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Modern by design

Despite the recommendations of separate sleeping arrangements from many late nineteenth-century health practitioners, twin bedsteads – named and marketed under that name – were a long time coming. Couples wishing to introduce Dr Richardson’s ‘single bed system’ into the marital bedroom could, of course, perfectly well do so by purchasing two single beds. But in so doing, they bought two individual, potentially unrelated objects. They had to improvise the alliance between them for themselves. Moreover, in buying their two single beds, they would have been participating in a health-related activity rather than a consumer event. Only at the point that two identical single beds were sold as a pair and unified under the name of ‘twin bedsteads’ was this way of sleeping afforded an identity, a status, an aura and a distinct cultural presence of its own. This chapter begins by tracing the coming to market of twin beds, and then tracks the relationship between these new consumer commodities and the idea of ‘the modern’ that was so fundamental to their early twentieth-century reputation.

The catalogues of the Tottenham Road furniture store Heal’s, which until 1880 sold only bedding, bedsteads and bedroom furniture, offer an invaluable perspective on the process whereby twin bedsteads came to the shops. The timing of their introduction in different furniture stores varied, and Heal’s was not the first: the rival furniture store Maples, for example, was quicker to appreciate their sales potential (Barty-King 1992: 49, 51). Nevertheless, the wealth of material in the Heal’s archive allows for a detailed account of twin beds’ gradual move to centre stage. Heal’s is not typical of the many Tottenham Court Road furniture stores: at the turn of the twentieth century it became closely identified with the design agenda of the Arts and Craft movement, owing to the allegiances of the new managing director, Ambrose Heal. The very singularity of the Heal’s profile, however, is itself illuminating, shedding light on taste and fashion among the more design-conscious purchaser as well as among the buyers of cheaper machine-made styles.

Heal's began as a feather-dressing business and mattress manufacturer in 1810, but soon expanded into the production of bedsteads and bedding. By mid-century they were selling an extraordinarily wide variety of bedsteads, single and double, in metal and wood, elaborate and simple, expensive and cheap. Their 1853 catalogue shows four-poster bedsteads in mahogany and brass; canopy, half-tester and tent bedsteads; French, Parisian and stump-end bedsteads; portable iron bedsteads for army officers on the move; press bedsteads for servants, folding iron bedsteads, and chair, couch, ottoman, sofa and stretcher bedsteads; cribs, cots and children's beds; bedsteads ranging in price from thirteen shillings and sixpence for a small, plain iron bedstead to £45 for an enormous (six foot by eight foot) 'Four-Post Bedstead of Elaborate and Chaste Design', and every price and size in between (Heal and Sons 1972: n.p.).¹ A dizzying array of bedsteads, of all sizes, styles and prices, could be purchased at Heal's, but nowhere in this cornucopia of sleep apparatuses can twin beds – two matching single beds, placed side by side – be found.

The inference to be drawn from the Heal's 1853 catalogue is that to sleep together meant to share a bed. A marriage bed was still unquestionably a double. This was certainly the case at the International Exhibition, an art and industry fair held in London in 1862, more extensive in scope even than the Great Exhibition of 1851, and attracting more than 6 million visitors (Greater London Council 1975: 137). Here, Heal's exhibited an opulent half-tester bed in mahogany faced with white enamel (Figure 3).² It attracted a short but approving review in the *Illustrated London News*, its decorated carvings singled out for particular praise: 'The symbols in which it abounds', wrote the reviewer, 'manifest that its designer was a devout devotee at the altar of Hymen'. Those symbols included 'two cooing doves enjoying each other's caresses ... a pair of arrows braided together ... everything is in pairs, and these pairs are always united' (*Illustrated London News* 27 September 1862: 22). Exhibited before the heyday of domestic sanitarianism, this bed, with its proliferation of iconographic conjugal pairings and its emphasis on union and harmony, was a fitting edifice upon which to enthrone and celebrate the married couple.

The importance of the later hygienic 'craze' (Elder-Duncan 1907: 178) associated with sanitarianism can be gauged by another Heal's exhibit at an international exposition some two decades later. The International Health Exhibition was held in London in 1884, with the aim of extolling, showcasing and selling the latest sanitarian recommendations and products. Once again, Heal's contributed a stand to the exhibition, this time a fully furnished set showing 'a dainty little bed-room, for a young lady' (*Illustrated London News* 2 August 1884: 6).³ The bed here could hardly be more different from the one exhibited in 1862. The bedstead itself is simple and modest, of brass or iron rather than carved wood, industrially produced rather than handmade,

intended for one person, and beds intended for two (or more), had always existed. From time to time married couples slept in the same room in separate beds: notably, Samuel Pepys encountered such an arrangement on his travels in 1661: 'Of all the nights that ever I slept in my life, I never did pass a night with more epicurisme of sleep' (Pepys 2003: 155). It was even the case, as all historians of the bed note, that twin bedsteads had made a brief first appearance at the end of the eighteenth century, when Thomas Sheraton had designed his elaborate 'Summer Bed' for couples (Wright [1962] 2004: 201). These notwithstanding, their moment had not yet come, nor was it to for another century. Only in the 1880s did they make their cultural – though not yet commercial – debut, in the advocacy of the domestic sanitarians.

While Richardson's term for separated sleeping was 'the single bed system', by the 1890s 'twin beds' had become the recognized term, both in Britain and the United States, for the separated marital beds gaining currency in the two countries. In 1892, the popular magazine *Comfort* noted the discarding of the 'old-fashioned double bed' in favour of 'the fashion of "twin beds"', observing that 'no fashion has more quickly obtained a firm hold' (*Comfort* 4, October 1892: 8). Their rise in popularity might have been rapid, but the name was clearly still novel enough to warrant the use of inverted commas. A piece in the *Medical Brief* in 1900 suggests the trend continued unabated, the author titling his article 'The Twin Bed Fad' and noting disapprovingly, 'In the homes of wealth and refinement one sees more and more of twin beds – for use by married people' (28.1: 205). These were both American publications, but, at much the same time, the term also entered the English lexicon. By 1892, Maples' stock 'comprised 600 designs in French, Italian, Half-Tester, Four-Post and Twin bedsteads' (Barty-King 1992: 49). Heal's was slower to feature these new paired bedsteads in their marketing materials. They first pictured twin beds, although they did not yet name them, in a small 'Curtains and Carpets' catalogue in 1893, where what was being advertised was not the beds but the fitment (frame and drapes) over the beds' heads: 'Parisian Bed Drapery ... to be used over one large double bedstead or two single bedsteads, placed side by side as shown' (Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/267). In the following year, the same image appeared in the catalogue of bedsteads and bedding, joined by another, this time of a half-tester (canopy) over twins. In both cases, the beds are shown closely side by side, with no space between. Indeed, initially they might be taken for a double, particularly since in both cases the two beds are further unified by having a single half-tester over their heads ('Catalogue of Bedsteads and Bedroom Furniture', 1894. Heal's archive, AAD/1994/16/2278/1 1885; Figure 4). Again, in neither case is it the bedsteads themselves that are being advertised, but their accessories – the half-tester, the Parisian drapery. The existence of accessories designed either for two singles or for a double suggests that an appreciable number of couples were already

FIGURE 4 *Heal's wood head and tester frame.*

sleeping this way, and choosing between a double or two singles for the marital bedchamber.

