had actually moved up in social acceptance from below.⁶⁸

The use of high-class social tableaux and high-society social models did not always follow the pattern of indulging the prospective consumer in a fantasy of merely moving "one step up" through acquisition of the advertised product. Sometimes the social fantasy assumed Cinderella proportions. Tableaux of rarefied high society and European aristocracy appeared almost as frequently in *True Story* or *Photoplay* as they did in *Ladies' Home Journal* or *McCall's*. Through *True Story* advertisements, young, working-class "Judy O'Gradys," as *True Story* often described its readers, learned how Lady Buchanan Jardine led "the gay whirl of smart young English society at balls and dances, famous race meetings, hunting and house parties" and how Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., "modern to her finger tips" and "ever on the wing," remained "entrancingly beautiful as this romantic world would wish her to be." Listerine Tooth Paste spoke frankly to *True Story* readers of "the dentifrice of the rich," and Camels depicted those discerning Camel smokers who were "to the manner born" (Figs. 6.26, 6.27).⁶⁹

Young working girls, advertisers calculated, savored social tableaux of high society just as much as those in the upper-middle class who might more realistically aspire to live the aristocratic life. "The average life is drab," observed a

president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies. The average family needed alluring dreams to compensate for its low income. Cecil B. DeMille had already demonstrated the popularity of opulent movie scenes that provided modest housewives and working-class girls a glimpse of the life of the rich. Although agency people were indifferent to many such movies, an art director argued, they should take a lesson from Hollywood and give this matinee audience the same opportunity to participate vicariously in a life of fashionable luxury through advertisements.⁷⁰

Were these social tableaux, though unrepresentative of American society as a whole, at least accurate depictions of the nation's wealthiest families or faithful mirrors of the social fantasies of the public? Idealized though these scenes were, they did reflect a wider tendency of the media of the age to portray the wealthy, in Frank Fox's phrase, "as a separate genus of man."⁷¹ The "smart set" was still a highly visible and relatively cohesive group. Whether or not the pre-1929 rich truly "glittered as they walked," as Caroline Bird later recalled, advertising writers and artists strongly encouraged American consumers to think of them that way. Advertising not only reflected but exaggerated and embellished the steeper social pyramid of the late 1920s.⁷²

Still, while the social tableaux of the aristocratic rich undoubtedly provided satisfying social fantasies for the wider consumer audience, the particular needs and biases of the ad creators shaped that fantasy in ways that may not have reflected accurately even the "realities" of the public's fantasy life. Distinctly absent from these tableaux were displays of the more vulgar tastes of some of the nouveau riche or any suggestion of those naughty escapades of the rich that so attracted tabloid readers. The need to protect the reputation of the product and confirm the reasonableness of its price ensured that advertisers would place it in the company of only the most discriminating among the rich. One suspects that this made the aristocrats of the advertisements more fastidious than their "real life" counterparts. It also may have made them less extravagant and sensual in their tastes than they would have appeared in social fantasies of the public's own making.

Social tableau advertisements thus emphasized the importance of class distinctions and provided a flattering and conservative portrait of the lives of a "natural aristocracy" composed of the very rich. But what did they reveal of the larger class structure? Some tableaux suggested the extent of the class spectrum, although from a rather foreshortened viewpoint. Advertisers tended to make only gross distinctions below a level roughly constituting the upper-middle class.⁷³ One scheme of stratification identified the aristocratic rich with butlers and manservants, the affluent or upper-middle class with maids, dinner parties, and tuxedos and evening dresses; the middle class with a white collar, home-loving existence—with, perhaps, a single maid—and the remainder of society as working class. Only those of the middle class and above ever appeared in the tableaux as consumers. Illustrators and copywriters frequently defined this spectrum of significant social classes through a mansion-bungalow comparison. The initial term of this comparison—the mansion—suggested that the contrast would span the universe of possible social stations. By implication, then, the cozy bungalow or "cottage" constituted the society's opposite pole of possible living standards.



