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UCLA Historical Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9hb1b08w>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 14(0)

ISSN

0276-864X

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Publication Date

1994

Peer reviewed

“Parties Are the Answer”: Gender, Modernity and Material Culture

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CLASSICAL THEORIES of modernity have neglected gender as a crucial facet in the constitution of social practices and structure. The dualism of “public” and “private” spheres has remained central to such theories, resulting in the “erasure of gender” from understandings of modernity.¹ Liberal economic theory, similarly, presupposes “a distinction between the public, “economic” world of the market and the private “non-economic” sphere of the home.”²

In opposition to such rigidity, feminism has celebrated the demise of the “project of modernity,” embracing instead the plurality of post-modernism as a more availing approach. Exploration of the significance of gender, as a socially constituted series of power related identities, is, however, of foremost concern in the historical understanding of the formation of contemporary societies.

This essay, then, is a historical study of the concomitance of gender, mass consumption and material culture, viewed as vital components in the individuals’ social and self-construction in society. Using an analysis of domestic material culture (namely, Tupperware) and associated modes of consumption in post-World War II U.S. society, it challenges the notion of the “home” as a “depoliticised” and “pre-social” sphere.

The Tupperware Object

In 1955 Tupperware kitchen containers and implements were added to the twentieth-century design collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as “carefully considered shapes...marvelously free of that vulgarity which characterizes so much household equipment.”³ Similarly in 1989 the Design Museum, London, chose to exhibit Tupperware as an exemplar of “distinctive design”

born through the Modernist ethos of the machine aesthetic.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the streamlined forms of Tupperware containers are hailed as exemplars of technological determinism; the “logic” of a free market economy manifest in the evolution of a “very functional” product “with a clever airtight lid.”⁴

Whilst the material culture of Tupperware rests upon a museological pedestal, the Tupperware Party remains an object of derision. The Tupperware plastic container is a metaphor for Modernity’s prevalent features: the rationalism, industrialization and Enlightenment of Western development. The Tupperware Party is construed as a mockery of lost “authentic” social relations—a symptom of a secularized, alienated society. The demise of community and the separation of economic, from home life, is parodied in the Tupperware Party’s blatant “commoditisation” of the modern domestic sphere. This dualistic treatment of Tupperware as a Modernist archetype, within design history, is akin to the gendered power construct of public/private implicit to the social theory of modernity.

By acknowledging the consumption and appropriation of material culture as a powerful force, this study contests the domestic as a solely private sphere. It traces the complex historical processes through which Tupperware, as an alienable commodity, became inalienable. It challenges the view of mass produced artefacts as empty, neutral entities and re-assesses the commodity as non-social form, commonly set up in opposition to the sociality of the pre-modern “gift.”⁵

The “Invention”

The “Bell Tumbler,” a seven ounce injection-molded form of milky white polyethylene, was the generic Tupperware container. Earl Silas Tupper was a dedicated and obsessive amateur designer, who considered himself blessed with the gift to devise a revolutionary product with which to serve humanity.⁶ In 1938, having worked for the Du Pont company in Massachusetts, Tupper formed his own plastics company. In an act tantamount to transmutation, he extracted a pure white, odorless, non-toxic, translucent substance from a black, recalcitrant petroleum waste product.⁷ To establish polyethylene as a revolutionary, fifth material category (after ceramics, wood, glass, and metal), Tupper patented the new low-density, moldable substance, with the trademark, “Poly-T, Material of the Future.” By 1947 the pivotal technology of the ware was the snugly fitting lid, the patented “Tupper Seal.”

“Poly-T, Material of the Future”: inception and appropriation

As early as 1947 Tupperware was imbued with a profoundly different image to

the banality conferred on most utilitarian household items. The October edition of *House Beautiful* featured the containers under the title "Fine Art for 39 cents," the first in a series of selections "to honor fine design" [Figure 1]. The accompanying editorial was dedicated to the exploration of plastics within the domestic sphere. The text reveals the struggle to locate this new material category, polyethylene, within a recognizable aesthetic language. The overtly machine moulded form and the alien nature of its substance immediately set a Modernist agenda of object evaluation. Tupperware received acclaim for its "fitness for purpose" and "truth to materials." For the large part, however, the female author's product appraisal couched description in terms of tactility, sensuality and desire. "Does it satisfy our aesthetic craving to handle, feel and study beautiful things?", she asked rhetorically, for "it has the fingering qualities of jade, but at the same time it reminds you of alabaster and mother of pearl." Tupperware she concluded, as a highly successful design, exceeded any measurable, rational criterion for assessment; "above all else, the bowls have a profile as good as a piece of sculpture." The consumer might even blatantly subvert its utilitarian storage status and display it as "shining points of interest as soup or berry bowls, or condiment dishes."⁸