At last, in the 1895 Heal's catalogue twin bedsteads make their entrance proper, appearing as a product dignified and made visible by their own name: 'Brass Twin French Bedsteads, 1 ½-in. Posts. Each 3ft 3 wide ... per pair £19.0.0' ('Catalogue of Bedsteads and Bedroom Furniture', 1895. Heal's archive, AAD/1994/16/2291 1895; Figure 5).⁵ No longer are customers left to undertake the twinning of two singles for themselves; no longer do they have to imagine the effect of two single beds placed side by side. Instead, the catalogue makes that imaginative move for them, explicitly inviting customers to consider twin bedsteads as an alternative to the double. Now, finally, the single and the double had been joined in the pantheon of beds by twin bedsteads – two identical single beds sold as a set and intended for use in one room, each bed for one person, but for one person alongside another. Sleepers in twin

FIGURE 5 *Heal's brass twin French bedsteads.*

bedsteads were, *by design*, simultaneously together and apart. Just in time for the new century, twin beds had arrived at Heal's.

Twin bedsteads had come out of the shadows, and from then on were everywhere represented as something distinct. Their ascendancy in the British home was gradual, but they gained steadily in visibility in the early years of the century, by which time Heal's was advertising a catalogue entirely devoted to 'Twin bedsteads in brass, iron and all kinds of wood' ([untitled], 1902–1909. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/176). In 1907, an advertisement in *The Gentlewoman* magazine informed readers, 'A Special Show of Bedsteads suitable for standing side by side is now being made' (1 June 1907: xxi. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/176). Twin bedsteads had achieved an identity and a level of popularity that afforded them a prominent place both in store and in advertising materials.

Commentators and advisers on household decoration noted this trend in the furnishing of the bedrooms of married couples. In *Das Englische Haus* (1904–5), a landmark book in architectural history and criticism, Hermann Muthesius, the German architect and cultural attaché to Britain, observed that nowadays 'the English custom whereby married couples share a conjugal bed is occasionally abandoned' in favour of twin beds, also noting how 'great is the preoccupation with questions of hygiene in the English bedroom'

(1979: 227, 224). We are left to infer the extent to which the change to twins was attributable to this English 'cult' of hygiene. In 1907, the architect John Hudson Elder-Duncan made a similar remark in his book *The House Beautiful and Useful*: 'The double bed has given way to some extent to the French twin bedstead – which should be selected is a matter of choice' (Elder-Duncan 1907: 179).⁶ By the 1920s, the press and household advice books made frequent reference to their popularity, and by 1930 Esmé Wingfield-Stratford was able to take for granted that his reference to the greater 'convenience' of twin beds needed no explanation.⁷ *The Complete Household Adviser* offers some clarification: twin beds are 'much more easy to move, make, clean, and take to pieces than double beds, and more convenient during illness' (n.d.: 21). Twin bedsteads had been generated by a desire for a healthy house, but were now sustained by a desire for a convenient and rational one – more practical, easier to keep clean, more efficient. Given the 'servant problem' – after 1918, the enduring lament of the English middle classes was that good servants were hard to find and harder to keep (Light 2007: 178–87) – such matters were of increasing interest to the housewife, now sometimes finding herself participating in housework as well as overseeing it. A decade later, another advice book, *The Home of To-Day* ([1934?]), was still testifying to both the ubiquity and greater convenience of twins: 'Single beds are now almost universally the custom, not only for convenience, but also for health reasons' ([1934?]: 114). Hygiene and convenience have become the bywords for twin-bedded sleep, the nineteenth-century rationale for twin beds now joined by a twentieth-century one. The bedroom was to be rationally equipped, its furnishing choices governed by good sense and practicality.

Home advice publications certainly noted the arrival of twin beds, but so too did social commentators. Early in the Second World War, the poet and novelist Robert Graves and historian Alan Hodge published a social history of the interwar period, *The Long Week-End* (1941). The book was, they wrote, 'intended to serve as a reliable record of what took place, of a forgettable sort, during the twenty-one-year interval between two great European wars' (Graves and Hodge 1941: 11; my emphasis), and as such it is an invaluable catalogue of small-scale events and cultural ephemera. One such forgettable detail, recorded in a chapter offering a vignette of recent changes to domestic life, noted that, during these years, 'White painted wooden twin-beds replaced the old mahogany or brass double-bed for married couples' (ibid.: 181). Twin beds were not only perceived by Graves and Hodge to be the new norm. Their introduction was also seen to be noteworthy, an indicative domestic fragment in the piecing together of a social history.

Graves and Hodge do not invoke twin beds approvingly, as part of a roll call of contributors to the long march of progress towards greater health and a more efficient home. Instead, their twin beds belong to a list dedicated to exposing

the lapses in taste of the class adopting them. The newly built houses in the suburbs might be the objects of 'a new-found pride of the younger women, who wished everything to conform in cleanliness and respectability to their new domestic standards' (ibid.: 171), but they reintroduced a taste for sham, so long the object of contempt for the critics of Victoriana. Not only was there a tendency towards mock-Tudor and 'pseudo-Jacobean', but more generally, Graves and Hodge suggest, 'this was the age of disguise', evinced in such atrocities as 'a William-and-Mary commode ... gutted to house a gramophone and records; a Georgian sewing-box repartitioned for cigarettes' (ibid.: 180). They might have added to their list, but didn't, the interwar double beds sold by Myer's whose headline selling point was their mimicry of twins: 'Imitation of Twin Bedsteads', announced one, and 'Has the Appearance of Twin Beds, but Is In Fact One Bed', the other (Figure 6; see too Myer 1976). Graves and Hodge's white-painted twin beds may not themselves be sham, but they jostle with a mish-mash of objects that together suggest social and aesthetic anxiety, aspiration, inauthenticity and uncertainty: 'glass-topped dressing-tables: buoyant imitation-leather chairs; chromium-plate and glass bathroom appliances; miraculously organized kitchen-cupboards with white enamel fittings; lamps and lamp-shades of degenerately seductive style' (Graves and Hodge 1941: 181). However twin beds may have been seen in the 1920s, by 1941 they can occasion an unmistakable curl of the lip. No longer the preserve of the health-conscious forward-thinking middle classes, they have joined other objects of lower-middle-class consumer desire made increasingly available by hire purchase. Graves and Hodge's dismissive mockery of the taste of this class is as unashamedly snobbish as Betjeman and Orwell's Gordon Comstock had been in the 1930s.⁸ Whether deplored as adjuncts of ersatz suburban style or celebrated for their contribution to the practicality of the modern rational home, twin beds were an interwar innovation that, for better or worse, defined – as Lytton Strachey might have said – the spirit of the age.