6.28, 6.29. Ad artists found frequent use for scenes of eager service to the wealthy. The chauffeur in a Maxwell House Coffee tableau doubled as a butler to make a proper picnic possible while a clerk in the illustration for a store equipment ad assumed a deferential posture.

The inhabitants of these far-from-tiny bungalows were inevitably a young middle-class couple. The husband, like all tableau figures with ambitions of mobility, was invariably depicted as *already* middle class in clothing, occupation, and social setting.⁷⁴

The working class appeared in advertising tableaux only in supporting, functional roles such as garage mechanic, house painter, truck driver, store clerk, or household servant. Some of these supporting players—delivery boys, tailors, maids, and scrupulously attentive sales clerks—remind us of the reality of the far greater amenities of deferential personal service that were then available to those of the middle class and above.⁷⁵ Working-class people, including the emerging white-collar class of clerks and office employees, were never shown off the job in home situations or enjoying recreational pleasures. The task of depicting a home scene of a working-class family would have severely challenged the illustrators' capacities for social imagination. There is no evidence that they found occasion to attempt it.

Although the advertising tableaux of the 1920s and 1930s spoke far more explicitly than their present-day counterparts about class position and frequently depicted characters who wore unmistakable badges of their exact class status, they never suggested that wide discrepancies in position should breed class resentment. On the contrary, the very tableaux that most vividly depicted the extent of the class spectrum often used the contrasts not to separate but to unite. Chauffeurs, maids, grocers, and department store clerks happily and deferentially served their exquisitely dressed patrons (Figs. 6.28, 6.29). The ad creators sufficiently shared

the class prerogatives of the upper and upper-middle classes to wish to believe that those who provided menial services to their betters did so fondly and thankfully.

If advertisements, as Jib Fowles argues, serve as the clearest indicators of a society's unfulfilled needs, then prominent among those needs in the 1920s and 1930s was the need for a sense of confidence in having secured a hold on a clearly demarcated place in the social hierarchy.⁷⁶ Ads did not necessarily promise consumers a position in the highest echelons. The tableaux often assumed that members of the consumer audience would continue to admire the upper crust of high society from afar. But advertisers offered viewers who used the product the prospect of a secure foothold on *some* elevated rung of the social ladder.

The attainment of such a status, moreover, was clearly a palpable pleasure. Recent advertisements often celebrate pleasures of comradeship, sexuality, or gastronomy by showing people enjoying them either entirely independent of any particular class setting or in a variety of class settings. In contrast, the tableaux of the 1920s and early 1930s associated all other pleasures with an explicit "class" setting. Although ads portrayed people having fun at restaurants, ballrooms, nightclubs, and dinner parties, the major satisfaction they conveyed was that of *simply being there*, securely installed in the proper class setting, among the proper people, and appropriately defined as "belonging" by their attire. Advertisers assumed that their audience craved vicarious participation in displays of class standing and that it gladly imbibed the frank portrayals and discussions of the class hierarchy that were necessary to define the setting of the tableaux. Modernity in the realm of consumption, the wanton pursuit of style, did not afford complete gratification; some ultimate reward was required. The ads confidently addressed an audience willing to believe that class position itself constituted the supreme pleasure. All other pleasures contributed to it or flowed from it. The "good life" in these tableaux was a life lived in evening clothes (Fig. 6.30).

Modern Maids and Atavistic Ambitions

Visual confirmation of a secure, elevated social status often called for the inclusion of a final supporting player in the social tableau—the modern maid. Ballrooms and polo fields provided a setting and required an attire that immediately conveyed the class atmosphere of a tableau. A maid provided the same visual index of class in a domestic scene. Although they served mainly as props and rarely gained speaking parts, these maids deserve our attention. Their prevalence in the advertising tableaux of the 1920s and early 1930s, and their particular physical characteristics, dramatically illustrate both the extreme distortions of reality sometimes reflected by advertising's "mirror" and certain larger truths about the society's cultural dilemmas.