From the onset, then, the promotion of Tupperware, as an innovative product and new material category, used highly gendered terms. The approach adopted the desirous tones of everyday household consumption practices; that is non-utilitarian, "creative" aspects of household provisioning where "need" is construed in anything but rational terms.

In 1946 an exclusive line of Tupperware was initially available, under the sub-brand heading "Millionaire Line," through department stores such as Bloomingdales. However, the majority of Tupperware sales came through mail order catalogues. In 1949 an illustrated publication featured thirty four table and kitchenware products as an attempt to establish "Poly-T, Material of the Future" as a fifth material category superseding all other plastics.

The orthodox terms of the domestic sphere mediated the overt radicalism of "Poly-T, Material of the Future." Using a series of didactic table settings and highly detailed product use descriptions "Poly-T" complimented the role of china, glass, pottery, silver, crystal [Figure 2]. The maintenance of manners, social relations and domestic rituals associated with such conventional tableware prevailed; "this material is so clean and wholesome of itself that it lends that feeling to the whole table when it is placed there," read one promotional plea.⁹

Similarly, Tupperware's modernity was treated with overt caution:



FIGURE I. The image used to promote Tupperware as “Fine Art for 39 cents” in *House Beautiful*, 1947.

that their design is as modern as the material from which they are fashioned, yet [that they] conform to the principles of good taste is interesting. Their very appropriateness in association with fine silver, napery, glass is assuring.

Direct editorial reference to aesthetic distinction, such as “simple good taste,” related less to the technocratic ideals of Modernism and more to the restraint of



FIGURE 2. A promotional shot from 1949 “Poly-T, Material of the Future” catalogue—representing Tupperware as a suitable addition to the conventional dining table.

Protestantism. References made to “chaste lines,” “restrained dignity,” “clean, graceful pairing” and “values of decor” implied that the products’ designs embodied the comfort of moral fortitude. Tupperware, it proposed, could contribute to the maintenance of domestic stability and refined sensibility. It readily assimilated the rituals of etiquette and socialization associated with food and entertainment within the home:

Early indoctrination in the fundamentals of gracious living sets a pattern that will endure for years and form a natural feeling for the niceties of life. So, the mother who does not permit even the partaking of the midday luncheon by the children in other than an orderly and pleasing manner, uses her Tupperware.¹⁰

Tupperware was constructed, not as an occasional household implement, but as a “method” of substantiating and expanding the values of everyday civility. Mo-

dernity was proffered, not in ideal, rational, utilitarian forms, but in terms of artefacts designed to enhance and expand the intricate manners of gendered social relations; items such as the "Tupperware Place Card Holder," with its receptacle for two cigarettes and a book of matches would, the catalogue editorial assured, provide "the 'soupcon' eagerly sought after" by the hostess and would "be gratifyingly commented upon by her guests."¹¹ Likewise "The King Cigarette and Match Case" and accompanying "Silent Partner Poker Chips" ("flexible, tough and unbreakable") might flatter the "man of the house...who loves to play host."¹²

The Tupperware Party

The formation of Tupperware Home Parties Incorporated in 1951 established the Tupperware Party as the sole means of product distribution. Inspired by direct sales concerns such as Stanley Home Products, the Tupper Corporation adopted the "Party Plan" system when Tupperware had failed to sell in sufficient quantities through other outlets. The Tupperware Party elaborated on established door-to-door sales techniques by incorporating party games, refreshments and sophisticated product demonstrations. Besides serving as a highly rarefied sales forum it acted as a ritual interface between maker, buyer and user. The structure of the "party plan" system blurred several crucial boundaries: domesticity/commerce; work/leisure; friend/colleague; consumer/employee; commodity/gift. The "hostess" offered the Tupperware dealer the intimacy of her home and the range of her social relations, with other women (relatives, friends, neighbors), in exchange for a non-monetary gift. The dealer, supplied by an area distributor, used the space to set up a display of products and recruit further parties from amongst the hostess's guests. The dealer benefited from commission accrued on sales and the potential for further party reservations.