It was not only in the bedrooms of the English middle classes (however defined and judged) that twin beds, with their twin promise of better health and convenience, found a place. If the middle classes secured their place in modern popular domesticity, their claim to be modern went well beyond this, into their reproduction in the more rarefied domains of art and design. By the turn of the century twin beds were to be found not just in furniture emporia such as Heal's and Maples, but also in the cultural milieus that helped define understandings of just what constituted 'the modern' in matters of taste and style. They feature in influential art magazines such as *The Studio* and the *Magazine of Art*; at national and international exhibitions associated with innovations in architecture, art and design, such as the Paris Expositions of 1900 and 1925, as well as the more commercial and conservative

FIGURE 6 Myer's double beds mimicking twin beds.

exhibitions such as the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibitions that began in 1908. They figure too in the work of prominent British, European and American architects and designers such as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Betty Joel, Wells Coates, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. Whether as part of the Ideal Home Exhibition's promotion of a modern consumerism represented by the technologization of the domestic environment, or of the anti-Victorian aesthetic of the Morris-inspired Arts and Crafts movement promoting simplicity and integrity of materials, design and function, or of the emerging values and machine-age agenda of the International Modern Movement, twin beds were part of the international currency of modernity, regularly featuring in the designs and displays through which these movements and designers became known. All were self-consciously turning their backs on Victorian design values, albeit in different ways. But in each case, twin beds' formal qualities were deemed congruent with emerging definitions of both the modern interior and the modern couple who would inhabit it.

Such movements were influential not only in the rarefied atmosphere of small arts journals, exhibitions, workshops and the private commissions of the wealthy, but also made their mark in more commercial environments. Heal's was a key site for the bringing together of machine-produced, reasonably priced furniture with the ideals and agendas of modern design movements: initially, the Arts and Crafts movement and, later, modernism. This unusual sympathy between art and commerce is largely attributable to the influence of Ambrose Heal, who entered the family business in 1893 after having trained first in fine art and then as a cabinet maker. He began designing furniture in the mid-1890s, and although his designs did not always sit easily alongside the store's prevailing ethos – Heal's staff reputedly described it as 'prison furniture' (Goodden 1984: 19) – it was admired by the Arts and Crafts designers whose own ideals had inspired him, but whose insistence on making only one-off, hand-crafted pieces put them beyond the reach of most people. Heal saw no necessary disjuncture between good design and machine production, and was committed to bringing the aesthetic values of the Arts and Crafts movement into the furniture sold in his family's store, and thus within the reach of a middle-class clientele: 'It took the conviction of a man like Ambrose Heal to successfully marry the philosophical aims and practical intentions of the movement – good design at reasonable prices' (ibid.: 24). Heal's therefore sat at the intersection of two quite distinct expositions of 'the modern' in matters of furnishing: the reasonably priced, machine-made furniture selling in department stores, benefiting from constantly evolving methods of production, advertising and marketing; and the design-led, ideological and idealistic work of the Arts and Crafts movement. These two tendencies met in the person of Heal and, through him, in the store of which he became the presiding genius as managing director in 1905 and chairman in 1913.

Ambrose Heal's credentials and connections as a designer and advocate of Arts and Crafts furniture elicited endorsements of his firm's furniture from several influential figures from the worlds of art, architecture and design, and it was in part through their interventions that Heal's positioned itself as a design-conscious store governed by taste and art as well as by its bottom line. In 1898, for example, Joseph Gleeson White, editor of the magazine *The Studio*, lent his support to Heal's ambitions for the store by writing a booklet called 'A Note on Simplicity of Design in Furniture for Bedrooms'. White wrote against 'vulgar ornament' and in favour of 'Mr Ambrose Heal's admirable designs for bedroom furniture'; he was happy that this 'also reflects praise on his firm' ('A Note on Simplicity of Design': 4, 6. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/272). The booklet, elegantly typeset and illustrated with woodcuts by the young architect Charles Quennell, was published by Heal's and distributed as part of their publicity material. The distinctiveness and the quality of both the booklet – its manifest style and good taste – and the furniture were both noticed and well received (Goodden 1984: 24).

This booklet was the first of several stylish manifesto-cum-endorsements produced for Heal's by prominent figures from the world of art, design and architecture. In 1912, the typographer, journalist and drama critic Joseph Thorp wrote a short study in praise of Heal's craftsmanship and design ethic, called 'An Aesthetic Conversion'. It was written, he insists, 'entirely at my own suggestion', which 'should make the notes a better guide to the spirit and character of this old-established and justly respected house of business than the discounted utterances of the ordinary trade announcement' ('An Aesthetic Conversion', 1. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/286: 1). The message was explicitly anti-Victorian and anti-Art Nouveau, and made a direct link between the work and ideals of William Morris and of Heal's (ibid.: 3, 9, 12–13). In 1926, the architect Sir Lawrence Weaver, shortly to become president of the influential Design and Industries Association, praised the Heal's bedroom at the 1925 Paris Exhibition, calling it 'well-mannered and reasonable, modern beyond all question, but mindful that furniture has a long history, and that no art with which one has to live can afford to be insane' ('A Few Notes on Architects and Furniture', 1926. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/304); the emphasis on a combination of good sense and modernity was characteristic of Heal's self-presentation. In 1930, the publisher and book designer Noel Carrington wrote the preface to a marketing booklet recommending Heal's as 'the one firm, above all others, to initiate and develop the claim for modern design in furniture' (*Heal's Catalogues 1853–1934* 1972: n.p.). Each of these booklets includes a by-line naming a well-known figure associated with art, design or architecture, lending to their endorsement of Heal's a sense that their recommendations inhabited a dignified and disinterested aesthetic space beyond mere commerce.

The association between Heal's and 'the modern' was consolidated by the opening of the in-store Mansard Gallery in 1917. An exhibition of paintings and sculpture by 'the London Group', including Roger Fry, Nina Hamnett, Wyndham Lewis and Paul Nash, was held in 1918, and in August to September 1919 Sacheverell Sitwell organized a show of recent French art, showing for the first time work by Picasso, Derain, Utrillo, Matisse and Modigliani; the preface to the catalogue was written by the novelist Arnold Bennett (Goodden 1984: 63). The press were not uniformly impressed: a *Manchester Guardian* review called it an 'admirable exhibition', the most interesting of the year (9 August 1919: 9), but a reviewer from the *Times* reportedly described how he 'totted from one "ghastly" picture to another' (Goodden 1984: 63).⁹ Nevertheless, its association with the new, the unconventional and the challenging were part of what marked out the gallery, and the store, as modern. Starting in 1930, the Mansard staged a series of annual exhibitions called 'Modern Tendencies', showcasing the latest designs in furniture and decoration, further collapsing the distinction between modern art, contemporary design and affordable furniture.

