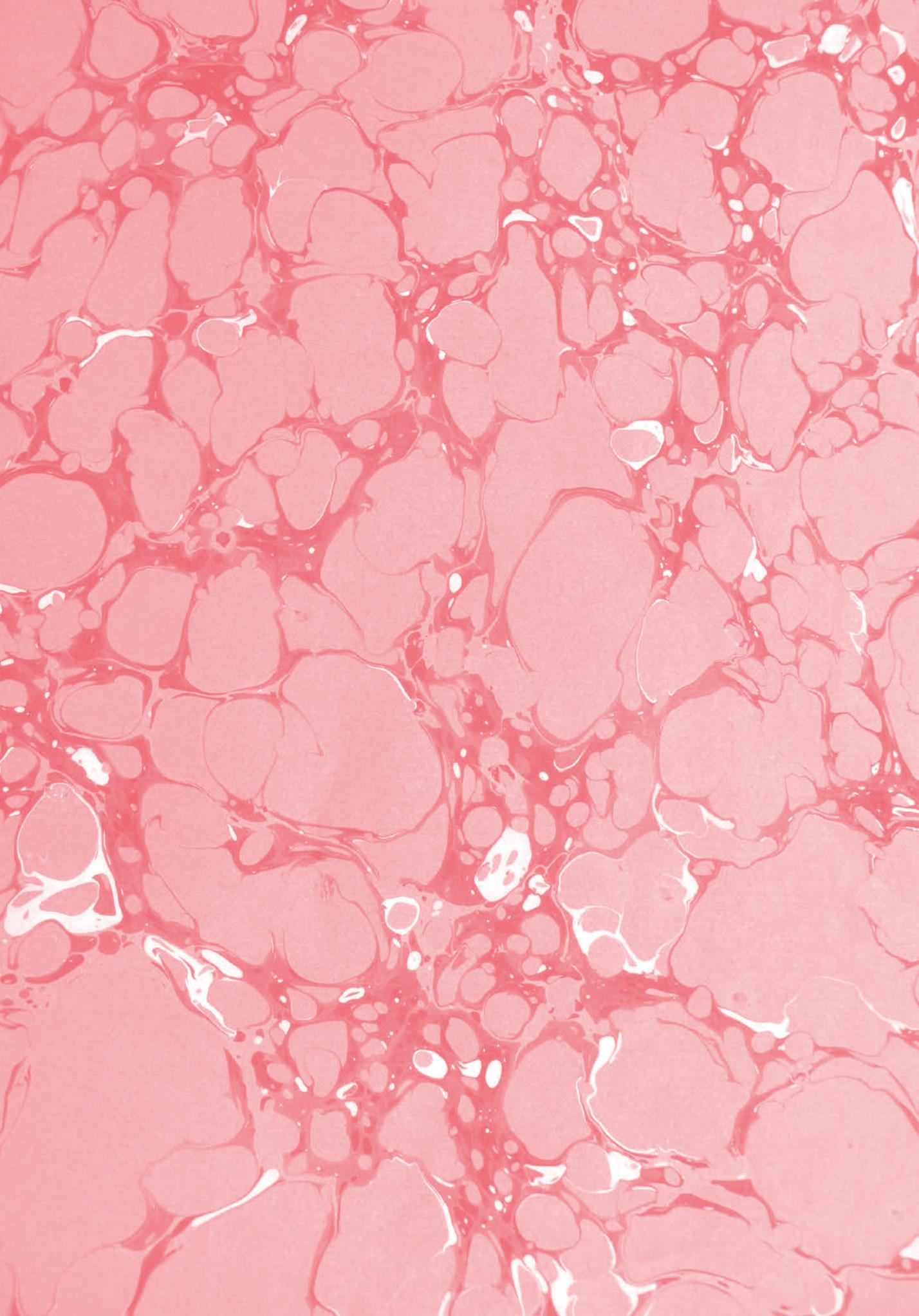


FEAST



SETTING THE TABLE

**THE
HOME STUDIES
COLLECTION**



Between April and July 2016 FEAST editors Laura Mansfield and Elisa Oliver invited a group of academics, artists and writers to undertake a period of research into the Home Studies Collection in order to develop a series of contemporary responses to the historical material.

Held within Special Collections, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Home Studies Collection contains more than 700 items relating to the preparation, serving and eating of food from the 1600s to the 1980s. Originally held at the Manchester School of Domestic Economy and used as a teaching resource, the collection includes household manuals, cookery books, national food surveys and educational text books as well as recipe books by Women's Institutes and Social Clubs from across the UK. The collection provides a wealth of information on changing food habits, aspirations and cultures.

Guided by FEAST's overarching theme of Setting the Table, Catherine Bertola, Augusto Corrieri, Bryce Evans, Beryl Patten, Rachel Rich and Susannah Worth worked with the vast array of titles in the collection to develop a response to the material that reflected their own creative or academic practice. The resulting responses were presented in a series of public discussions facilitated by FEAST's editors in the collection. The intimate discussions provided a unique opportunity for those attending to view and handle a selection of the materials that had formed the basis of the invited practitioners research.

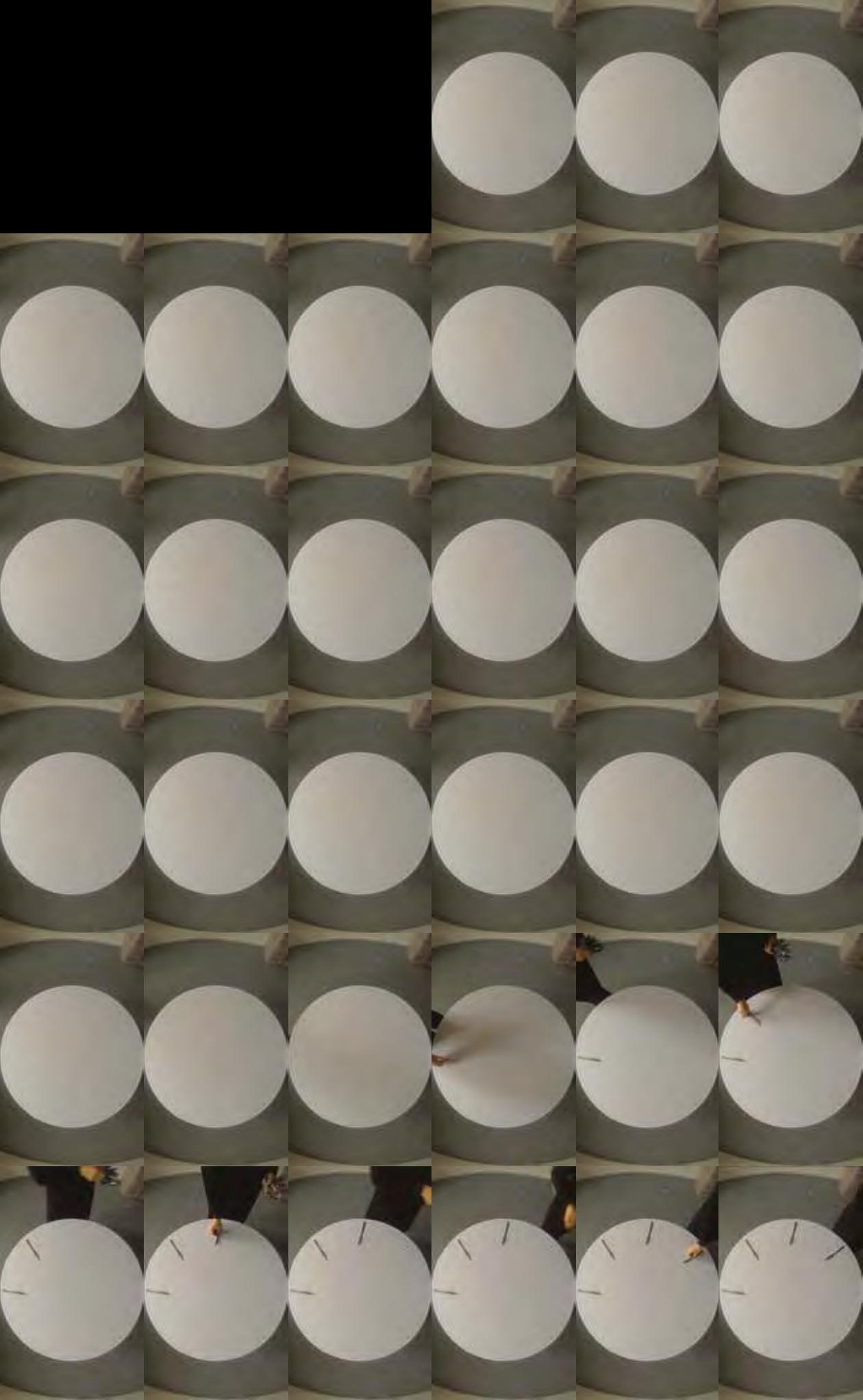
The following publication is a document of the individual responses and attests to the collection's ongoing importance in contemporary debates around cultures of eating and the availability, popularity, preparation and production of certain foods.

Edited by

LAURA MANSFIELD

After reading several historic household manuals and publications advising women on how to manage and run domestic spaces, Catherine Bertola developed a short film that functions as a sketch for a larger work. The following images are a sequence of stills from the film. They appear throughout the publication as an echo of the continual repetition of domestic tasks.