It is the ambiguity of the Tupperware Party, the unease with which the values of commerce merge with the values of social relations, which has led some contemporary critics to berate it as the ultimate anti-feminist, capitalist sales device:

This form of organizational parasitism, while it has its unique features, is analogous to that form of colonialism which extracted taxation by utilizing the existing tribal structure rather than developing its own grass roots system of administration and collection.¹³

Tupperware employment was organized on a casual basis; it offered little security and no formal insurance benefits for women. The flexibility enabled by this

self-employment structure “allowed” women, in a period identified by its re-affirmation of women’s domestic roles, to be informally employed. Tacit homemaking and management skills were paramount in the Party Plan sales system as was sociability and sharing in the process of establishing successful sales networks.

Dorothy Dealer’s *Dating Diary*⁴, a full-color cartoon booklet, outlined the basic tactics inherent in the successful dealer’s repertoire. The document stressed individuality of approach and the necessity of sharing “dating” tips with other dealers. A series of cartoon case studies taught trainees to “create incentive or change excuses into a positive party date” and charm husbands who were reluctant to let their wives lend their homes as hostesses. “Naturalizing” the products by introducing them into everyday scenarios was vital to the process; as a particular scenario set in a supermarket (which, needless to say, results in a successful “Party Date”), illustrates:

Cashier (to a woman carrying a large Tupperware canister over her arm): “Gee...that’s an attractive bag where did you get it?”

Dealer: “Yes, isn’t it? That’s a Tupperware Jumbo Canister. Are you familiar with Tupperware?”

Tupperware Parties animated the product range; during game sessions such as, “Clothes Pin,” “Waist Measurement” and “Game of Gossip,” miniature brand-named Tupperware “trinkets” were awarded for performance. Initiates showed their familiarity with the product range by deciphering the specifics of Tupperware’s product language (Scrub-E-Z, Serve-n-Save, Hang-It-All, Fly-Bye-Swot, Square Round, etc.). In addition to embracing conservative and domestic feminine concerns, more subversive activities manifested themselves in the form of husband-focal games. Guests were required to write hypothetical newspaper advertisements to sell their partners, read out for the amusement of the other women they proved particularly popular:

“One husband for sale. Balding, often cranky, stomach requiring considerable attention!”

As a ceremonial occasion such gatherings excelled in transforming alienable commodities into inalienable artefacts. In his discussion of gifts and commodities, Carrier has emphasized the importance of social relations and ensuing processes through which people acquire objects; “shopping is the conversion of anonymous commodities into possessions, shopping is a cultural as much as an



FIGURE 3. Tupperware Dealers preparing for a corporate 'pep' talk promoting the 'Party Plan' Sales System in 1954.

economic activity."¹⁵ The Tupperware Party, then, used the sanctity of the home and the premise of its domestic economy in an act of celebratory and social consumption.

Commodities and Informal Economies

Women were encouraged to touch and fondle the products and swap tips regarding potential usage. This process broke down women's inhibitions and allowed Tupperware initiates and novices alike to directly contribute to the corporate design process.

Tupperware did not merely act as an empty vessel, a neutral commodity upon which social relations were brought to bear. Tupperware, as other mass produced and consumed material culture, expanded existing fissures and enabled social and material alternatives. Dealers with children might barter Tupperware to enable themselves to accrue income selling Tupperware:

I remember as a Tupperware dealer with my babies I exchanged time for Tupperware

with my neighbors. In other words let's say you would watch my children for three hours, well, rather than paying you 50 cents an hour...I would give you a dollar and a half worth of retail Tupperware. Now please remember, that was a set of cereal bowls back in those days.¹⁶

Tupperware Parties provided sanctioned all-female gatherings outside the family. Loyalty to fellow neighbors and friends was the lynch pin for attendance to many parties (some informants even recalled budgeting within the monthly housekeeping for attendance at Tupperware Parties), but for numerous women it was an opportunity to socialize outside the home at little expense. [Figure 3]