Heal's not only benefited from the endorsements of contemporary designers and from an association with modern art, but they also showed their work in contexts where they would be judged artistically rather than commercially. In 1900, they exhibited a specimen room entitled 'A Guest's Room' at the Paris Exposition Universelle, a major retrospective on the old century and a fanfare for the new. The Heal's room included twin beds designed by Ambrose Heal with hangings by Godfrey Blount.¹⁰ Heal's bedroom ensemble won two silver medals, which, it was noted with some pride, was 'the only instance of so high an Award being made for a display, consisting ... solely of Bedroom Furniture' ('Paris Exposition', 1900. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/274). Twin beds continued to figure at later Paris exhibitions. At the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes – the famous 'Art Deco' exhibition – the Heal's exhibit, entitled the 'Painted Bedroom', featured twin beds, as did their exhibit in the 'Week-End House' in the British Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition ('A Few Notes on Architects and Furniture', 1926; 'Architectural Review', September 1937. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/304; AAD/1978/2/183). Heal's also exhibited twin beds in the more commercial context of the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1930 ('Stand 31 – Ideal Home Exhibition'. Heal's archive, AAD/1978/2/308), showing a range of bedroom furniture available for purchase in their stores – a bedroom suite in weathered oak – rather than a specially designed, one-off exhibit. While the modernity invoked here was more narrowly commercial and domestic than that characterizing the Paris exhibitions, the emphasis remained emphatically on the 'modern' as a governing principle.¹¹

Heal's was unusual for combining a reputation for modern design with commercial acumen, but it was not alone in choosing twin beds to represent the latest in fashionable design; so too did high-profile figures such as the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the British furniture designer Betty Joel. Mackintosh's work included designs centring on twin beds in the Bassett-Lowkes' house at 78 Derngate, Northampton (1916). Best known is the spectacular geometric guest room (1919; Figure 7), but the main bedroom in that house also included twins; both houses were featured in *Ideal Home* magazine. The furniture in the main bedroom was 'all in grey sycamore of severe design, quartered and relieved by black inlay, twin beds are also in same wood and finish'—much more muted than the twins in the guest room, and perhaps less exhausting for daily occupation; the overall effect was 'delightfully cool and refreshing' (*Ideal Home* September 1920: 93).¹² The Bassett-Lowkes' later house, the 'super modern' 'New Ways' (1926), was designed by Peter Behrens, a German architect in the modernist vanguard. This house also featured in *Ideal Home*, including on its cover, and again both the main and the guest bedrooms were furnished with twin beds – indeed, photographs suggest that the Bassett-Lowkes kept the beds from their bedroom at Derngate (Figure 8), although the guest room was newly equipped (*Ideal Home* January 1927: cover, 20–28). The two houses, separated by ten

FIGURE 7 *The guest bedroom at 78 Derngate, Northampton.*

FIGURE 8 *The main bedroom at 'New Ways', Northampton.*

years, together with the *Ideal Home* features which applaud them, confirm the continuing association of twin beds with cutting-edge modernist architecture and design throughout the 1920s.

Mackintosh's designs prior to the celebrated guest room at Derngate were not themselves twin bedded, but nor do they ignore this fashionable mode of sleeping. His best-known bed was designed for himself and his new wife Margaret Macdonald in their apartment at 120 Mains Street, Glasgow. The bed made its mark as an instance of design innovation, featuring in Charles Holme's *Modern British Domestic Architecture and Decoration* (1901b: 112; Figure 9), a book published as a manifesto for the new century. Muthesius somewhat hyperbolically wrote that the Mains Street interiors 'mark the way to excellence for mankind in the future' (quoted in Brett 1997: 2.761).¹³ It might therefore seem odd that the bed draws heavily on the iconography of the massive Victorian marriage bed: it is a four-poster constructed of oak, with a wooden canopy and embroidered hangings. The scale of the bed, however, is significantly smaller than that of its predecessors (the Mains Street flat was small), making it more intimate than imposing.

The modernity of Mackintosh's bed inheres in its simplicity of form and its colour. In contrast to the dark wood and drapes of Victorian four-posters, the wood is enamelled white and inset with 'glass jewels', its hangings featuring

FIGURE 9 *Bed designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh for the use of himself and his wife, Margaret Macdonald at 120 Mains Street, Glasgow.*

a stencilled floral design in pink and green (Holme 1901b: 112). The bed has an unusually high footboard, divided by a central post supporting the canopy; where it adjoins the central post, each side has rounded corners, interrupting the continuity of the line. The single footboard, divided by the central post and the break in the horizontal line, gives the impression of being two. While the bed is a double, therefore, it composes its doubleness from singular elements, and presents it as composite and contingent. It suggests the coming together and the persistence of two separate entities, rather than their merging into a unity. This sense is reinforced by the division of the original bedcover into two distinct elements by a broad dark contrasting panel in the centre. Overall, the initial impression is as much of two single beds as it is of a large double – or, rather, the effect is of *doubling*, rather than of a double.¹⁴ The Mackintosh bed faces two ways at once. It looks back to the traditional marriage bed – the massive four-poster, redolent of the Victorian age – but it also refers to the newly fashionable twin beds, in a style characterized by the simplicity and clean lines of the new century. Perhaps the bed's insistence on the stylistic presence of singularity in doubleness embodied something of how

Mackintosh and Macdonald viewed their marriage. Whatever was the case, when they moved from the rented accommodation for which it had been designed to a new house, they took the bed with them (Sparke 2008: 44–5).

The Mackintoshes' bed was not the only one to feature in art journals that mingled references to the traditional and modern, double and twin. In a 1904 article on bedroom furnishing in the *Magazine of Art* by the designer and architect Aymer Vallance, not only are a pair of striking Art Nouveau twin beds by Liberty featured, but so too is a bedroom by J. S. Henry showing 'the arrangement of what are called "twin" beds, constructed on the old four-post mode' (Vallance 1904: 179, 180). Vallance continued, 'The intention ... is to combine classic details with furniture forms suited to thoroughly modern needs' (ibid.: 182). The 'modern needs' are realized in the beds' twinned form, but their four-poster frames reference the classic Victorian double. Owing to the traditional form of the canopy and the carved bed-posts, the two beds appear at first sight to be a double. The combination in this room reverses Mackintosh's double-as-twins, and offers instead twins-as-double. In both cases, however, the traditional connotations of the double marital bed are borne by the beds' four-posted forms, while the 'twin' element – whether appearing as citation, as in the Mackintosh case, or in the actual construction, as in the Liberty beds – is the one signifying 'the modern'.

Beds such as those of Mackintosh and Macdonald, or designed by J. S. Henry, or even by Liberty were likely to have been beyond the reach of most people, because of their scale as much as their cost. Such furniture would not have fitted easily into smaller houses and flats, whether the late Victorian mansion flats or the later properties built during the boom in speculative building. Overall, Edward Gregory noted, there was a new 'tendency for bedrooms to be made smaller, particularly in towns' (Gregory 1913: 85). It was for these smaller living spaces that the British designer Betty Joel worked. John Gloag noted approvingly that her designs represented 'altogether practical solutions to the varied problems of accommodation in the smaller houses and flats of today' (quoted in Joel 1953: 74). Betty Joel's work initially 'represented a stripped-down Arts and Crafts style with neo-Georgian overtones', but in the 1930s it 'developed a more dashing Modernistic manner' – what Anne Massey refers to as '*moderne*' (West 1997: 657; Massey 1990: 91–121, 2000: 63–70, 79–91). The style combined elements of 1920s Art Deco with more functionalist International Style modernism, resulting in a sleeker and simpler style.