If advertisers, as apostles of modernity, wanted to acquaint American society with the logical outcome of the process of industrial modernization, they should have emphasized the leveling of the hierarchy of classes and the fading of visible class distinctions. They should have reflected the tendency for people to find their identity more in occupational groups than in explicit distinctions of social class.

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THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

November 14, 1931



The HAWK — the newest after-dark Arrow — and the first dress shirt ever Arrow has ever made — guaranteed for permanent fit. The blouse is smartly tapered for wear with the fashionable high-rise trousers. The fabric is a beautiful French poplin. The Hawk — with its new button-plate and its opening-at-the-back — is easily the smartest and most comfortable dress shirt Arrow ever made. Three dollars and fifty cents. (The distinctive Arrow Wing Collar is \$1.50.)

© 1931 THE ARROW SHIRT & CO., INC., NEW YORK, N. Y.



ARROW SHIRTS

6.30. The American dream meant belonging to the right class. To live the dream was to spend one's life in evening clothes. See also Figs. 4.10, 10.3.

They should have explained that “exclusiveness” through external display was necessarily declining with the advance of mass production and mass consumption. And they should have accurately recorded a decline in personal servants.⁷⁷ But they sensed that their audience was not eager to listen to such blunt messages. If Americans were not yet prepared to relinquish the vision of a highly visible and elegantly enthroned social aristocracy, even as the price for a presumed democratization of society, advertising men were willing to indulge them in nostalgic social fantasies. Again, advertising leaders acted more as mediators than as apostles of modernity, providing the audience with fantasies that would buffer their adaptation to modern realities.

The “modern maid” of the advertising tableaux epitomized the adaptive social fantasy in its nostalgic or atavistic form. One might have expected that the high demand for maids as a means of establishing a “class” atmosphere would have provided employment in the tableaux for many black and immigrant women. But such was not the case. In defiance of the realities of the American domestic working force, advertisers insisted upon the image of the “French maid” as the standard for social respectability. In *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, Christine Frederick conjured up images of domestic maids with such names as “Bridget, Maggie, Hulda, or Annushka,” but the poise, demeanor, and facial characteristics of most advertising maids hardly suggested recent immigrant stock.⁷⁸ A few black women did make an appearance as maids or cleaning ladies, but they were outnumbered more than ten to one by young white women in immaculate caps and aprons. White maids older than thirty-five or with physiognomies distinctly different from that of the lady of the house were even scarcer than blacks.

Again and again, in advertisement after advertisement, the maid was young, poised, and slender. She possessed finely chiseled facial features and a smartly modern hairdo. Except for her dress, she was indistinguishable from the leading lady. Even in photographed tableaux, the models who posed as lady of the house and as the personal maid could have been interchanged (Figs. 6.31, 6.32). Of 186 advertising illustrations of maids I have recorded, 158 show maids who are young, white, slender, and have facial features very similar to those of the leading ladies, occasionally differing from them only in looking slightly younger or having a different hair color. In 13 instances the maids are somewhat dissimilar to the smart young leading lady, but are still young, white, and slender. In only 15 cases is the maid black, plump, or noticeably older than the mistress.⁷⁹

Such a phenomenon cannot be explained by any theory of advertisements as direct reflections of social realities. Most female domestic workers in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s were not young “French maids.” In fact, most were blacks or recent immigrants. According to the 1930 census, 18 percent of the women listed under “other domestic and personal service” were foreign-born and 39 percent were black. By 1940 the percentage of blacks among female domestic servants would surpass 46 percent. Nor were the majority of actual maids young women in their early twenties, as the ads seemed to suggest. In 1930, 39 percent of female domestic servants were over thirty-five years of age. By 1940, those over thirty-five had increased to 47.8 percent.⁸⁰ The likelihood of an urban upper-



Where housewives approve the daily menu—there you will usually find *Bond Bread*.

How surely the modern housewife plans her meals! Every chicken reflects her appreciation of food values, but while most of us are still planning, only one has really solved the problem of Bond Bread's quality!