Catherine Bertola









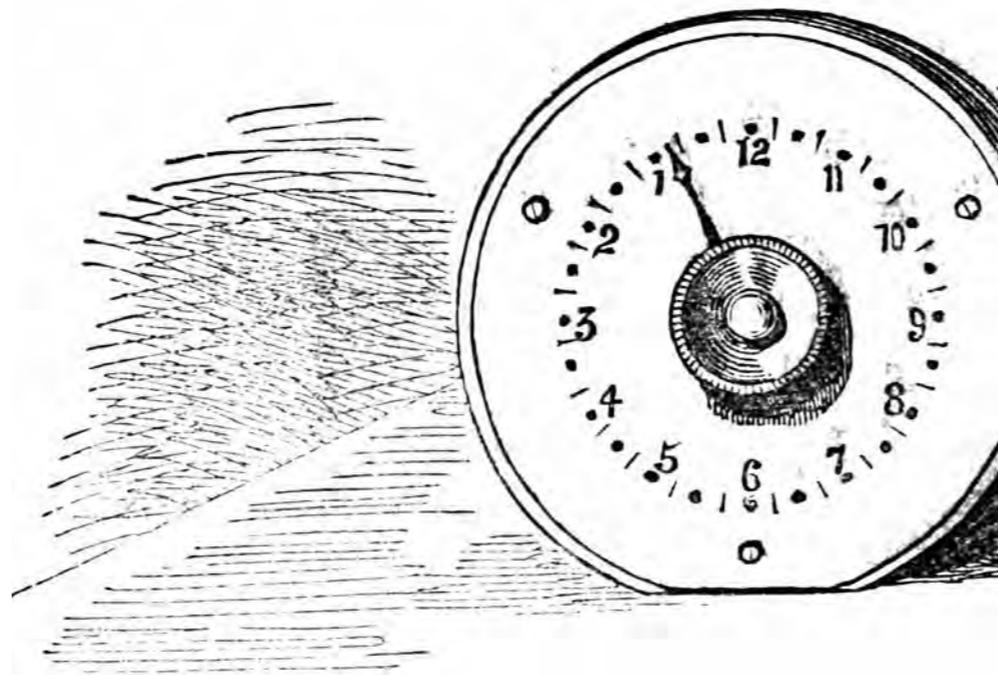


WORKING WITH
COOK BOOKS



by

RACHEL RICH



The art of cookery is every day receiving increased attention: and no wonder. Life is made all the brighter by satisfactory feeding; and he is a dull philosopher who despises a good dinner...

But the strong point of good cookery is not its gratification of the palate, but its influence on health. This is a matter of far greater importance than is generally thought.

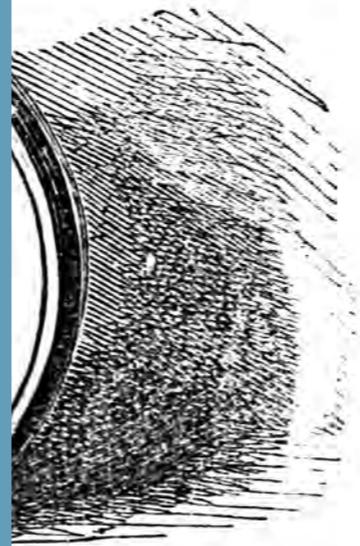
It is no exaggeration to say that the explanation of many fatal disorders is to be found in nothing but badly cooked and ill-assorted viands.¹

Cookbooks are much more than straightforward lists of recipes: they are sources of expertise and inspiration; lifestyle manuals; lists of ingredients and instructions; family legacies; personal and social histories; and histories of cultures, times and places. For food historians, cookbooks are a way of learning about the availability of ingredients, changing fashions, and new domestic technologies. For women's history, cookbooks are a genre written by (often) and for (usually) women, and collectively shed light on how ideals of domesticity have varied between times and places. The Home Studies Collection contains all of this and more, situated in a wider collection of books about food, domestic management, domestic economy and education the collection presents a wide range of topics which suggest how women's lives were imagined in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Placing cookbooks within this collection is in itself significant. In her *Bibliography of Household Books* Dana Attar separates *cookbooks* — which she defines as books where over one third of the content is recipes — from *household* books, which include books of advice on cleaning, home decorating, the management of service, and many more things considered part of women's job of running the home.² For me, cookbooks make most sense as historical documents when considered alongside this wider domestic literature. Cookbooks offered women advice about running their homes. They often situated recipes within moral advice about women's duties, and made suggestive assumptions about class and gendered identities. Having spent time in the collection I noted four themes that emerged within the array of cookbooks: advice and aspiration, the imagined reader, the love of modernity, and orderliness and timekeeping.³

¹ Anon. *Cassell's Dictionary of Cookery*. (London: Paris and New York, n.d.), n.p.

² D. Attar, *A Bibliography of Household Books Published in Britain 1800–1915*. (London: Prospect Books 1987), 11. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

³ I have written further about the workshop on the Recipes Project blog: <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/7919>



ADVICE AND ASPIRATION

In the variety of acquirements which adorn the female sex, domestic occupations stand the most conspicuous, and are the most useful. A well-arranged and steadily conducted system of domestic management is the foundation of all the comfort and welfare of private families in particular; and, where this is wanting, no family can truly be respectable and happy.⁵

Within each cookbook that is part of the Home Studies Collection we can find hints as to what their authors believed to be the aspirations — domestic and otherwise — of their imagined reader. Cookbooks are part of a wider genre of self-help and advice manuals which includes books on conduct and etiquette, home improvement, medical care, and many others. The nineteenth century was a time when self-improvement became widely popular, and cookbooks (along with more general forms of advice) were published in great numbers.⁶ Tempting as it may be, we must never imagine that published cookbooks can tell us what we want to know about what people ate, who cooked it, or how they moved around in their kitchens and dining rooms.⁷

⁵ Anon, *A Modern System of Domestic Cookery or the Housekeepers Guide*. (Manchester: J.Gleave 1822), 1. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

⁶ See for example, Andrew St George, *The Descent of Manners: Etiquette, Rules and the Victorians*. (London: Chatto & Windus 1993); Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct*

in Early Modern England. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998); Rachel Rich, *Bourgeois Consumption: Food, Space and Identity in Paris and London, 1850–1914*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2011); Dena Attar, *Biography of Household Books Published in Britain 1800–1914*. (London: Prospect Books 1987)

⁷ Manuscript cookbooks, by contrast, can provide a great deal of information about what specific women were doing in their kitchen. See for example: E. Leong, 'Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern Household.' *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 81

⁸ Catherine M. Buckton, *Food and Home Cookery: A Course of Instruction in Practical Cookery and Cleaning, for*

Children in Elementary Schools, as Followed in the Schools of the Leeds School Board. (London: Longmans, Green and Co 1879), 1. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

⁹ Alfred H. Miles edited, *A Look Inside: A Daily Household Guide*. (London c. 1898), 118. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

Instead, published cookbooks have to be read as prescriptive literature, which contain clues about the dominant ideals of a time and place; that is to say, the women who we glimpse in the pages of cookbooks published in the nineteenth century imaginary are representations of the ideal woman: clean, punctual, domestic, and loving. As one writer notes: *These cooking lessons which you are going to attend will, I hope, not only teach you how to cook, but how to take care of your homes, give your father, brothers and sisters, comfortable meals, and nurse your mother or any member of your family when sick.*⁸

Sometimes writers projected the image of a woman failing to live up to this ideal, as a way of showing the importance of success: *Young women utterly ignorant and careless of domestic duties often think themselves fully qualified to undertake the duties and responsibilities of married life, while at the same time regarding it as derogatory to their dignity to cultivate knowledge on which, unless their husbands are very wealthy, the happiness of their homes must necessarily depend.*⁹

Through their cookbooks, we can understand something about what the Victorians aspired to in their homes, family lives, and social interactions.

According to M.M. Mallock, there were four factors which determined the character of 'the *cuisine* in any household' which were:

01. The standards which the taste and knowledge of the mistress enables her to maintain.
02. The amount of technical skills possessed by the cook.
03. The *time* which the latter can devote to actual cooking.

The kind and quantity of materials procurable.¹⁰

A man's work,
'tis till
set of sun.
 But a woman's
 work is
 never
 done!



¹⁰ M. M. Mallock, *The Economics of Modern Cookery*. (London: Macmillan 1922), 3. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

Illustration Alfred H Miles, *Look Inside: a daily household guide*. (London: John Heywood Ltd 1903) frontispiece. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

THE IMAGINED READER

Really, my dear, you ought to be satisfied if I bear all the anxieties of my business and such concerns as are away from home. I really cannot undertake to say *how* you are to make salad-dressing, or take the stains out of the tablecloth, but it *is* reasonable to expect you to see that such things are attended to. I have my department, and hand you a considerable part of its results; you have yours, and I will not interfere.¹¹

Writers of cookbooks and domestic manuals used imagined dialogues like the above to create fictional lives which they envisaged their readers to be living, or trying to live. Some authors were explicit about their use of such fictional constructs, as when Mrs Peel, in *Marriage on Small Means*, wrote: *Even though our imaginary couple have married on small means they will, we hope, wish to entertain their friends now and then, for to take all and give nothing shows a most unattractive disposition.*¹²

Other authors made extraordinary claims to their readers about the usefulness of cookbooks. In the introduction to *Five Thousand Receipts in all the Useful and Domestic Arts*, Colin Mackenzie writes: *In truth, the present volume has been compiled under the feeling, that if all other books of Science in the world were destroyed, this single volume would be found to embody the results of the useful experience, observations, and discoveries of mankind during the past ages of this world.*¹³

¹¹ Mrs Pullam, *The Modern Housewife's Receipt Book*. (London: D. M. Aird 1856), i. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

¹² Mrs C. S. Peel, *Marriage on Small Means*. (London: Constable & Co 1914), 152. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

¹³ Colin Mackenzie, *Five Thousand Receipts in all the Useful and Domestic Arts, Constituting a Complete and Universal Practical Library and Operative Cyclopaedia*. (London: G and W. B. Whittaker 1823), n.p. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

Similarly, the anonymous (probably male) author of *The New Family Receipt Book*, wrote in his preface that: *The Collection of Domestic Receipts now presented to the public could not have been formed in any age but the present. The wisdom of this age has been to bring science from her heights down to the practical knowledge of every-day concerns' and the number or its inventions and discoveries have kept pace with the increasing wants of man.*¹⁴

In order to justify their own role as expert domestic advisors, many authors of these kinds of books imagined their readers as incompetent in the kitchen and beyond. This had the double advantage of playing on women's anxieties and aspirations, while creating a clear gap in the market which was then filled by the book in hand. For example, *The Young Woman's Guide to Virtue, Economy and Happiness*, starts with this 'Dedication': *To the Young Females of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, This Work is most respectfully inscribed, as a new, safe, and pleasant Guide to the purest and most lasting sources of happiness, and which essentially depends on the just performance of the various Duties of their Sex, whether as Servants, Daughters, Wives, Mothers, or Mistresses of Families.*¹⁵

¹⁴ Anon, *The New Family Receipt Book, Containing One Thousand truly Valuable Receipts in Various Branches of Domestic Economy*, New edition, considerably enlarged. (London: John Murray 1837), vii. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

¹⁵ John Armstrong, *The Young Woman's Guide to Virtue, Economy and Happiness*. (Newcastle: McKenzie and Dent 1803), n.p. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

The book links nationality and sex with virtue and happiness and offers a key to success by following the instructions on offer. It cuts across class divisions, suggesting that all women are the same, and that at whatever social level the reader may find herself, the key to their lasting happiness is housework.