The drive to bring women back into the home in post-war North America is well documented,¹⁷ as is the role of mass consumption and the promotion of the suburban lifestyle in this endeavor.¹⁸ Through such critiques, women are frequently represented as duped puppets devoid of self-possession, repositories for the consumer goods of a newly productive post-depression US. economy. The phenomenon of suburbia has also suffered from an historical and socio-economic analysis preoccupied with basic emulatory theories that treat the collective experience of modernity as little more than a "parade [of] objects up and down in front of some anonymous mass in an assertion of status...the route to the American Dream."¹⁹

Such approaches to consumption, based on the trivialization and depoliticization of the domestic sphere, fail to acknowledge the sociality through which material culture operates; commodities in a basic sense are taken "home," shared by family and friends, adapted and reinterpreted in establishing relationships and social positions. Women unified in their desire, not just for material luxuries, but for a sense of belonging. Becoming a dealer or manager meant having a large network of social relations, extra money and a standing in the community. For women whose dreams and desires had been anchored to the home, Tupperware, and its potent articulation of material culture and social relations, operated as a blatant promotion of ambition and control: "If you believe in a thing you work for it. You work with it. You are active in it. You participate."²⁰

The Gender of Consumption

Tupperware Home Parties Incorporated was initiated and headed by Brownie Wise, an historically gendered embodiment of consumptive activity. While she managed the consumption of Tupperware down South in Florida, Earl Tupper managed the production up North in Massachusetts. They remained rigidly ethically and geographically apart. As vice-president, she acted as "an ordinary

middle-aged housewife" who had turned rags to riches with the "Cinderella Company."²¹ *Tupperware Sparks*, the monthly in-house magazine, featured Wise on its covers in charismatic and glamorous poses: flanked by the kneeling male executive proffering gifts; standing resplendent in strapless satin gown; embracing high achieving Tupperware women. Similarly the pages of popular women's magazines featured her anecdotes, household tips, and descriptions of her lace couture dresses, pastel pink Cadillac, luxury lakeside home and dyed pink canary. Foibles such as her compulsive eating habits were discussed in length for a popular female audience in magazines such as *Woman's Home Companion*:

Brownie fixes herself a snack of pickles, cheese and walnuts before going to bed. She packs away enormous breakfasts frequently topped off by ice-cream, eats dessert before her hamburger at lunch and munches ice-cream sticks whenever she feels hungry during the day.²²

By 1954 over twenty thousand women had joined the Tupperware network and *Business Week* featured Wise on its cover with the caption "If we build the people, they'll build the business."²³ Inside she described an ethos of caring and nurturing as intrinsic elements of a successful business operation. She promoted communality of experience rather than individual profit. Feminine reciprocity and loyalty were seen to bolster individual productivity, which in turn was seen to benefit to others:

In the unity of our ideas and our ambitions lies our greatest strength....A drop of water contains but an infinitesimal molecule of strength...powerless in itself. But the merging of billions of drops of water produces the tremendous power of Niagara Falls.²⁴

Altruism transferred directly to the material culture of Tupperware itself. Under the heading "Tupperware Cereal Bowls Help To Save Man's Life!" one consumer praised the virtues of Tupperware bowls, used as cold packs, in preventing her uncle from bleeding to death.²⁵

Generic Tupperware artefacts, however, were the tip of the commodity iceberg in a system that embraced the significance of the "gift," and bonded social relations, in numerous extravagant displays. The Floridian headquarters consisted of a classically inspired, gleaming white, colonnaded building located amidst a thousand acres of lush, lagoon-filled gardens that included an extensive golf course, swimming pool and tropical gardens dedicated to Tupperware dealers past and present. Here Tupperware Homecoming Jubilees, held annu-

ally for a period of three days, provided an increasingly lavish “potlatch” where the corporation would demonstrate loyalty to its dedicated women.