Joel's best-known design was her prizewinning circular bed exhibited at the 1935 British Art in Industry exhibition at the Royal Academy, although opinion on this was divided: the poet and art critic Herbert Read condemned it as resembling a 'dislocated hip bath' (Joel 1953: 93; Read 1935: 48). Most of her bedroom designs were more conventional, however, featuring both doubles

and twins in the simpler style for which her work became known.¹⁵ The scale of her twin beds was certainly more modest than the Mackintosh-Macdonald, Liberty or Henry beds. They were French bedsteads, low to the floor, their heads and ends typically plain in style, any sense of opulence deriving from their construction from expensive imported hardwoods.¹⁶ The archive of the photographers Millar and Harris includes pictures of many twin-bedded room displays from her London showrooms in the 1930s; a design from 1937 shows the 'severely simple' lines noted by Gloag (Joel 1953: 74; Figure 10).¹⁷

Yet there is a telling contradiction in Joel's design profile. Designing for small spaces might more practically have led her to concentrate on doubles, for, as Edward Gregory had noted, twin beds are not the obvious – or perhaps even rational – choice for the smaller house or flat: 'Twin bedsteads take up more room than one double one ... Twin bedsteads, even if they each measure only two feet six inches in width, will occupy more space than the largest double bed' (1913: 84–5). Whatever the practicality and convenience claimed in household manuals for twin beds, these did not extend to their being the rational, space-saving choice for those living in small houses or flats.¹⁸ Betty Joel's twin beds would not only have occupied a larger floor area than a double, but they were also usually displayed in a way that required still more space. Rather than being set closely side by side, as they had been in

FIGURE 10 *Twin beds designed by Betty Joel.*

the earlier Liberty and Henry designs, and as they usually were in the early room sets advertising Heal's twin beds, Betty Joel's twins were typically separated by a bedside table as in Figure 10, thereby increasing still more the space needed to accommodate them. Given her reputation as a designer for smaller houses, Betty Joel's choice of twin beds was not driven by practicality. The choice was aesthetic and commercial. Her twin beds helped produce an identifiable, successful and fashionable 'Betty Joel Ltd' style, and one whose modernist credentials were widely accepted. By 1930, David Joel, her then-husband and business partner, notes that their showroom in Knightsbridge was 'regarded as a fashionable rendezvous for modern furniture and other aspects of the Modern Movement' (Joel 1953: 90). Betty Joel's twin beds – simple, unadorned, sometimes severe – were known not for their practicality in small spaces but for their ability to materialize ideas about modernity in design.¹⁹

It was not in Britain alone that twin beds carried the banner of modernity in domestic design, nor only in the homes of the middle classes. In mainland Europe and the United States, twin beds were also an integral part of the vision of the progenitors of modernism in architecture and domestic design. In Germany, for example, an architectural exhibition organized in Stuttgart by the Deutscher Werkbund in 1927 on the theme of contemporary living included the Weissenhofsiedlung, a model development of 'a group of dwellings designed by various architects and incorporating the current technical, hygienic and aesthetic ideas for domestic architecture' (Beckett 1979: 29) and intended to address some of the pressing housing needs of the post-war environment.²⁰ The exhibition was a showcase for the architectural avant-garde, the exponents of High Modernism who became synonymous with the International Style. As well as the Germans Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Peter Behrens and Walter Gropius, it included J. J. P. Oud and Mart Stam (from Holland), and Le Corbusier (from Switzerland). The contributions of Le Corbusier, fresh from his controversial exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1925 (the 'Maison de l'Esprit Nouveau'), also drew considerable attention: 'Not only did his two houses succeed in dominating most of the critical reports of the Weissenhof Siedlung (favourable as well as hostile), but it was his ideas and his slogans (especially the notorious "house as a machine for living in") which came to be accepted as the rallying cries of modernists and traditionalists alike' (Benton and Benton 1977: 24). The 'Double House' was one of the two houses at the Weissenhofsiedlung designed by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret. Characterized by its long horizontal window and flexible living spaces, where living room was designed to convert to bedroom, the furnishings were an integral part of the design, and included tubular steel twin beds designed by the Swiss architect and artist Alfred Roth (Figure 11). Unadorned and utilitarian to the point that they resemble the metal-framed

FIGURE 11 *Tubular steel twin beds designed by Alfred Roth for Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's 'Double House', at the Weissenhofsiedlung exhibition, Stuttgart, 1927. Photograph by Dr Otto Lossen. © Canadian Centre for Architecture*

beds now associated with boarding schools, prisons and hospitals, they share the functional and flexible aesthetic of the rest of the house.

Such solutions to affordable housing were, at this point, deemed too radical and too European to be embraced in Britain, where commentators remained largely unimpressed by the Modernist machine aesthetic and the related penchant for tubular steel furniture. Nonetheless, a photograph of the Roth tubular twin beds accompanies an article about metal furniture in the trade journal *The Cabinet Maker*, quoting at length from a German pamphlet, 'Stahl Überall' ('Steel Everywhere'), which lauds the durability, hygiene and space-saving properties of such furniture. The *Cabinet Maker* journalist remains non-committal, however, hedging his bets by suggesting that such ideas 'are not without interest, though they are undoubtedly open to question' (20 October 1928: 119; Campbell-Cole 1979: 52, 57). The sense is that such an aesthetic, however acceptable to Europeans, is likely to stick in the craw of the English consumer whose 'conservative modernity' (Light 1991: 11–14) insisted on good sense and tradition as checks on the extremes of modernist design. Practicality and good value were important, but so too was comfort, and if tubular steel furniture failed to meet these criteria, then its cutting-edge credentials would not be sufficient to secure its adoption in Britain.