Other books, though, are more precise, in — for example — addressing themselves to specific demographics: young housewives, newly-weds, families on a budget, or particular servants. Mrs Beeton addressed the mistress of the house and the housekeeper in two consecutive chapters, to make the point that her book was to be read by the person who managed and the person who executed the work described. However later, less expensive, editions of Beeton did away with this, as a tacit acknowledgement that many mistresses of modest homes had to do a great deal of their own cooking and cleaning.¹⁶

¹⁶ See for example, Isabella Beeton, *Beeton's Every-Day Cookery and Housekeeping Book* (London: Ward Lock & Co 1891); Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Cookery Book: A Household Guide* New ed. (London: Ward Lock & Co 1901)

¹⁷ Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, 80

¹⁸ Eliza Acton, *Modern Cookery, For Private Families, Reduced to a System of Easy Practice in a Series of Carefully Tested Receipts*. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Rob 1861), viii. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

Like Mrs Beeton, Eliza Acton addressed the middle-class housewife. Mrs Beeton famously compared her housewife's role to running a military — 'as with the commander of an army... so it is with the mistress of a house'.¹⁷ Mrs Acton was equally earnest about the seriousness of the task at hand, putting the fate of the British Empire in the hands of the young homemakers she addressed: *It is of the utmost consequence that the food which is served at the more simply supplied tables of the middle classes should all be well and skilfully prepared, particularly as it is from these classes that the men principally emanate to whose indefatigable industry, high intelligence, and active genius, we are mainly indebted for our advancement in science in art, in literature, and in general civilization.*¹⁸

Acton, Beeton and many others presented their books of advice to specific women, not all women. Thus Acton and Beeton singled out the middle classes, an increasingly important market, and one that loved to consider themselves as the source of British 'industry, high intelligence, and active genius' at a time when modernity was bringing about change and progress, all of which could be charted in the evolution of the domestic kitchen.

THE LOVE OF MODERNITY

One of the reasons why the middle classes appealed to cookbook writers, and why cookbooks appealed to middle class readers, was that both shared a love of all things new and modern. Although cookbooks were far from new, and most offered precious little in the way of genuine innovation, they positioned themselves as part of the modern world through the use of key words in their titles. Alexis Soyer in his *Shilling Cookery for the People* for example — offered something like ‘an entirely new system’ for cooking or looking after home and kitchen.¹⁹ Similarly, other authors used titles like *The Complete Economical Cook, and Frugal Housewife: An Entirely New System of Domestic Cookery*; *The New Family Receipt Book, Containing One Thousand truly Valuable Receipts in Various Branches of Domestic Economy*, or, in the case of Eliza Acton, *Modern Cookery*.²⁰ These titles drew in readers who wanted to show, through their reading habits and, by extension, their domestic routines, that they were living up the contemporary ideal of progress.

Alongside their titles cookbooks contained other ways of signalling a commitment to the shiny world of progress and modernity. One of the clearest is through the introduction of new technologies. In *A Shilling Cookery*, Soyer included an illustration of a new alarm clock, and I shall expand upon shortly, timekeeping itself was part of what made kitchen’s a modern space. Similarly, Annie Greggs gave her readers a long list of utensils, all of which were ‘tools’ which could make the kitchen a rational and efficient workplace, the first item on

¹⁹ Alexis Soyer *A Shilling Cookery for the People*. (London: George Routledge & C 1855), Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

²⁰ For another similar title, see: Anon, *A Modern System of Domestic Cookery or the Housekeepers Guide*. (Manchester: J. Gleave 1822). Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

the list being a clock. *Food and Home Cooking*,²¹ the Leeds School Boards cooking textbook contains an illustration of a modern coal oven, demonstrating for readers how important new technologies were to domestic happiness.

For the majority of cookbook writers modernity was most clearly apparent when tracing the progress of civilization through the history of improved eating habits. This narrative of progress and it is significant for what it tells us about the contemporary sense of history, and the writers own, important, place within a continuing historical narrative.

Writing in 1893, Mary Jewry remarked on the ways in which food and eating habits had progressed, and observed that: *Gastronomic taste changes with the progress of a people. In bluff King Henry VIII’s days a porpoise was esteemed a delicacy, and sent with great care to the royal table* ²² — a point which Katherine Mellish would have agreed to when she set out to provide a book appropriate to her own time, and therefore unlike, or so she claimed, the cookbooks of the past:

*Although there exist several books on Cookery and Domestic Management, some of which have done food service in the past, customs and requirements have changed so considerably during the past few years that much which has been written is now of little service. The principal reason for this volume, therefore, is to afford information of the most modern kind, avoiding all the old and useless details of what may be termed the beaten track of cookery books.*²³

The sense of history exhibited by nineteenth century cookbook writers was part of their sense of the importance of time and time management, which lays the foundation for my final theme.

²¹ Catherine Buckton, *Food and home cookery: a course of instruction in practical cookery and cleaning, for children in elementary schools, as followed in the schools of the Leeds School Board* (London: Longman Green & Co. 1879)

²² Mary Jewry edited. *Warne’s Model Cookery and Housekeeping Book*. (London: Frederick Warne 1893), 1. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

²³ Katherine Mellish, *Cookery and Domestic Management including Economic and Middle Class Practical Cookery*. (London: E. and F N Spon Ltd. 1901), v. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

- 24 On timekeeping and domestic manuals see also: Rachel Rich, "if you desire to enjoy life, avoid unpunctual people": Women, Timetabling and Domestic Advice, 1850–1910,' *Cultural and Social History*, 2015

Mrs Beeton, sometimes credited with ‘inventing’ the modern approach to recipe writing, offered uniform instructions about how long dishes took to cook:

INGREDIENTS FOR THE BATTER

½ lb. of flour

½ teaspoon of salt

Apples

Hot lard or clarified
beef-dripping

½ oz. of butter

2 eggs

Milk

TIME

About 10 minutes to fry them;

5 minutes to drain them.

Average Cost, 9d.

Sufficient for 4 or 5 persons

Seasonable from July to March.²⁵

MODE

Break the eggs; separate the whites from the yolks, and beat them separately. Put the flour into a basin, stir in the butter, which should be melted to a cream; add the salt, and moisten with sufficient warm milk to make it of a proper consistency, that is to say, a batter that will drop from the spoon. Stir this well, rub down any lumps that may be seen, and as the whites of the eggs, which have been previously well whisked; beat up the batter for a few minutes, and it is ready for use. Now peel and cut the apples into rather thick whole slices, without dividing them, and stamp out the middle of each sliced, where the core is, with a cutter. Throw the slices into the batter. Have ready a pan of boiling lard or clarified dripping; take out the pieces of apple one by one, put them into the hot lard, and dry a nice brown, turning when required. When done, lay them on a piece of blotting paper before the fire, to absorb the greasy moisture; then dish on a white doily, piled one above the other; strew over them some pounded sugar, and serve very hot. The flavour of the fritters would be very much improved by soaking the pieces of apples in a little wine, missed with sugar and lemon juice, for 3 or 4 hours before wanted for table; the batter, also, is better for being missed some hours before the fritters are made.

ORDERLINESS AND TIMEKEEPING

The most recent facet of cookbooks I have been exploring is the idea that these cookbooks were part of a wider set of discourses around the importance of orderliness and timekeeping.²⁴

Cookbooks were about time in all sorts of ways, and some more explicitly than others. Alfred H. Miles's book contained a whole chapter on different ways of thinking about time, but even in books which were less explicitly interested in timekeeping, time is an inherent part of all cooking and therefore a pervasive thread throughout the Home Studies Collection.

To produce a meal, and get it on the table, is above all else an exercise in time management. Each dish needs to be cooked properly, and all need to be ready to serve at approximately the same time, a feat which everyone who has ever cooked a meal knows is not easily achieved. As we've seen, some cookbook writers suggested that a clock was an essential kitchen tool, but there is really no way of knowing how many women followed that advice, and how many either trusted their own instincts, or listened for example, for church bells or other external clues in order to mark the time in the kitchen.*

Other authors treated time more fluidly, and offered women sensory, rather than mechanical, ways of telling when something was ready. For example, Acton's recipe for Pork Chops, which is very precise about the cost of the dish, but assumes that the person cooking will use their senses to deem the dish's readiness:*

Or her recipe for Salmon and mashed potatoes, which was barely a recipe at all, but rather an allusion to the fact that her readers would surely know how to execute this dish once alerted to the possibility: We are informed by a person who has been a resident in Ireland, that the middle of a salmon is there often baked over mashed potatoes, from which it is raised by means of a wire stand, as meat is in England. We have not been able to have it tried, but an ingenious cook will be at no loss for the proper method of preparing, and the time of cooking it. The potatoes are sometimes merely pared and halved; the fish is then laid upon them.²⁶

²⁶ Lady Constance Howards, *Everybody's Dinner Book from One Shilling to Ten*. Second edition. (London: Henry & Co c1891), 3. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

GOOD WAY OF COOKING A PORK CHOP*

INGREDIENTS

Pork Chop 5d.

Apples, etc., 3d.

MODE

Buy one pork chop. Fry well, taking care that it is not the least dry. Previous to frying, egg and breadcrumb the chop; Sprinkle it with finely chopped onion and sage. Serve with apple sauce in a sauceboat. If you have any cold potatoes, fry, and serve with the chop.²⁷

*What seems evident to me, though, is that there was not a single, accepted way of telling the time in the kitchen.