Using the purest and finest of all ingredients only, Bond Bread brings us the taste of a loaf that really makes it an appetizer, a comfort and delight. It is the quality of the world's most

But if Bond Bread had not made house-baking unnecessary, how like more than a million other housewives who buy Bond Bread every day, she knows that it is dependable always.

SAVING SPACE, LITERALLY

Bond
The home-bake bread




Perfection can be Attained Only by the Most Meticulous Scrutiny Of details!

An APEDA photo Means Perfect Reproduction. Let APEDA Photo sell it For you!

Apeda Studio
PHOTOGRAPHERS
211 West 46th Street
NEW YORK
Established 1906

6.31, 6.32. Advertising's maids lost some of their youth and poise in photographs (compare Figs. 5.1, 6.11, and 6.33), but they still looked like their mistresses, not like real maids of the era—who were usually immigrant, black, or older.

middle-class family securing a maid who met all of the typical tableau specifications—slim, white, between twenty and thirty years old, and possessed of finely etched facial features—was slender indeed.

The persistent presence of maids in the advertising tableaux, moreover, contradicted broad social trends. The ratio of domestic servants to households had fallen sharply in the United States in the decade before 1920. In that year, according to figures cited by David Katzman for five Northern cities, female servants ranged from 35 to 79 per 1,000 families. Markedly lower ratios characterized rural areas. Although the number of female servants took an upturn in the 1920s, it had slumped again by 1940. Never after 1920 did female domestic servants exceed a national ratio of 67 per 1,000 households. Meanwhile, wages for domestic help increased in the 1920s. As a writer summarized the "servant problem" for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1926, "only the very wealthy can afford the luxury of being insulted by high-priced domestics."⁸¹

Advertisers perceived that the public found fantasy fulfillment in visions of stylish maids, especially when they connoted both modernity and willing subordination. Upper-middle-class families were facing a complex "servant problem" to which the producers of household appliances were offering only a partial solution. Some of these families now did without full-time, live-in servants because of the shortage of cheap household labor and the acquisition of labor-saving products. They sought to get by with the once- or twice-a-week black washerwoman or immigrant cleaning lady.⁸² But the absence of a maid provoked



As for hosiery . . .
 the Fresher the silk —
 the Better the fit because



FRESH silk hosiery is resilient, it moulds itself to every curve, clings snugly, and when stretched, springs instantly back into shape.



*F*ew things are more irritating than hosiery that fits with limp indifference—the sort that continually wrinkles at the ankle and sags at the knee. For, no matter how much time or thought you may devote to the rest of your ensemble, unless your hosiery fits well, the whole ensemble is sure to lose its effectiveness.

You can easily avoid the annoyance of ill-fitting hose if you will let Real Silk take care of your hosiery requirements.

Don't overlook the fact that the *freshness* of the silk has a most important bearing on the fit of your hosiery . . . And you can always be sure the silk is FRESH if you buy your hosiery direct from our Mills through the Real Silk Gold Button Men who call at your home.

SILK THAT IS 24 DAYS "YOUNG"

Due to Real Silk's exclusive methods, raw silk is brought fresh from the silatures in Japan to the great Mills at Indianapolis in the unbelievably short space of 13 days. In 6 days more it can be manufactured into hosiery. And since we deal direct with the consumer, rarely more than 3 days are required to make deliveries by mail to Real Silk customers throughout the land.

Think of it! Scarcely a month after the silk is taken from the cocoons, you can actually be wearing hosiery fashioned from it.

Silk is FRESH as that from which Real Silk Hosiery is made has lost none of its natural flexibility and life. That's why Real Silk Hosiery moulds itself so firmly to every contour—clings so snugly when once adjusted—creating a charmingly smooth, sleek silhouette from top to toe.

AND IT HOLDS ITS SHAPE, INSTANTLY

Whether it be our full fashioned or our "regulate", you'll find—as millions of women already have found—that Real Silk Hosiery fits well not only the first time you wear it—but as long as you wear it! Stockings made of FRESH silk, even in the shortest fabric, are not likely to stretch out of shape.