It was not until the advent of chromium steel plating in 1930 that tubular steel furniture found a significant market in Britain, its striking high-gloss finish allowing it to be rebranded as fashionable rather than as just functionally modern and economical. Chromium-plated tubular steel gave the market a much-needed fillip at a time of slumps in the sales of all bedsteads. It was smart, shiny, hard-wearing and represented the acceptable face of European modernism, imparting to British homes some of the glitz and glamour of the then-fashionable Art Deco style so strongly associated with Hollywood. Heal's launched their new range of chromium steel bedsteads in an attempt to revive the bed department's flagging fortunes (Figure 12). Sales of metal beds had been in decline since the 1920s, and even their wooden bedsteads had been selling badly. Chromium-plated beds first appeared at Heal's in the opening 'Modern Tendencies' exhibition in the Mansard Gallery in 1930, and were seen as 'a splendid way of creating new cheap and fashionable chassis for the bedding department, while stocking up with a range of matching "ultra-modern" furniture' (Benton 1978: 112). The beds did better than Heal's expected: the style 'was regarded as a bit of a gimmick until it met with such an enthusiastic response from customers' (Goodden 1984: 71; see too 63–85). The success of these beds is attested by a 1932 feature in *Ideal Home*

HEAL & SON Ltd., 193 to 198 Tottenham Court Rd., London, W.1

CHROMIUM-PLATED STEEL FURNITURE FOR BEDROOMS

(From Left to Right): Chair, MW 2028, special Spring Steel, Back Hole Seat and back	24	7	6
Bedside Table, MW 1218, Plate Glass Top, 2 Painted Wood Shelves under, Adjustable Reading Lamp	55	12	6
Bedstead, MW 2028, steel with Iron Frame Bottom, 3ft. by 6ft. 6ins.	29	15	0
Bedside Table, MW 2004, Stainless Steel, Plate Glass Top, 2ft. high	27	18	0
Occasional Table, MW 2018, Cellulose-enameled Wood Top (any colour), 2ft. high	25	15	0
Dressing stool, MW 1918, Seat stuffed all over and covered in Coloured Leather	15	5	0
Dressing Table, MW 1918, Glass Top and Back, Painted Wood Shelf under, Swing Mirror, 3ft. 6ins. wide	47	10	0

FIGURE 12 Heal's chromium steel bedsteads.

magazine on a stylish contemporary house. The main bedroom includes a chromium-plated steel double bed from Heal's, while a second bedroom is equipped with a pair of their chromium-plated twins (*Ideal Home* June 1932: 425).²¹ Unmistakably modern but also relatively cheap, chrome beds allowed customers to be identified with the latest style while not spending immoderately – a not unimportant consideration during the economic slump of the 1930s.

Not all consumers, however, were convinced that the enduring English desire for comfort as well as fashion was answered by this new material. Deborah Cohen notes how one woman returned two chrome-plated settees to the manufacturer, complaining that 'my friends say sitting on the smaller one is like sitting in a third-class railway carriage', while another found that a 'chrome dining-table suggested "a Nudist colony in November rather than a gathering of rational human beings": "cold, stark, and repulsive, a negation of comfort and all the gentle things of life"' (Cohen 2006: 178, 179). Associated here with both the discomfort of lower-class travel and the chilly and outré predilections of the nudist, clearly not all the English middle classes were ready to put up with chrome-plated furniture in the name of fashionable modernity.

While mainstream middle-class British consumer taste was reluctant to embrace styles that smacked of European high-modernist experimentation, there were nonetheless architects working in Britain who were fully behind the vision of a dwelling as a minimalist, unadorned and uncluttered 'machine for living'. Lawn Road Flats, in Hampstead, London, designed by the architect Wells Coates and completed in 1933, were, according to his obituarist, 'nearer to the *machine à habiter* than anything Corbusier ever designed' (Richards 1958: 359; Figure 13). Coates's vision for the interior, an integral element of the architectural design, included 'standardized built-in furniture, designed for maximum economy of space. ... [The furniture] made no concessions to decoration, its aesthetic being derived from its function' (Hoyte 1997: 286).²² Once again, the modernist aesthetic of functionality and economy included twin beds (Figure 14). Just as the stark lines of the unadorned, massive exterior were fundamental to Coates's vision, so too the agenda of the modern bedroom was realized in twin-bedded form.

In the United States, whose history of twin-bedded sleep had always been intertwined with Britain's, twentieth-century architects also included single bedsteads in their designs for new kinds of living. The iconic modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright, designer of the distinctive 'Prairie-style' building, worked with a 'holistic organic' (Robertson 1995: 194) architectural vision, designing living rooms, dining rooms and bedrooms as well as the external architecture. Cheryl Robertson has found the information regarding his bedroom designs scantier than for the public rooms; nonetheless, his bedroom designs for

FIGURE 13 *Lawn Road Flats, Hampstead, London, designed by Wells Coates.*

FIGURE 14 *Twin beds in interior of Lawn Road Flats, Hampstead, London.*

the Meyer May house (1909) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, are unequivocal. Turning away from the traditional iconography of the master bedroom, with its celebration of 'the marital bed, made conspicuous with elaborate, costly textile hangings, and sometimes elevated on a dais', he instead designed for Mr and Mrs May 'spare, wooden twin beds set side by side' (Robertson 1995: 196). His designs continued to include twin bedsteads over several decades. In 1912, a country house designed for the Littles in Wayzata, Minnesota, featured paired single beds; so too did the master bedroom in the Prairie house built for Henry and Elsie Allen in Wichita, Kansas, in 1917–18; and much later, in the Usonian Clarence Sondern House built in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1940, twins once again figured in the plans (*ibid.*: 200, 196, 199).

What is most striking about these instances is not that Wright included twin beds in his plans – this was, after all, a commonplace sleeping arrangement – but that in some ways they run counter to his aesthetic. On the one hand, they help fulfil his ambition to make bedrooms into living rooms, echoing both the fireside inglenook and the 'benches, or day beds, Wright sometimes had provided as part of Prairie living room ensembles' (*ibid.*: 199). On the other hand, Wright disliked the way conventional houses comprised a series of small, differentiated rooms, advocating instead integrated and unbroken spaces, 'uninterrupted lines and axial vistas' which made 'a single spacious, harmonious unit of living room, dining room, and kitchen'. 'Instead of many things, one thing', he wrote (quoted in Robertson 1995: 198). Given this emphasis on continuity of living space, the rejection of the 'boxy house made up of a series of mini boxes' (*ibid.*), his preference for one thing over many, and the stripping out of extraneous fixtures, he nonetheless included the atomized 'mini boxes' of twin beds rather than the continuous form of the double. Perhaps a rationale can be found in his discomfiture with the social aspect of domestic life, apparent in his furniture's 'few concessions to the human form' (Massey 1990: 50). Wright's ambivalence about those who inhabited his dwellings is apparent in his observation that 'human beings must group, sit or recline – confound them – and they must dine, but dining is much easier to manage and always was a great artistic opportunity' (quoted in Robertson 1995: 195–6). Perhaps for Wright the 'confounded' human need to recline in the bedroom was best dealt with by designing that room not as a place of communion or intimacy, a place of disorganized 'grouping', as might be implied by a double bed, but as a place dedicated to the individual and solitary act of sleep. Perhaps twin bedsteads, these one-person *machines à dormir*, came as close as possible to turning the need to sleep into an integral element of the design by organizing the couple more closely as they settled into their beds at night.

While the presence of twin beds in the bedrooms of Wright's wealthy clients testifies to the presence of this mode of sleeping in the work of American

modernist designers as well as of European ones, these beds would have had no more cultural visibility or impact in Britain at the time than those of the relatively little-known European designers (Massey 1990: 88). Certainly, the work of avant-garde designers would not have figured significantly in how British people imagined the sleeping habits of Americans. Such imaginings were far more likely to be shaped in the interwar period by that most pervasive of American cultural institutions, the Hollywood film industry, with its attendant commercial satellites of product placements, consumer tie-ins, movie magazines and press features on celebrities and their homes.