CONCLUSIONS

As my above observations have demonstrated, there are multiple ways of reading and considering cookbooks. Following my presentation in response to my time spent in the Home Studies Collection, it was clear that all those attending my talk had their own ideas about what a cookbook was, and how it might tell the story of the past. Leafing through a selection of books I had brought out from the collection personal memories and family stories which involved cookbooks, recipes, and eating emerged. Wonderfully, the cookbooks within the Home Studies Collection acted as prompts for people to tell their own stories sharing contemporary thoughts and memories around the preparation, cooking and eating of food.











DIGESTING RECIPES:
FROM TEXT TO TABLE



by

SUSANNAH WORTH

'I then set the saucepan over a coal fire, and stirred the contents round for a few minutes with a wooden (or iron) spoon until fried lightly brown.'⁶

The time I spent with the material in the Home Studies Collection was very *instructive*. I particularly learned a lot from *Elsie de Wolfe's Recipes for Successful Dining* (1934), in which the actress and socialite says, in a section entitled 'Between Ourselves' (a friendly whisper, strictly *entre nous*): *Do you have menus on the table so that your guests may choose the dish they prefer, if they do not eat all and everything? How often has one heard a guest say: 'Oh, dear, if I'd know this was coming, I wouldn't have taken that'.*¹

It is important, we are told, to let our guests know what is coming up, so they can save themselves for their favourite thing which they know will soon appear, or gorge themselves in the delicious present, safe in the knowledge there will be little or nothing to tempt them later on. Taking this instruction to heart, an introductory insight now might aid decisions regarding which parts to engage with fully, and which might be left aside in favour of conversations or intellectual

diversions. In this high regard for discourse and intervention, I follow Elsie de Wolfe to the letter again, with tips for table decoration to encourage *exchange*: *Never have high flower vases, or other things that obstruct the view of the beautiful woman across the table, or prevent the witticism of the clever man who is your opposite reaching you, unless you dodge to one side or the other.*²

Alongside this, in place of knife and fork, perhaps paper and pencil to aid those diversions, and digestion; just as Mrs Almeda Lambert thoughtfully includes space for readers' own thoughts and notes in her *Guide for Nut Cookery* (1899).

And so, that promised introduction. My intention is to offer some thoughts about recipes — drawing on some from the Home Studies Collection — in relation to memory, as texts which detail past activities, and invite future imaginings and aspirations, which act as memory devices, and as tools for action.

¹ Elsie De Wolf, *Elsie de Wolfe's recipes for successful dining*. (London: Appleton-Century 1934), 17. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

² *Ibid*, 21-2

By way of canapé (literally a decorative sofa, and by figurative extension, a cushion on which to place tempting toppings), here is an assertion that the recipe is far more than authoritarian decree. In her essay *Recipe Art*, painter and writer Mira Schor uses the recipe as a critique of formulaic tendencies she had identified in visual art, the key ingredients for successful, marketable, commodifiable artwork. Taken in this way, ‘recipe’ is derogatory, [Recipe: something from popular culture + something from art history + something appropriated + something weird or expressive = useful promotional sound bite. The work is selected for review because it can be written about efficiently. It is not necessary to see the piece.](#)³

However, as many cookbook writers will say — at least these days, for such things change with fashion — recipes need not always be strict, precise instructions, but can offer insight and guidance, an open-minded exchange, and the foundations to

experiment in ways that may lead to failure or, perhaps, to something extraordinary.

While recipes *can* be stern and exhorting, they need not be. A recipe for Calf’s Head Pie in *Tib’s Tit-Bits: Two Hundred and Thirty-one Recipes* (1869) edited by Frances Freeling Broderip and Tom Hood, instructs to ‘stew in the broth till it is very good’.⁴ In fact, this kind ambiguity is most likely less *laissez-faire* and more due to the fact that this kind of household manuscript would have been written as guidance from the lady of the house to her cook and could, therefore, assume a great deal of knowledge on the part of the reader. When the reader is allowed, or even expected, to contribute as much as the writer, recipes can offer an intriguing collaborative model.

A recipe is a malleable thing, open to shaping and adjusting, in practice and in writing. Annotation is a classic accompaniment to any recipe: handwritten ticks, crosses,

³ Mira Schor, ‘Recipe Art’, in *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2009), 232

⁴ Frances Freeling Broderip and Tom Hood edited *Tib’s Tit-Bits: Two Hundred and Thirty-one Recipes*. (London: Richard Bentley 1869), 45

⁵ Anon. [Recipe book dated 1798 and belonging to Margaret Hampton], Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

underlines and scribbles; adjustments in the margins; not to mention the tell-tale stains and sticky marks that highlight well-thumbed pages and favourite dishes. In a recipe book dated 1798, inscribed to Margaret Hampton, there is a recipe for cured ham in which the word ‘frequently’ is crossed out and inserted, through a rather ornate kind of asterisk, are the words ‘every other day’, in a different hand.⁵ Many years may separate the original and the variation, and we can only guess the relation of the recipe writer to the annotator.

The system of a recipe’s components, combinations and outcomes has parallels with creativity, with family, and with memory. As I understand it, our memories are not kept whole, tucked away in a vast mental filing system, to be retrieved, each time a little more dusty and tattered. Instead, each memory is made from a myriad different parts (ingredients, if you will), that are, upon recollection, stitched together in a fragmented mental collage.

Each time, it is a little different, something added, something left out, but still the same memory (the same dish).

Inside a large, brown, handwritten recipe book, inscribed to Helen Rolfe, with her Aunt Victoria’s love, there is a much-stained newspaper cutting with a recipe for Cheap Soup. Very unusually, it is written in the past tense, like a story, but muddles the telling of facts with the practice of recipes offering options and variations: [I then set the saucepan over a coal fire, and stirred the contents round for a few minutes with a wooden \(or iron\) spoon until fried lightly brown.](#)⁶

Though rarely written in the past tense — most often, recipes are written in the imperative (‘wash your ox-palates’, ‘stew a knuckle’, ‘pick the meat from one salt herring’, and so on) — recipes often cast their gaze backwards, with nostalgia or upon memories or roots that somehow affirm our identities, whether to cultures and communities we have left or lost, or to certain rules and

⁶ Newspaper cutting inserted into the front page of Anon [Recipe book, inscribed to Helen Rolfe, with her Aunt Victoria’s love. 1837 with later additions] Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

⁷ Margaret Hampton, title page inscription

⁸ Ibid

standards that assert our place in the social order. Recipes can be mementoes, souvenirs or heirlooms. In Margaret Hampton's recipe book there is an inscription in dark ink on the title page that begins: *Dear Tom — keep this book, for the sake of my dear father and mother, it was of value to them.*⁷

Recipes can be memos; devices for remembering that look back on past actions and lessons learned, drawing on experiences in writing or annotation that is addressed to your future self. Recipes, then, look forwards, into the future — through planning, lists, the next numbered step, intended outcomes, intended recipients, hoped-for responses and reactions. Margaret Hampton's recipe book is almost held together by tables of information, cut out and stuck in: the fair and foul weather prognosticator, times of the moon's rising and setting, and the somewhat less romantic 'fish table'.⁸

Returning to Elsie de Wolfe, an inscription inside reveals another noteworthy wish for the future: *Hoping this will help you — Mother.*⁹ It is a wish for future happiness, but simultaneously perhaps an acknowledgement of a current failing. Underneath, there is the residue of another message, written in pencil and rubbed out — perhaps the wishes of a previous gift-giver, or the thing that 'Mother' thought better of saying.

*

In Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood's *The Art of Entertaining* (1892), in a chapter called 'The Intellectual Components of Dinner', the author raises the idea of what she calls 'mechanical adjuncts' as 'an empirical remedy against dulness'. She suggests 'a dinner card, with poetical quotations, conundrums, and so on'. She notes that 'the Shakespeare Club of Philadelphia inaugurated this custom with some very witty results'.¹⁰ Culinary Consequences is a game I have invented, in the vein of such parlour games and in the spirit of experimentation, collaboration and exchange. Here are my instructions for how to play.

⁹ De Wolfe, title page inscription

¹⁰ Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood. *The Art of Entertaining*. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co 1892), 69. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

TO PLAY:

Write a recipe title at the top of the page.
Fold the paper over and pass it to the person on your left.

Each time you are passed a piece of paper, you must contribute to the recipe. The number of lines on the left will indicate which section of the recipe you are writing:

-
- 1 LINE = INGREDIENTS**
 - 2 LINES = METHOD**
 - 3 LINES = RESULTS**
-

When you see a single line margin on the page, write one ingredient. Then fold the paper over and pass it on.

When you see a double line on the left of the page in front of you, write one action. Then fold the paper over and pass it on.

When you see a triple line on the left of the page in front of you, write or draw one result. Then fold the paper over and pass it on.

When you are handed a full page, hold onto it. Keep it folded up until all the pages are complete. Then, one by one, go round the table and read out the recipes.

VARIATION:

Alternatively, you may want to indicate the different sections with different colours, for example green for ingredients, blue for method, and red for results.

VINEGAR, PIGEONS,
SUGAR,
MANNA

**'CHATE' IN THE
CHATING DISH**

*A plate of
steaming mash*



PICKLED PIGEON











THE DINNER TABLE IN THE
SECOND WORLD WAR AND AFTER:
NAVIGATING THE SHORTAGES



by
BRYCE EVANS

The using up of all 'left-overs' is essential if waste is to be avoided. By 'left-overs' we do not necessarily mean half a roast sirloin, or a good portion of steak and kidney pie, for every sane person would make these serve for another meal. It is the spoonful or two of mashed potato, the stem or outside leaves of what had been a choice cauliflower, a portion of cold sauce, the trimmings of sandwiches, cereals that have lost their crispiness, a piece of cold Yorkshire pudding, leavings of rice from a dish of curry and such like, on which attention must be focused in these times.⁵

1 Ministry of Food, *Wise eating in Wartime*. (London: Ministry of Food 1940). Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

5 Daily Express. *War Time Cookery Book*, 99

When the Second World War broke out in 1939 Britain was perilously reliant on imported food. In the same year, across the nation, regional food control committees were established and shortly thereafter the first rationing orders were issued. Rationing proper began in January 1940 (with carbohydrates such as bread and potatoes unrationed but most fats and proteins rationed). In April 1940 retail guru Lord Woolton became the Minister of Food and in August 1940 a special Ministry of Food Order made it illegal to waste food of any sort.