If you have never worn Real Silk Gold Button Brand Hosiery, it will pay you to give our Representative an opportunity to demonstrate its advantages. We will be glad to arrange an appointment if you will 'phone our local Branch Office or drop a line to the Mills telling when you want him to call.

REAL SILK HOSIERY MILLS, INDIANAPOLIS, IND., U. S. A.
 World's Largest Manufacturers of Silk Hosiery
 and Makers of Fine Legwear

THE BRANCH OFFICES IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
 Consult Phone Directory for Your Local Office

REALSILK

Gold Button Brand
HOSIERY
 and SUPER-SERVICE SOCKS



The gold button identifies the Real Silk Service Representative when he calls at your home or office.



*"There's just
 ONE WAY"*

© 1931 R. S. M.

6.33. What could feed fantasies of class harmony and personal status more powerfully than an attentive, worshipful maid whose "at-your-service" stance complemented her mistress's dramatic pose? See also Figs. 5.1. and 6.11.

fears of social inferiority. Through coupon tests, the J. Walter Thompson agency discovered that the most effective headlines for Lux dishwashing soap were "Do Women with Maids Have Lovelier Hands?" and "Need Your Hands Say 'I Have No Maid'?"⁸³ Consumers liked to think of themselves as entering that social class whose status was still symbolized, as a result of a kind of cultural-pictorial lag, by the visible presence of idealized, prestige-enhancing maids.

Even those who still retained domestic servants did not appreciate being reminded by the advertising pages of their problems with uncongenial, hard-to-manage, and less-than-exquisitely presentable household help. The tension-filled relationship of mistress and maid continued to be, in David Katzman's phrase, "an arena of intense cultural, racial, religious, and class conflict."⁸⁴ In short, this was an era in which the satisfactions of being attended by a maid were likely to be far greater in vicarious experience than in the reality. If the advertising tableau was going to depict a maid, there was ample reason not to stir the ill-humor of the reader by reminding her of such unpleasant realities as her dependence on ethnic minorities and blacks or on unstylish and hard-to-manage older women for domestic help. Instead, a parade of smart, efficient, and subservient young French maids might provide welcome psychological relief from the irritations and indignities of the "servant problem."

But the smart young maid, despite her passive role as a dehumanized stage prop, did more. Her modern, often glamorous, beauty added a Veblenesque increment to the image of conspicuous leisure in "class" advertisements. Her streamlined figure complemented the modern artifacts surrounding the leading lady of the tableau in an ensemble effect that would have been disrupted by the authentic depiction of a typical real maid of the era. The French maid's usual roles as dutiful, conscientious servant and ego-enhancing personal attendant offered readers a chance to retain in fantasy something that appliances-as-servants could not provide—the psychological pleasures of solicitous personal attention from an obvious subordinate (Fig. 6.33).⁸⁵

Thus the advertising tableaux, despite their distortions of reality, did sometimes explore basic social dilemmas of the era. Modernization, in the form of mass production, improved standards of living; new leisure-creating technologies seemed to promise an opportunity to rise in society. But middle-class and upper-middle-class families were likely to find those promises a bit hollow unless that rise could be certified by visible signs of social arrival (such as a French maid). The ultimate reward they sought for modernity in style was ascension into a secure, exclusive level of society, enriched and made visible by dominion over attractive and attentive personal servants. Then they would be presumed tasteful and modern by instinct and birthright.

Logically, apostles of modernity should have characterized maids and other visible signs of aristocratic exclusivity as passé. Nothing in the theory of modernization suggested that women should look to Princess Marie de Bourbon, or even Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt, for authoritative guidance. But if consumers wanted to believe that exclusiveness was still fully compatible with an age of mass-produced goods, advertising leaders were not prepared to undermine such expectations. On the contrary, they began to find a larger social function in accommodating their advertising strategies to any wistful fantasies and illogical faiths that would ease the continuing transition to modern society.