The 1954 Homecoming Jubilee celebrations, for example, used the pioneer theme “Dig For Gold” to invite top dealers and managers to a full scale gift-giving ceremony. Forty-five thousand dollars worth of consumer durables were buried beneath the headquarters grounds. Several hundred spades were poised for women, dressed up as cowboys and Indians, to dig uninhibited for deluxe toasters, fur coats and diamond rings in a hybridized charade of American cultural mythology. Within this analogy the spoils of a post-war industrial nation replaced raw gold. While a Methodist preacher spoke at length of the value of Tupperware as a national icon and a “defensive bulwark against communism,” a Wish Fairy, clad in theatrical gold tutu and sparkling tiara, made a celebrity wish-fulfillment appearance. Waving her diamante wand she granted saleswomen anything from entire Parisian haute couture wardrobes (from satin pyjamas to strapless ball gown), luxury bedroom suites, washing machine ensembles and brand new Ford convertibles. In courting women with such gifts Brownie was scrupulous in her pragmatism; organizing, for example, the baby-sitting arrangements for the eleven children belonging to the recipient of a luxury weekend vacation. Such ritual and mysticism played a crucial role within the corporate culture. “Tupper Magic” blessings took place at Poly Pond, (one of the numerous landscaped lagoons) as Wise had consecrated the water by casting a handful of raw polyethylene pellets to its depths.

At the pinnacle of the “gifting” rituals was the donation of the adored leader’s own publicly worn garments. Restricted to the “Vanguard” sales elite, this exceptional accolade was highly coveted and described in the most tantalizing and indulgent detail:

The dress I wore at the last jubilee graduation is to be one of the awards (it’s an original of imported pink batiste...fine pin tucks and lovely Irish lace, with flaring gores breaking at the knee with a deep permanently pleated flounce, and a matching pink taffeta slip).¹⁶

A typical example of adoration is exemplified by the prose of a Tupperware dealer taking short-hand notes at one of Brownies’ “Know-How” classes. At the end of the session the dealer was compelled to tear off the page and give it to her leader. It read:

Brownie—just sitting here looking at you and listening to you talk I wonder if you can ever realize the tenderness in our affection for you, and the really deep and abiding

gratitude that most of us (me in particular) feel for this wonderful opportunity in business we now enjoy. Thank you Brownie for being a constant shining example of never tiring energy and a moving force that keeps us all in constant motion—love Helda Degraes.⁷

The Tupper College of Knowledge offered a form of certificated qualification to a population otherwise precluded. At graduation soft, stirring choral music and candlelight accompanied women of all ages in a formal celebration of their achievements. They met their inspirational leader, Brownie Wise, who, pinning a fresh orchid corsage to their breast handed them a certificate, commemorative medal and a copy of her auto-biography as the Star Spangled Banner signalled the close of the ceremony. Several weeks later the company magazine featured a roll of honor “to all those who had triumphed.”

Women active within the Tupperware Corporation triumphed in using previously unrecognized labour and skills—the moral economy of informal domestic relations, diplomacy and the ability to empathize, were embraced under the corporate phrase “Know-How.” Respect and support were combined with informal sales skills and celebrated within the “Tupperware Family.” Anthems which pervaded sales gatherings celebrated these sentiments:

There's only one place for me/One place I want to be/A part of the Tupperware Family/
With my head held high singing praises to the sky/As a part of the Tupperware Family/
Gone are the lonesome days/These are the golden days/Glad to be up with the sun/
There are Oh! so many sensations/To enjoy with all your relations/In the Tupperware family⁸

Gifts, Gender and Social Relations

The Tupperware Family Album, an illustrated publication where dealers could choose gifts (through accrued sales points) “to thrill” their “entire family,” challenged the assumed alienability ascribed to commodities. With its direct articulation of gifting and household provisioning, the “Tupperware Family Album” merged commercial concern with the nuances of household provisioning and moral economies.

Each portrait size picture of the nine member, white, suburban extended family was mounted, simulating a conventional photograph album, in juxtaposition to the commodities. The gift objects, with consistent and prominent reference to their brand names, were themselves represented as potential “members of the family.” “Mother” was identified with the “Crown Jewel Ladies Schick Razor,” “Manicure Set by Griffon” and electric knife (“delicate slicing action”)

each photographed in open and availing presentation boxes, as posturing subjects within themselves. "Father" was identified with a "Garcia Mitchell Fishing Rod Outfit" and a traditional carving knife set ("Dad will be master of the holiday meals!"). Youngest daughter, Judy, featured with "Giant Doll Playhouse" ("the dream of every little girl") was pictured opposite her brother, Tommy, and a "Deluxe Microscope Set" ("Not a Toy") and "Electric Racing Car Set."

The Tupperware Family Album delineated and substantiated race and gender constructs, through an association of commodities, intrinsic to the cultural context within which the Tupperware product, sales system and corporation operated.