The importance of Hollywood as an engine of consumer culture as well as of dreams is well attested. As Anne Massey has shown, on both sides of the Atlantic there was perceived to be a direct link between 'the transient, two-dimensional image projected on the screen and the more permanent, three-dimensional artefact', and the connection forged between Hollywood and the marketplace from the early days of the film industry 'manifested itself in all areas of design and consumption – from buildings, interiors, advertising to clothing and beauty products' (Massey 2000: 2). The capacity of Hollywood to serve as a stimulus to consumption was quickly exploited: Ruth Vasey notes that by 1922 'the U.S. Department of Commerce had coined the slogan "trade follows the motion pictures"', and in 1928 the secretary of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America told a gathering of salesmen that 'the motion picture has dropped into your laps a selling agency, the like of which you advertising experts never even dreamed of. People are going to the motion picture as to an animated catalogue for ideas of dress, of living, of comfort' (Vasey 1997: 42, 43). The effect was as significant in Britain as in the United States: David Joel remarked that by the 1930s, 'the cinema, whether for bad or for good, had become part of the life of the people and was influencing the furnishing of people's homes. Usually the film showed glamorous interiors, sometimes good examples of the best of the Modern Movement' (Joel 1953: 83). Bedrooms frequently figured in this 'animated catalogue' of dream interiors: 'The mass-circulation magazines provided ideas for emulating the luxury of the stars' bedrooms. ... "Bedroom Secrets" were revealed by Julia Cairns, and the beds of Norma Shearer, Lelia Hyams and Jeanette MacDonald were illustrated' (Massey 2000: 132). The bedroom, while more remote from public scrutiny than the rest of the house, was as ripe for stylish modern remaking as the living room or bathroom, the Hollywood promise it embodied as desirable and resonant there as elsewhere.

In Hollywood's heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, when the bedroom in question belonged to a married couple, it was invariably shown as twin bedded, to the extent that 'twin-bed marriages actually mark a whole Hollywood epoch of bedroom customs' (Tyler 1974: 61). The then-current consumer fashion for twin-bedded sleeping was not only represented in

the movies, but also in press reports on the lifestyles of the stars. The *Daily Mirror's* gossip column 'Bedtime Chatter', by Molly Castle, known as 'The Hollywood Spy' (Lovell 1987: 216), featured stories about the bedrooms of the stars. On 14 December 1939, for example, the focus was on Bette Davis, her four-poster and her predilection for reading in bed, while on 7 March 1940, the subject was Cary Grant, his large double bed and his broadcloth pyjamas. In April 1940, the column featured the actress Gail Patrick, and included a detailed description of the Hollywood home she shared with her husband, Bob Cobb. As well as learning that Gail's favourite colour is red, her latest dressing gown faux leopard skin, and her ambition is to bathe in perfume, we are also told that 'the Cobbs have twin beds. The bed heads are covered in quilted burgundy faille, and there are burgundy faille spreads' (*Daily Mirror* 22 April 1940: 12). Such columns offered a glimpse of how the other half lived, and passed on the secrets of their fashionable and luxurious lifestyles. Twin beds, like leopard-skin dressing gowns, benefited from the reflected and glamorous glow conferred by the films themselves and by their appearances in the habitats of the stars.

The presence of twin bedsteads in Hollywood's marital bedrooms was not the outcome only of consumer preference and social mores, nor of successful product placements. If the overall history of twin beds is a shadowy one, Hollywood's habitual representation of the bedrooms of married couples as twin bedded is so well known as to be legendary, and the origin of this convention in the censor's office equally so. The Motion Picture Production Code, or 'Hays Code' (named after its first chief censor, Will H. Hays, replaced in 1934 by Joseph Breen), comprised the rules and guidelines adopted voluntarily by the movie industry from the 1930s to the 1960s setting out what was and was not acceptable film content. In 1927, a list of 'Don'ts' and 'Be Carefuls' had been drawn up which formed the basis of the later code, specifying that 'special care' needed to be taken when presenting 'First night scenes', 'Man and woman in bed together' and 'The institution of marriage' (Gardner 1987: 213–14). Care might have been needed in such scenes, but nonetheless it was not unthinkable at this point that 'man and woman' be shown 'in bed together'. Indeed, in his history of film censorship, Anthony Slide notes that 'there is no reference to the need for twin beds in the published Production Code' (1998: 14) adopted in 1930.²³

Nonetheless, by the mid-1930s the industry wisdom had become that twin beds were standard equipment in Hollywood's bedroom scenes. In 1937, Olga Martin's *Hollywood's Movie Commandments* was published, a handbook intended for the movie industry and drawing out the implications of the censors' stipulations regarding the screening of the bedrooms of married couples:

Marital Relations

The Code warns against 'certain facts' regarded as 'outside the limits of safe presentation. These are the manifestations of passion and the sacred intimacies of private life.'

Under this regulation a picture portraying the intimate marital relations could not be approved. In fact, there should be no dialog or action introduced into a screen story indicative of the marital relationship. Where it is necessary to include bedroom scenes, twin beds should be shown to permit delicate treatment of the implied intimacy. (Martin 1937: 173–4)

While the Code itself did not specify the need for twin beds, by 1937 the advice to moviemakers was unequivocal: a double bed was too explicit in its sexual associations for 'safe presentation' in films intended for the general cinema-going public. Only twins had the necessary cultural delicacy. They had the advantage of *implying* marital sexual intimacy without showing a bed that might have facilitated it.

Much of the fine detail of what was and was not acceptable to the Hays/Breen Office evolved over time through the application of the Code to particular film scripts, submitted to the censors for approval and in response to which detailed advice was given. Strikingly, however, the evolution of the requirement to show twin beds rather than a double was not straightforwardly the result, as is often assumed, of the conservatism of the American censors, but was as much a result of the requirements of the British ones. Films were made to be distributed in Britain as well as in the United States, and, 'pointing out that the British usually deleted scenes of married couples in double beds, Breen would commonly ask producers to put their couples in twin beds' (Gardner 1987: xxi). Perhaps Breen was in part passing the buck of an unpopular prudishness to the British. Even so, the evidence suggests that twin bedsteads in the movies, so frequently attributed in popular memory to the puritanism of the Depression-era United States, were in no small part a British requirement.