What impact did this have on the dinner table itself, and on the rituals of dining? One of the key impacts of the new austerity in food was the danger of repetition. With the decrease in shipped supplies due to conflict at sea, people were forced to forego the variety of foods they were accustomed to and revert to a diet that was more monotonous. As the Ministry of Food's *Wise Eating in Wartime* pamphlet put it, 'repetition day after day of the same foods, cooked and dished in the same way, is enough to drive a man to drink — and it sometimes does'.¹ Therefore many wartime recipe books and pamphlets were designed not only with food stocks in mind, but also morale. Many pamphlets were produced with meal plans for the week in them, all of which tried to avoid the impression that the food being eaten was boring in its sameness. Recipe books emphasised the importance of conjuring ostensibly different dishes out of essentially the same foods so as to give the impression that repetition was not occurring. Aimed at the housewife, state propaganda was conventionally gendered, urging women to do their bit for their husband's, family's, and nation's morale by avoiding repetition. Perhaps the easiest way to appreciate the impact upon diner and the dinner table is to list several typical courses in the *a la russe* order of consecutive dishes.

STARTERS

Vegetables featured prominently in all the recipe books of the period, reflecting the need to 'Grow Your Own' and 'Dig For Victory' as Britain reverted to a more self-sufficient diet based around food from the ground. These could often appear a little unappetising — for example lettuce soup and cucumber soup feature prominently — but most starters recommended in the cookery books were based around onions, since they were in good supply. A typical starter during the war, then, was an onion soup.



ONION SOUP

INGREDIENTS

4 medium sized onions	1 ½ oz. margarine
1 ½ pints of stock	pepper and salt
a little mace	1 oz. flour
½ pint of milk	2 oz. stale cheese (optional)

METHOD

Melt the fat in the pan, add the sliced onions and cook over a low heat but do not allow to brown. Add the stock and seasoning. Boil gently until the onion is cooked. Rub through a sieve. Stir in the flour, previously blended with a little water. Add the milk. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Immediately before serving, stir in the finely grated cheese.

4-5 persons

*Daily Express. War Time Cookery Book: practical advice
and recipes specially prepared for War time conditions.*
(London: Daily Express Publications, 1939), 124.

The Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan
University Special Collections

**...EVERY AVAILABLE PIECE OF LAND
MUST BE CULTIVATED**

**GROW
YOUR OWN
FOOD**

SUPPLY YOUR OWN COOKHOUSE

MAINS:

The reversion to canned supplies effected the biggest shift in dining habits. Canned cookery was pushed by the state as both necessitous and desirable. In 1940 people were instructed by the Ministry of Food to lay in stocks of canned food. Accordingly, the *Daily Express War Time Cookery Book* warned that 'jokes about the young wife who is an excellent cook with a tin opener are now quite out of date'.²

But it wasn't just canned meat imported from North America that people were forced to get used to. Since meat such as beef and lamb was heavily restricted in supply, rabbit — a readily available substitute meat and off the ration— cropped up constantly in wartime recipe books. Rabbit Tart, Rabbit Casserole, Rabbit Pie, Rabbit Broth and Sautéd Rabbit are recommended again and again in books of the period held in the Home Studies Collection. Whole sections of cookery books were now devoted to cooking with bunnies as the staple meat.

² Daily Express. *War Time Cookery Book*, 99.



RABBIT EN CASSEROLE

The simplest and one of the most pleasant ways of cooking a rabbit — a young one is best — is to cut him up in pieces and to put them with a good piece of butter in a casserole. Fry them until golden brown, add a few button onions, salt and pepper, put the lid on and cook gently until the rabbit is done. Take off the cover now and then and let the water which has formed inside run into the casserole, to help with the gravy. A few mushrooms toasted in butter might be added with advantage towards the end of cooking. Pork or bacon fat would be best in place of butter, and onion flavouring could be used.



MISCELLANY PIE

INGREDIENTS

1 rabbit	1 lb. potatoes
1 apple (according to size)	¼ lb. fat pork
salt and pepper	2 onions (according to size)
1 teaspoonful sage	
stock or water	

METHOD

Wash and joint the rabbit. Dust with seasoned flour. Cut the pork into neat pieces and slice the onions, apples and potatoes. Put the rabbit, pork, onion and apple in layers in a greased pie-dish or casserole, seasoning and sprinkling each layer with sage. Two-thirds fill the pie-dish with water. Cover with potatoes and bake in a moderate oven for 2 hours or until eat and potatoes are tender.

4-5 persons

Similarly, the wider availability of cheaper meats led to substitute dishes constructed from cheaper pork meat — one recipe for ‘Mock Duck’ essentially involved arranging sausages in the shape of a duck; ‘Irish stew made with sausages’ provides another good example. Tripe was also increasingly recommended. ‘Never let anyone tell you the tripe is tasteless’ instructs the Ministry of Food’s *Simple Dishes for Wartime*, which offered recipes with grandiloquent titles such as ‘Brains Au Gratin’ to underscore the point. The government also attempted to get people eating more fish. Extra rations of meat were given to people at Christmas via the ration and, if one was a vegetarian, one got an extra six ounces of cheese instead.³

Vegetables, predictably, also featured heavily in recommended main dishes. Most famous was the Ministry of Food’s own ‘Woolton Pie’ — named after the Minister himself and featuring potatoes, carrots, turnips, swede, cauliflowers, and brussels sprouts. The pie crust, due to wartime restrictions, was made without fat and so was quite bland in taste, but the dish incorporated almost every vegetable a market gardener keen to ‘dig for victory’ could lay his or her hands on. The emphasis on vegetables was reinforced by the Ministry’s own cartoon character duo, who appeared in cinemas, newspapers and pamphlets: everyone’s favourite spud with a death wish, Potato Pete, a squat little potato who was often pictured holding signs instructing people to devour him, and his tall, thin, bespectacled chum Doctor Carrot, who extolled the virtues of vegetables for health. Everywhere, the importance of keeping left-overs and re-using them was stressed.⁴

³ Ministry of Food, *Simple Dishes for Wartime*. (London: Ministry of Food 1941)

⁴ See Richard Farmer, *The Food Companions: Cinema and Consumption in Wartime Britain, 1939-45*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2011)

DESSERTS:

Since economy in sugar use was an important national supply issue, a greater use of fruit in desserts was encouraged, especially dried fruits like prunes, dates and raisins. Cakes were also affected by the coarser 'national flour' introduced during the conflict, so recipes for substitute desserts such as 'potato scones' became more common.

Private companies like Stork Margarine seized on butter shortages to 'do their bit' via the Stork Margarine Cookery Service — a bulletin with tips on how to make your ration go further by using margarine in your cakes instead of butter.

These changes to diet and food habits borne of supply shortages, in turn altered the practicalities of wartime dining, forcing a change in how the table was set and the rituals around dinner unfolded.

Communal dining is often nudged aside by rationing in the popular memory, but a network of thousands of 'British Restaurants' and industrial canteens operated across the country. A state initiative, the restaurants and canteens aided food and fuel economy — to cook and serve in bulk produced efficiencies. In terms of setting the table, dining out at a state restaurant was part-canteen, part-restaurant experience. Prime Minister Churchill was responsible for the name, keen that these new state diners be appealing, turning down the Ministry's favoured title 'State Feeding Centres' in favour of the 'British Restaurant' brand. In some ways, the service at these public dining rooms resembled the restaurant, with service conducted by a waitress, for example, but British Restaurants — although popular — also struggled to overcome the common cultural resistance among working class families to 'eating out'.⁶

For those who opted to cook at home, government pamphlets on how to best keep food helped in the national economy drive. The state was anxious to extol the qualities of canned foods, urging housewives that canned cream or canned soup was quicker and easier to prepare, pre-echoing the post-war shift towards processing and economy in the preparation of food. Yet there was an ulterior motive for the state, too. Significantly, canned foods would not absorb poison gas, an attack of which was expected during the early stages of the conflict.⁷

Many instructional pamphlets in the Home Studies Collection emphasise the need to maintain morale through food by continuing as far as possible pre-war dining conventions. The British Medical Association issued a pamphlet, now held in the Home Studies Collection, entitled *The doctors tell you what to eat in wartime* which offered the following salutary advice: 'Don't grumble or quarrel at meal times. A meal is a social occasion and an opportunity for appeasement of body and mind'.⁸

But was it easy to 'keep calm and carry on' while suffering aerial bombardment? Many cookbooks and pamphlets, produced by independent authors, the state and private groups claimed that it was. Many reiterated the official guidance on maintaining the illusion that all was normal by advising housewives to keep the oven on during an air raid, and keep the food cooking, especially if one was cooking a dinner that required substantial oven time, like a roast. Similarly, many pamphlets gave instruction on how to cook with gas during an air raid and how to check the gas meter.