Similarly, in 1960 the winner of a Miss Teen contest, "Blonde hair...Blue eyes...Fair skin...Meet the prettiest teenager in USA," was awarded, along with a Hollywood screen test, a complete wardrobe from Bobby Brooks and a beautiful Lane Sweetheart Chest, "a set of terrific Tupperware that will last a lifetime."²⁹ In the same year, *Co-ed—the Magazine for Career Girls and Homemakers of Tomorrow*, featured recipes, illustrated with Tupperware, for the "smart hostess" to serve at her swim party where a "revolving 'Party Susan' could offer sophisticated snacks by the poolside."³⁰

Although Tupperware, by the late 1950s/early 1960s, was promoted as being firmly embedded in the dynamics of white North American suburbia, the sales system and objects had, soon after its inception, been appropriated by Hispanic and black women (oral histories have to date provided most evidence of this activity).³¹ Transcripts of Jubilee sales seminars make consistent reference to "the Negro market" as a significant arena of consumption. Although Wise made several guest appearances at black colleges, promoting the role of business and positive self-growth philosophy, the visual representation of the corporation remained overwhelmingly white.

Indeed the "pedigree" of the Tupperware product was couched in terms of national and iconic status. From 1951 onwards, corporate representation of the Tupperware range utilized an evolutionary model of the historiography of material culture. The Tupperware Museum of Dishes used a diachronic and taxonomical exhibition of kitchen vessels from a "pre-historic era to present day." The collection "progressed" from Egyptian alabaster bowls and South Pacific horn tumblers, to seventeenth century wine glasses and eighteenth century silver teapots. The display culminated, as the sole representation of vessels in the twentieth century, in an illuminated stack of Tupperware containers. Ceremonial, decorative, vernacular and utility vessels are displayed without differentiation or cultural context. The Tupperware product is posited confidently

amongst a rich array of nationally significant material culture: Shaker boxes, American Indian vessels, and the decorative glassware of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

By 1954 Tupperware's status as an object worthy of national pride and moral integrity was enacted in a bizarre scene of commodity imperialism, photographed and described in the pages of the in-house magazine *Tupperware Sparks*. Explorer, Hassoldt Davis, far exceeded Earl Tupper's modest vision of the total "Tupperization" of North American homes, by introducing Tupperware to an African nomadic tribe. Replacing African natives' traditional ritual palm-sapping and blood letting vessels with Econo-Canisters and Wonder Bowls, Tupperware, he boasted, "had been through the roughest treatment the natives could subject it to, including the use [of one] canister as a container for "magic" witch-craft powder."³¹

Status was more readily accrued in the realm of popular feminine culture. Promotional pleas such as "Christian Dior isn't the only one coming up with a new look these days!," used in a 1957 TV tumbler product launch, linked Tupperware with other gender specific metaphors of modernity, revealing the sociality and participatory nature of the Tupperware consumer experience.

Such examples reveal the integral nature of gender identity and commodity. Examples are made of Miss Teen and the "smart hostess" who learn as young women to mediate their identities, their opportunities, their worth, through the concomitance of commodities and prescribed race, class and gender roles.

Expansion and Re-Appropriation

In 1961 Tupperware was appropriated and reinvented by a British public. *Which?* consumer magazine criticized Tupperware (despite finding its functional performance flawless) for its elaborate and immoral American sales technique, which brought commerce directly into the sanctity of the home.³³ Numerous newspaper reports condemned the divisive Tupperware Party but were forced to acknowledge that British women had defied all marketing surveys (which predicted Tupperware would never function outside U.S. society) and embraced the network enthusiastically.³⁴ The National Housewives register integrated Tupperware Parties as part of their "getting to know you schemes" on new housing estates and by the mid-1960s the product and its party, featured on the front cover of the fashionable and aspirational *Queen* magazine, were both fashionable symbols of a newly perceived social mobility.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the arena of consumption and material culture, to chal-

lenge the trivialization of the domestic sphere and assumptions of classical social theories of modernity. The Tupperware product's transformation from alienable to inalienable commodity, in part through non-market economy relations, reveals the inadequacy of productionist-led approaches to mass-produced material culture. The view of mass consumption and commodity forms as the automatic embodiment of alienation in contemporary society undermines the potentially authentic, and gendered, experiences of modernity. The consideration of labor, capital and production as the sole basis of identity formation, in contemporary societies, precludes gender as a vital constituent of modernity.³⁵