⁶ Peter Atkins, 'Communal Feeding in War Time: British Restaurants, 1940-1947', in *Food and War in Twentieth Century Europe* edited by Ina Zweiniger Bargielowska et al. (Farnham: Ashgate 2011), 139-54

⁷ Thomas Jones, *The Unbroken Front, Ministry of Food 1916-1944*. (London: Everybody's Books 1944). Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

⁸ British Medical Association, *The doctors tell you what to eat in wartime*. (London: British Medical Association 1941)

The notion that bombing raids need not disturb the genteelness of the dinner ritual was emphasised by cookery writers already establishing a name for themselves and whom, after the war, would become famous exponents of the genre. Marguerite Patten for example, gave instruction on how to keep up the appearance of the kitchen table. 'Cut flowers for table decoration are a luxury now', she lamented (most flower growers were forced by the state to turn over land for vegetable production) but 'if you must', she urged, 'remember that flowers keep longer in a china than a glass vase; fill the vase first with sand then water to keep longer, store in cool place and not in a stuffy living room'. This advice might appear unnecessarily frivolous in the context of war, but civilian morale, as this illustrates, was imperative.⁹

Contrary to popular belief, the food situation did not dramatically change with the end of the conflict in 1945, and printed material held in the Home Studies Collection emphasises this point. By Christmas 1945, with harvests hampered by wartime destruction and bad weather, there was a global shortage of 5 million tons of wheat. Harvest failures from Latin America to China assumed near biblical proportions, with extreme flooding and even plagues of locusts aggravating worldwide hunger. Closer to home, too, the threat of starvation was not being taken lightly. In 1946, the British government exhibition 'The Battle for Bread' toured the country with its stated objective to 'fight famine'. The fight, it emphasised, began at home and on the kitchen table.¹⁰

⁹ Marguerite Patten, *Practical hints in wartime*. (London, 1942)

¹⁰ Great Britain Ministry of Food, *Manual of Nutrition*. (London: Ministry of Food 1947). Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

In Europe, too, food producers were still struggling to overcome the wartime decline in wheat and rye production, forcing a reliance on coarse grains as a substitute for bread grain. By 1947/48 the world's coarse grain exports stood at 8 million tons — double the 1945/46 figure, but still 5 million tons below the pre-war annual average. Coupled with the hard winter and dry summer of 1947, these shortages ensured that people across peacetime Europe were still dying of starvation and its associated diseases.¹¹

The prolonged cold spell of 1947 gave way to extensive flooding, further damaging food supply and prompting the British government to extend the ration to bread and all other major foodstuffs: a situation which had been avoided even in the worst years of the war. One hundred years on from Ireland's great potato famine, it was not long before the rationing of bread in Britain led to excess demand for potatoes, leading to renewed worries that potato supplies would run out.¹²

In enjoying the ritual of dinner, people were still navigating food shortages long after peace was declared, using techniques learnt from wartime printed materials and honed during the conflict. Little wonder, then, that the British 'austerity diet' still occupies such a prominent place in popular memory and culture.

¹¹ J.F. Blitz, *Behind the Ration Book a survey of Britain's food situation*. (London : Fabian Publications 1950), 46-54. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

¹² Report of the National Food Survey Committee, *The Urban Working Class Household Diet 1940 to 1949*. (London: H.M.S.O 1951). Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections









DINING TABLES AND PERFORMANCES,
OR: THE LABOUR OF ILLUSION



by

AUGUSTO CORRIERI

01.
THE DISAPPEARING
KNIFE TRICK

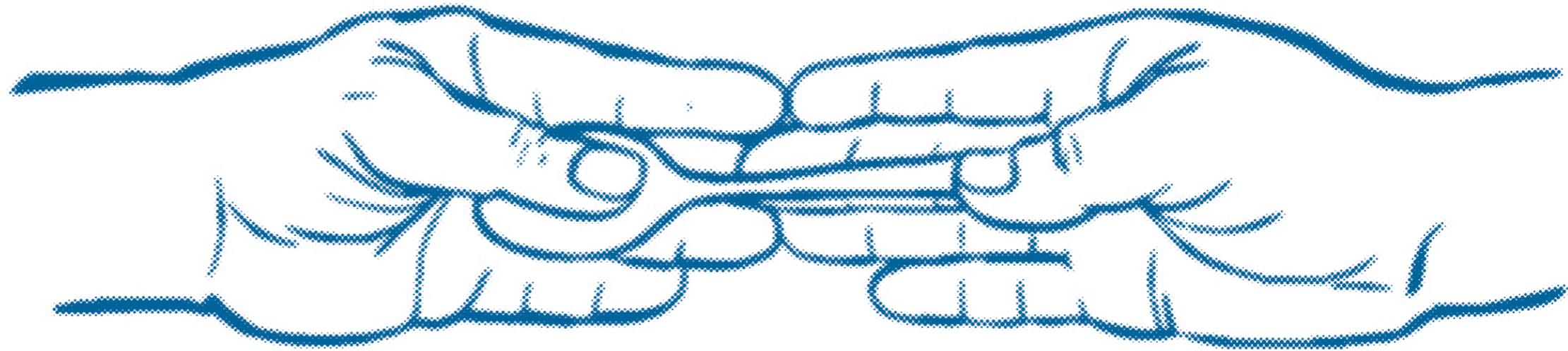


fig.1

'At first I am rather confused'

After spending some time perusing various books from the Home Studies Collection, it seems to me there is little connection between my own work — the ideas or practices I habitually engage with — and the theme or setting of the dinner table.

The fields I am currently engaged in can be named as: magic and conjuring, theatre as a framing device, avantgarde performance practices, and lastly, and somewhat differently, animals, non-humans and ecology. Visiting an archive of nineteenth and early twentieth century books around cooking, dining and the domestic, therefore, seems at once too familiar, and too distant. Too familiar because eating and dining are activities that, despite the attention I might dedicate to them, remain in the background of my direct interests: eating is an activity I do when I am not ‘at work’. And distant because, again upon first impression, this collection arguably relates to bygone eras, when the places assigned to women, men, children, animals, food and objects were fixed according to values that have since been radically called into question, if not superseded.

However, as I continue my research in the collection, certain correspondences begin to emerge, particularly between magic and the dining table. Correspondences that are perhaps phantasmal, imaginary, superficial even... and therefore worth pursuing. I realize, for instance, that the first magic trick I ever saw and learned as a child, as far as I can remember, was at a dinner table. I would have been maybe 7 or 8 years old. I was sitting opposite a family friend — a man in his 40s I think — at the family table. The man picked up a knife, covered it with his hands, and brought his hands up to his mouth: in one swift

motion he then moved his mouth over his hands, miming as though ‘eating’ the knife, which to my great surprise had vanished without a trace. I can remember a strange mixed feeling, a kind of ‘thinking wonder’: it seemed to me that the knife really had been eaten up, though I also knew that *couldn’t* be happening, lest everything I’d learned so far about the body, and matter in general, suddenly be wrong or radically incomplete. Back then I don’t think I quite had a sense of ‘something else’ taking place: of backstage work, trickery, something secret or hidden. After all, I was at home, in my own kitchen, at the table where I sat every day for my meals. This man simply took one of the knives from the table, and appeared to gobble it up.

Little did I know at the time that the very dining table, the cutlery, and the fact of being sat together facing one another — all *that* constitutes the apparatus of the magic feat, and that’s why it remains invisible: because it is simply the same apparatus structuring the meal. When we step into a theatre, with the lights, the stage and the curtains, we know to be on alert: we know to be suspicious of a theatre, because it is obviously meant to deceive, it is an apparatus that hides and reveals. Surely the domestic space is not a theatrical apparatus? Surely ‘home’ is not rigged with trapdoors and pulleys for magical illusions?

Simplifying to the extreme, on the one hand we have ‘the theatre’, clearly announced as a place for spectacle and deception. On the other hand, the ‘home’, which passes itself as real, private, or not-theatre. With this dual model in the back of my mind, I delve back into the Home Studies Collection and chance upon *The Gentleman’s Table Guide*, by E. Ricket, (1873). In a striking passage the author describes emperor Nero’s spectacular dining apparatus, configured to represent a mutating cosmos: *In Nero’s palace, called the ‘Golden House’, the whole building being covered with gold, enriched with pearls and precious stones, he caused the roof of one of the banqueting rooms to resemble the firmament, both in figure and motion, turning incessantly about night and day, exhibiting new appearances as the different courses in the feast were removed... the attendants could at pleasure make it rain down a variety of sweet waters or liquid perfumes.*¹

Nero’s impressive sensory display partakes in a rather usual understanding of theatre — as visible apparatus, as spectacular occasion, as entertainment. In contrast to this, we find Roman politician Lucullus’ more subtle theatrics:

¹ E. Ricket, *The gentleman’s table guide*. (London: Frederick Warne 1873), 76. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections.

² Ibid, 77

Among the luxuries of Lucullus are mentioned his various banqueting rooms, each named after the gods... To each apartment was assigned its peculiar feast, so that he had only to say to his servants that he would dine in a certain room, and they understood perfectly what they were to prepare for the entertainment. Cicero and Pompey attempted on one occasion to surprise him [to see how Lucullus dined normally] and were astonished at the feast which had been prepared at the simple remark of Lucullus to his servant, *the he would sup in the hall of ‘Apollo’.*²

Lucullus was able to communicate, at a moment’s notice, exactly what kind of feast should be prepared, simply by informing his servant of the room. In this apparent absence of preparedness lay the trick that fooled Cicero and Pompey. Whereas Nero’s theatrics were in full view, Lucullus’ were ingeniously disguised: the deceptive feat was made possible by the tacit knowledge shared between himself and his servant. It was the apparent absence of any preparation that fooled his guests; and as any magician knows, it is precisely where there appears to be no trickery, or even no possibility of trickery, that trickery is taking place. This, at least, is what I have learned from magic: it is in the apparent absence of any wrongdoing, often at the very moment of honest display (the moment the hands are ‘shown empty’) that the subterfuge is carried out.

The word subterfuge literally means ‘*to flee beneath*’. It helps in fact to explain the knife trick that first enchanted me. After carefully covering the knife with both hands, all you do is gently drop it onto your lap: the knife’s fall is covered by the hands, and by the edge of the table. The rest is theatrics.

fig 1 & 2

The basic mechanics of the trick, here seen using a spoon. George Schindler, *Magic with Everyday Objects*. (New York: Stein & Day 1976), drawings by Ed Tricomi.