Tupperware is not a pure, rationally derived form, nor a blatant manifestation of a fully operational market economy. Tupperware embodies the complex social relations of "everyday life" where commodities circulate beyond the realms of utility, status seeking and individualized desire but instead belong to a complex system of sociality and moral economy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. I would like to thank the Tupperware dealers, hostesses and consumers in the United States and the United Kingdom who gave generously of their time and stories. A version of this essay was delivered on September 16, 1994, at the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

NOTES

1. For a comprehensive analysis of this argument see Barbara L. Marshall, *Engendering Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 1994).
2. Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (London: Harvester, 1983), 144.
3. Arthur Drexler and Greta Daniel, eds., *Introduction to Twentieth Century Design* (New York: MOMA, 1959), 75.
4. John Heskett, *Industrial Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 156.
5. John Davis, *Exchange* (London: OUP, 1992), 7, the author highlights how modern economic theory trivializes incidences of explicit exchange ritual (such as those engendered in the Tupperware Party) as exceptions or aberrations distinct from the formal market economy. Similarly the author challenges the reductionist dualism of commodity/gift.
6. To quote ex-Tupperware executive's oral history, "he never had much interest in people, but he loved things."
7. Corporate promotional literature 1947 onwards characterized this process as a "miracle."
8. Elizabeth Gordon, "Fine Art for 39 Cents" *House Beautiful*, October 1947, 2.
9. *Tupperware Product Catalogue-C*, (1949), 4.
10. *Tupperware Product Catalogue-C*, (1949), front cover.
11. *Tupperware Product Catalogue-C*, (1949), front cover.
12. *Tupperware Product Catalogue-C*, (1949), 4.
13. Rex Taylor, "Marilyn's Friends and Rita's Customers; A Study of Party Selling as Play and as Work," *Sociological Review* 3. Part 26 (1978), 574.
14. Dorothy Dealer's Dating Diary (Florida: THP Inc., 1959).
15. J. Carrier, "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations," *Theory and Society* 19 (1990): 579-98.
16. Interview with Pat Jordon, ex-Tupperware dealer, on November 18, 1989, Lake Mary, Florida,

- and interview with ex-Tupperware executive Elsie Mortland on December 2, 1989, Kissimmee, Florida. Transcriptions of "Prospecting and Previewing" a lecture given at the 1953 Tupperware second managerial convention.
17. See Ruth Schwarz Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1963); Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987); Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More-American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); N. Rubin, *The New Suburban Woman* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geohegan, 1982); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: a History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).
 18. See in particular Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (London, 1987).
 19. Carrier, "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations," 580.
 20. "Personal Growth Comes from Know-How," *Tupperware Sparks* vol. 2 no. 5 (May 1952).
 21. Tupperware Home Parties Incorporated was frequently referred to as the "Cinderella Company" in trade journals as it was seen to turn women's dreams and wishes into material realities.
 22. "Help Yourself to Happiness," *Woman's Home Companion* (August 1953), 34.
 23. *Business Week* (April 17th 1954).
 24. *Tupperware Sparks* vol. 3 nos. 6 & 7 (July-August 1953).
 25. *Tupperware Sparks* vol. 5 no. 3 (March 1956) back page.
 26. *This'n' That* no. 1 in-house publication THP (1957) no.1.
 27. Wise Papers, Account no. 509, History Archives, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
 28. Jubilee Celebration Song c. T.H.P.1959.
 29. *Teen*, June 1960.
 30. *Co-Ed: The Magazine for Career Girls and Homemakers of Tomorrow* May 1960 vol 5 no.8.
 31. Anonymous (African-American ex-Tupperware hostess), interview with author, Florida, November 22, 1989.
 32. *Tupperware Sparks* (Florida: THP Inc) September 1954 vol. 3 no. 20, 5.
 33. *Which?* Consumer Association report December 1965.
 34. For example, *The Daily Mail* June 23rd, 1961 which described Tupperware activities under the heading "As the Soft Sell Steals into Suburbia."
 35. The work of Daniel Miller, *Mass Consumption and Material Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1987) discusses at length the concept of "objectification" and appropriation of everyday commodities as meaningful entities.

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