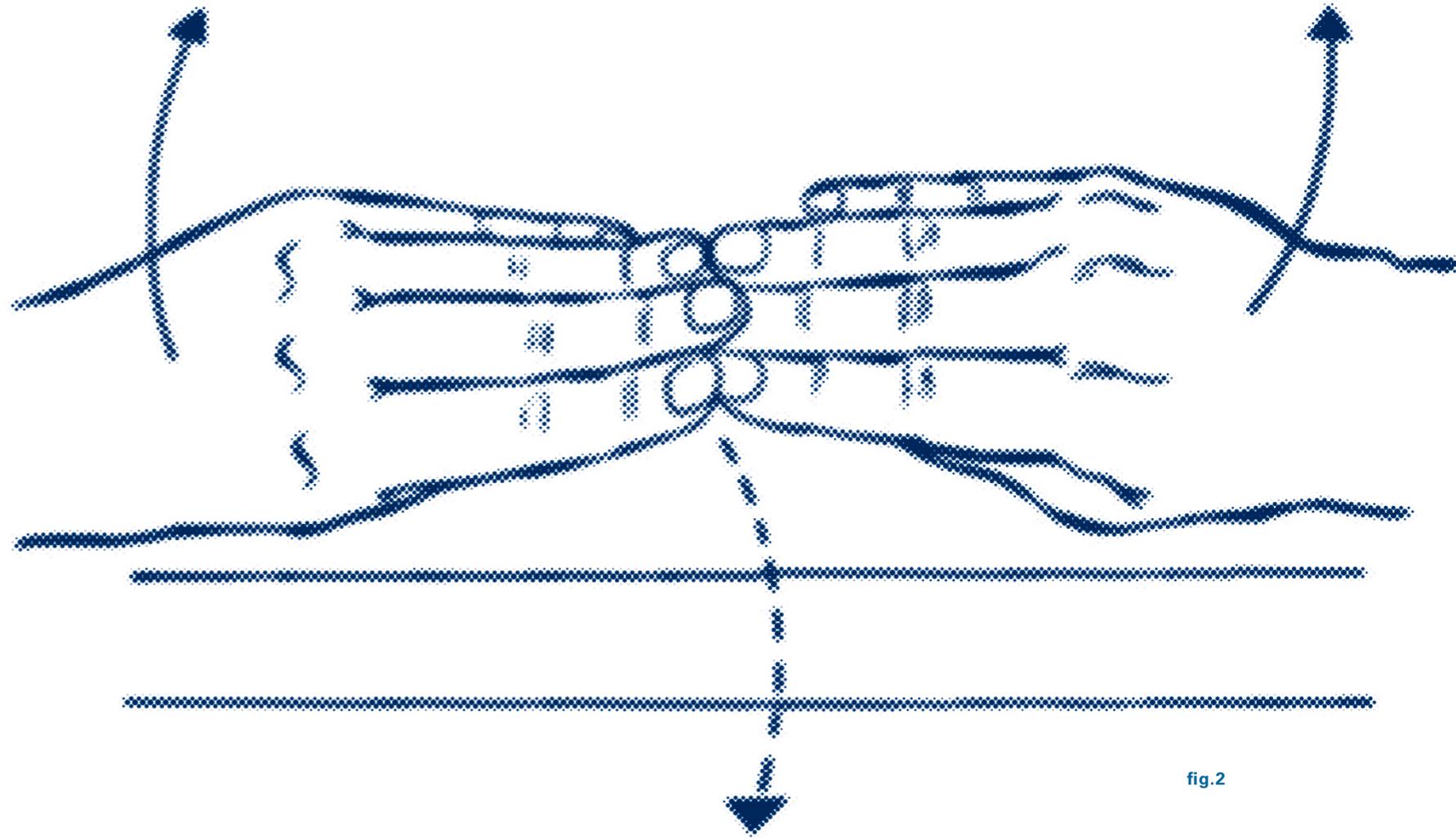


fig.2



fig.3

02.
THE VANISHING LADY

The dining table, much like a magic theatre, might be a site of subterfuge, of timed appearances and disappearances. The display of food upon the table, the serving of dishes by trained staff in contemporary restaurants or the servants of historical empires, might create a sense that the dinner is effortlessly made — there is no artifice, no investment, and no preparation. The (often female) labour remains hidden, and the feast unfolds as though of its own accord: by ‘magic’.

For a parallel we might think of classical ballet, the trained bodies of (often) female dancers, those ‘docile bodies’³ gracefully leaping about the stage, in a display of effortless and spontaneous movement. And we might think of those female assistants, who from the nineteenth century began to accompany male stage magicians, and who unbeknownst to the theatre audience were the ones often carrying out most of the labour to make the illusion happen — activating pulleys, executing difficult bodily feats and manoeuvres, preparing and disposing of props and objects — all the time having to appear as pleasant human décor, or else as subjects who are being hypnotised, etherised, made to sleep, levitate and vanish, if not sawn in half or skewered, yet through the (male) magician’s powers eventually return to their usual bodily selves.

fig. 3

Poster for stage magician Kellar (artist unknown).

³ The term ‘docile bodies’ comes from Michel Foucault. See for example Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. (New York: Random House 1995)

In an echo of the relations between workers and capitalist factory owners, the female assistants carried out the labour of illusion, whilst the male conjuror reaped the benefits and took all the credit. The female assistants were quite literally objectified by the male magician’s act. [On April 5, 1789, a poster for the Haymarket theatre, London, promised that that Monsieur Comus, ‘lately arrived from Paris, will, by sleight of hand, convey his wife, who is 5 feet 8 inches high, under a cup, in the same manner as he would balls’.](#)⁴

It might not be a coincidence that most of the books in the Home Studies Collection were published during the so-called Golden Age of magic, the second half the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Whereas earlier magicians would perform in a variety of settings, and were generally considered rather lowly entertainers, in the mid nineteenth century they begin to don tailcoats and perform in theatres. Magic transforms into [a legitimate form of theatrical performance, one that would, by the 1880s, become an indisputable staple of the Victorian cultural diet.](#)⁵ And THE illusion that propelled magicians to a kind of stardom is, low and behold, the Vanishing Lady.

fig. 4

A. Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions, Special Effects, and Trick Photography*. (New York: Munn 1898).

⁴ Karen Beckman, *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film, Feminism*. (Durham and London: Duke University press 2003), 46

⁵ Ibid, 41

Before describing the trick, there are two historical contexts that need to be thought about, and which theorist Karen Beckman has written about superbly in her 2003 book *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film and Feminism*. The first is that in 1851 'the national census made the British public aware of a burgeoning female population, that left men in the minority'.⁶ What ensued was a growing male anxiety about managing an increasing population of women, who were increasingly unmarried, in work and able to educate themselves. They were not disappearing into the household, to set the table. Public discussions centred on the perceived question of female surplus, a surplus that would need to be somehow curbed: actual suggestions included shipping women to the colonies, such as New Zealand.

The second historical context to bring to bear on a discussion of the Vanishing Lady illusion highlighted by Beckman is the Indian rebellion at Cawnpore of 1857, resulting in the violent killing of British civilians by the Indian army, and an excruciating retaliation from the British forces. Beckman suggests that this colonial uncertainty abroad, and the beginnings of what would turn into universal suffrage at home, were worked through at a more or less subconscious level, and that such subconscious workings can be seen to appear in the stage conjuror's acts of the time. For one, magicians began having assistants, who were invariably either women or Indian men: *From the 1870s on, British magicians began to blow women out of canons, a trick that could not but recall the punishment of Indian soldiers at Cawnpore, whose bodies were decimated precisely in this way.*⁷

⁶ Ibid, 19

⁷ Ibid, 45

⁸ Ibid, 52

⁹ Ibid, 53

The trick that gathered the most attention was Buatier De Kolta's Vanishing Lady. The original title was *L'escamotage d'une dame*, the word *escamotage* from *escamote*, the conjuror's cork ball used in the famous cups and balls routine. Here again a literal upscaling of 'object', from cork ball to female body. The essence of the trick again is a literal act of subterfuge, or fleeing beneath. Presented on the Victorian stage by Charles Bertram, the act was performed in a set that represented the Victorian drawing room, which as Beckman notes is 'already a place of disappearance or 'withdrawal' from public view'.⁸ The magician is asking us to imagine a domestic space, in which the female subject is made to literally disappear. After having the female assistant sit on a chair, Bertram would cover her with a large cloth, which was then whisked away with a flourish to reveal an empty seat, the woman nowhere in sight. In fact the assistant would slip through a trap door below (as pictured), her escape perfectly concealed by the cloth, and most importantly by a metallic structure built around the chair, which replicated the essential features of a human body shape.

Interestingly, in the original performance of the trick by De Kolta, the magician also made the cloth vanish, meaning that the secret apparatus that kept the body shape was also gotten rid of. Beckman gives importance to this cloth and its disappearance, reading a kind of anxiety about colonial unrest: *De Kolta's vanishing of the silk, renders invisible the mechanism of vanishing along with the body in question... This piece of silk is remarkable as the only remaining visible trace of the exotic Orient that this very British, very domestic conjuring scene works hard to repress.*⁹

Before the massacre at Cawnpore, in fact, Western magicians often wore Oriental robes and silks, referencing fakirs and mystics from the East. After the rebellion, silks were largely abandoned, magicians now presenting themselves as capitalists, in top hats and tails, establishing a clear and legible corporeal difference.

A detail, that made the trick particularly startling, was De Kolta's spreading of a newspaper on the floor, beneath the chair. How could the lady vanish, without making noise or a tear in the sheet? The secret was that the newspaper placed beneath the chair was actually made from Indian rubber, with a flap for escape. So again it is an Indian product, made of the same rubber serving to erase pencil marks, that is itself made invisible.

Despite the evident analogy between the disappearance of the female assistant and Victorian anxieties around surplus women, Beckam is wary of wanting to read the act as an exclusively straightforward representation of a desire to get rid of women. She acknowledges for instance that a certain disappearance of 'woman' might be desirable, if strategized as a mode of resistance; just as she points out the fact that the female body, in the Vanishing Lady trick, has to return, it insists on coming back, it cannot be vanished without reappearing. And importantly, in London the feat was performed by Mademoiselle Patrice, herself an accomplished magician, which was very rare at the time (and still is). She was summoned by the royal family to perform at Sandringham Palace, like Charles Bertram, the magician who presented the Vanishing Lady.

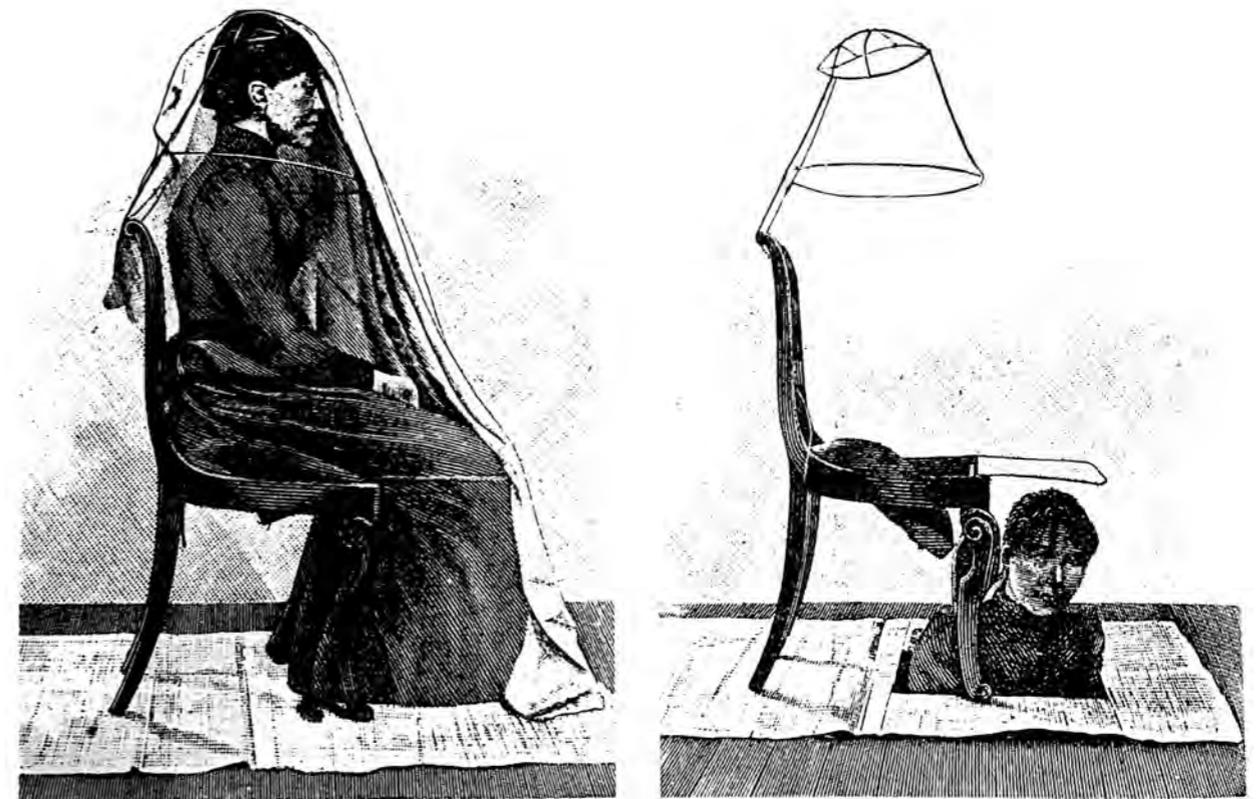


fig. 4

03.
RETURNING TO
THE TABLE

The Vanishing Lady trick brings us back to the vanishing knife, since in both cases it is not just an 'object' that mysteriously disappears, but more significantly the very apparatus that makes the trick possible: in the Victorian illusion, the cloth and the metallic contraption, in the table trick, it is the dining table itself that remains unperceived. The seeming absence of artifice or preparation requires very specific labour. The empty space (in theatre), the blank canvas (in art), the white page (in literature): each is already constructed, discursively, materially, and politically. In a similar vein, the empty table or the table set for dinner is a richly inscribed surface, as demonstrated by the following passage, taken from chapter 5, 'Laying the Dinner Table', of Mrs M. J. Loftie's 1878 book *The Dining Room*:

First, place on the table a thick white cotton blanket, such as we find on beds in Germany; this will save the wood from hot dishes and enhance the beauty of the damask. Before all things it is necessary, in order that a dinner-table may look nice, that the cloth be perfectly clean. It may be unbleached, to show the pattern, if this is the fancy of the lady of the house; it may be of plain linen, such as is often met with abroad; it may be of the coarse diaper with coloured borders to be found in the south of France: it may be of the finest double damask, but it must be spotless. Unless this luxury can be afforded, it is needless to talk about ornament.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mrs M. J. Loftie, *The Dining Room*. (London: Macmillan 1878), 79. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

THEN

FOLLOW

PAGES

OF

ADVICE

...procuring and fitting napkins, before moving on to consider cutlery, glass and china. In contrast to the illusion of the dinner table, what is productive about magic is the way it implies its hidden activity. It is always winking at spectators, 'I know that you know that I know', and in that winking does a lot of work around the seams of artifice and illusion. As Beckman notes: [magic provokes critical spectatorship through its self-acknowledged performance of undisclosed activity.](#)¹¹

And of course magic partakes in other cultural norms, anxieties and myths. If silks and ladies sawn in half might refer to Victorian political debates, I wonder about that first trick I saw, the knife disappearing under the guise of being eaten. Perhaps that simple subterfuge has to do with the ways the dining table is associated with a certain kind of propriety: it is a civilising apparatus, where manners are learned, a certain conduct upheld, it is the terrain of 'docile bodies'. I certainly didn't grow up by eating with my hands, then graduating to fork and knife, though I am glad to see this happening with children nowadays. In fact, in one of the books from the collection, *The Gentleman's Table Guide*, I find this riposte, by people who prefer to use their hands to eat: 'Fingers were made before forks'.¹² And, taking it one step further, in the 1854 book *Table traits, with something on them*, I find that the word adoration refers to the act of putting the hand to the mouth.¹³

Perhaps the eating of a knife short-circuits that sense of propriety and docile conduct. This bit of harmless fun could be read as a form of revenge against that training; the distance that cutlery establishes between hands and food is suddenly collapsed, as cutlery itself becomes food. The medium becomes the feast.

¹¹ Beckman, 190

¹² Ricket, 5

¹³ J. Doran, *Table traits, with something on them*. (London: Richard Bentley 1854), 67. Home Studies Collection, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

CONTRIBUTORS



Laura Mansfield is a writer and curator. She works closely with artists over the development of publication and exhibition based projects. In conjunction with to her ongoing work on FEAST Laura has developed the AHRC funded project eating-history and devised curated events at The Tetley Gallery, Leeds, The International Anthony Burgess Foundation, Manchester and Contemporary Forward at Touchstones Rochdale. She has an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck College, University of London and a PhD from Manchester School of Art.

Elisa Oliver is Senior Lecturer in Fine Art Critical Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University and Leeds Beckett University. She has worked as a curator and public programmer for Tate, FACT and New Art Gallery Walsall and continues to develop projects, writing and curation that reflect her interest in the culture of food as a barometer of class, gender and social interaction in daily life. Elisa has just completed her Doctorate at Central Saint Martins focusing on masculine identity and constructs of labour informed by the shift from material to immaterial labour over the period 1970s to 1990s and its negotiation in contemporary British Visual Culture.

Dr. Rachel Rich is Senior Lecturer in History at Leeds Beckett University. Rachel's teaching and research interests are in the cultural history of modern Europe, as well as in the history of food and eating habits. She is a member of the editorial boards of *Women's History*, and *Food & History*, and sits on the steering committee of the Women's History Network. Rachel has published widely on the history of food and eating, including a Manchester University Press monograph *Bourgeois Consumption: Food, Space and Identity in London and Paris, 1850–1914* (2011). Recently, she has turned her attention to the cultural history of timekeeping practices in the nineteenth Century Home, looking at clock ownership, women's diaries, cookbooks, and domestic advice manuals. Rachel has also consulted on food history questions for companies including Le Creuset, Talk PR and Le Pain Quotidian.

CONTRIBUTORS

Catherine Bertola is a visual artist whose practice involves creating installations, objects, film and drawings that respond to particular sites, collections and historic contexts. Underpinning the work is a desire to look beyond the surface of objects and buildings, to uncover forgotten and the often invisible histories of both places and people, in an effort to reframe and reconsider the past. Most recently Catherine has been working with found photographs of interiors of buildings that no longer exist to create new film and photographic works. In her practice of reframing and reconsidering the past Catherine has developed commissions for the Brontë Parsonage Museum (Haworth, UK), The National Trust, the National Museum Wales (Cardiff, UK), V&A (London, UK) and the Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester. She has exhibited widely including the touring exhibition *To be forever known, Acts of Making*, Crafts Council UK, *Silences* at Nässjö Konsthall (Nässjö, Sweden) and Temple Gallery (Philadelphia, USA), *Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design*, Museum of Arts and Design (New York, USA) and *From Trash to Treasure*, Kunsthalle zu Kiel. Throughout 2016 Catherine will be Leverhulme artist in residence at Leeds Beckett University collaborating with Dr. Rachel Rich on the development of a new body of work.

Susannah Worth is a writer and editor. Her recent publication *Digesting Recipes the Art of Culinary Notation* scrutinises the form of the recipe, considering the recipe as both an instruction and a statement of potential, aspiration and imagining. As a writer and editor Susannah has worked with Almanac Projects, archipelago projects, C Magazine, Calvert Journal, Jerwood Visual Arts, Ridinghouse, The Saatchi Gallery Magazine, Taste Journal, and the Whitechapel Gallery amongst others. In conjunction with her written practice Susannah developed the project *Do Things with Salad*, a communal cooking workshop at Open School East in 2015, and the installation *How to Do Things with Salad* at the Jerwood Project Space in 2016.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Augusto Corrieri is an artist, writer and lecturer in Theatre and Performance at the University of Sussex. His live works for theatres and galleries have been commissioned by European art centres, including Madrid's Casa Encendida, Vienna's Tanzquartier, London's Camden Arts Centre, and Brighton's Nightingale Theatre. He has published in Cabinet Magazine, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Journal and the International Journal of Screen Dance. His book, *In Place of a Show: what happens inside theatres when nothing is happening* (2016) is published by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. In parallel to his performance and writing practice, Augusto presents a magic show under the pseudonym Vincent Gambini.

Dr. Bryce Evans is Senior Lecturer in History at Liverpool Hope University. His expertise lies in food history and modern Irish and British history. He is the author of four books including *Seán Lemass: Democratic Dictator* (2011) and *Ireland during the Second World War: Farewell to Plato's Cave* (2014). Bryce contributes regularly to national newspapers and has appeared across radio, television and online media. He has received funding from a number of bodies including the AHRC, the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and the Wellcome Trust and is currently a Winterthur Research Fellow. Outside academia, he carries out advocacy and charity work combating food poverty and has addressed several UK Parliament working groups on this issue.

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