This was a requirement, moreover, which endowed the British censors with a certain ability to – quite literally – call the shots. Since the British market represented 30 per cent of Hollywood's profits, Hollywood could not afford to alienate the old country (Massey 2000: 34). The memoir of Jack Vizzard, who had worked in the censor's office, confirms this account. Vizzard is unequivocal about it being the British censors who insisted on twin beds, and he dates this demand to the making of the comedy-cum-mystery film *The Mad Miss Manton* in 1938. The film included a scene with an elderly caretaker and his wife in a double bed, disturbed by a noise in the night. Despite the non-sexual character of the scene, the British censors 'presented a stony countenance' (Vizzard 1970: 114) to it, and refused to distribute it. The matter was finally

resolved, but rather than risk a recurrence, thereafter the Production Code office in Hollywood responded to bedroom scenes by warning films' production managers that 'twin beds would be needed for England':

Since England was a good market, the production manager usually complied, and ordered twin beds for his set. And since it was too much trouble to dress two sets in two different ways, one with a double bed for the U.S.A., and another with a pair of twin beds for the British Isles, it became commonly supposed that the Code forbade the double beds, and the myth was born. (ibid.: 115)

Vizzard's first-hand recollection is compelling. However, he only started work in the censor's office in 1944, so was perhaps himself instrumental in producing a counter-myth, implicating the British in twin-bedded film history. After all, Olga Martin's handbook had been published in 1937, by which time the advice was already current.

Whatever the origin of the demand for twins in Hollywood's bedroom scenes, British censors certainly wielded power in this regard, and continued to do so into the 1940s. In 1947 the *Daily Mirror* reported on a new comedy from Columbia Pictures starring Lucille Ball and Franchot Tone, called *My Awful Wife*. Columbia had shot a scene with the requisite twin bedsteads, but the British censors were unhappy because the two beds were pushed together, and they refused distribution: "'It violates our rules," the censors declared. "Twin beds *must* be *at least* a foot apart"' (*Daily Mirror* 3 May 1947: 6–7; original emphasis). To satisfy the British censors, the twin beds had to comply with the spirit of the guidelines as well as the letter, and be positioned at a 'delicate' distance from each other (Figure 15). To ensure British distribution Columbia had to reshoot the scene, at a cost of £7,500 – '£625 for every inch the bed was moved', spluttered the *Mirror* in exasperation. The *Mirror* also noted that Lucille Ball – later associated with marital twin beds in the minds of early television viewers owing to their presence in her long-running show 'I Love Lucy' – commented 'sarcastically: "Is it getting old-fashioned for husband and wife to make love?"' (3 May 1947: 6–7).²⁴ The tone of the *Mirror* article suggests that by 1947 there was a growing sense of popular frustration with a code of propriety seen as rigid and outdated. If in the interwar period twin beds had been given a boost by the censors' insistence on them, in the immediate post-war period that insistence no longer identified these beds as fashionably and desirably stylish but rather as decidedly prudish and passé. The objections raised in articles such as this gave early notice of the ultimate banishment of twin beds into design oblivion in the 1960s and 1970s, their turn-of-the-century associations with a modern commitment to innovation and autonomy finally replaced by those of coyness and repression.

FIGURE 15 *Press photograph of Lucille Ball and Franchot Tone taken following Columbia Pictures' decision to reshoot a scene in *My Awful Wife* (released as *Her Husband's Affairs* in 1947) to comply with the British censor's requirements.*

Twin beds' Hollywood history suggests something of the complexity of their twentieth-century associations with modern design, on the one hand, and propriety, on the other. Through to the 1920s and 1930s, twin beds were endlessly reproducible as markers of the modern in the Art Deco or *moderne* bedrooms featured in the Hollywood film sets. They could be as glamorous or as ordinary as other commonplace household objects – tables and chairs, cups and plates. By now, twin beds had lost the aura of being 'not very nice' which Esmé Wingfield-Stratford (1930: 142) had discerned at their inception. His characterization of them suggests that their two-part form had reminded people of something usually obscured by the familiarity of the double bed to which they were a new-fangled alternative: namely, the night-long encounter of two people in a shared bedroom. Some 'old-fashioned' people still retained these feelings about their impropriety, Wingfield-Stratford suggests, even in the early 1930s; but for most people, to the contrary, twin beds had acquired the patina of social and sexual delicacy and desirability.

This transition from indelicacy to delicacy was achieved in part through the gradual absorption of twin beds over the years into the category of the ordinary. They were gradually emptied of their earlier associations with the intimate nocturnal lives of their inhabitants and became instead more readily legible (though never exclusively so, as will be discussed in the final section of this book) as unremarkable household objects, worthy of comment not for their formal composition – the fact that they were *twin* beds – but for the ways that they announced themselves as, for example, expensive or cheap, ostentatious or simple, tasteful or tasteless, glamorous or modest, fashionable or dowdy. In other words, in the first half of the twentieth century these beds were usually read in terms of their style rather than their twinned form. Their ordinariness was the result of their widespread adoption across an increasingly broad social spectrum. They achieved a cultural acceptance which enabled the distinctiveness of their separate-but-proximate form to fade into the background. In the early years of the century their newness had marked them out as modern, forward-thinking and stylish, but later, by the 1940s, they had become more indicative of an everyday middle-class domestic landscape. In the cartoons of the *Evening News*'s Joseph Lee, for example, the cartoonist who most regularly situated his middle-aged middle-class couples in twin beds, the joke is staged in the context of twin beds, but is not about them (Figure 16). As long as twin beds continued to be perceived as ordinary and unremarkable, questions of propriety – their status as 'nice', on the one hand, or as prudish, on the other – could be left at the margins of conscious association. The choice of double or twin was largely reducible to questions of class-inflected personal preference, with neither choice necessarily attracting opprobrium or stigmatization.

By the time of the making of *My Awful Wife* in 1947, however, twin beds were emerging again into cultural visibility regarding questions of conjugal sexuality. As post-war ideas about marriage and the couple changed, so too did ideas about their sleeping arrangements. In this context, twin beds gradually came to be read as indicative of a marriage in trouble, or, conversely, defended as nothing of the sort. There was no sudden or wholesale cultural repudiation of this way of sleeping, no rapidly consensual excoriation or dismissal of them as divisive or outmoded. Rather, their withdrawal from the realm of the ordinary to become sexually and maritally suspect was slow and uneven, taking the best part of twenty years. For example, two years after the *Mirror* was expostulating at the ridiculousness of the British censors' insistence that a married couple be shown in twin beds a foot apart, the designer David Joel patented his 'Drop-arm Bedsteads' (Figure 17), which were vigorously promoted by Heal's and won a place in Joel's *Adventure of British Furniture*. While the *Mirror* might dismiss the strictures of the British film censors as

Image removed for copyright reasons

FIGURE 16 *'SMILING THROUGH: Ready, Aye, Ready. "But perhaps it won't start at night, darling. Anyhow, take your boots off."* Cartoon by Joseph Lee in the Evening News (21 June 1943).

FIGURE 17 *David Joel's 'Drop-arm Bedsteads'.*

and designers alike to communicate the bold design innovations of modernity. The combination of nostalgia and idealism in the Arts and Craft movement was modern, but so too was the melding of the traditional and the contemporary, the craft and the commercial, at Heal's. Differently but equally modern were the starkly functionalist industrial aesthetic of the European avant-garde, the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the simple lines and muted aesthetic of Betty Joel's designs, and the Art Deco and *moderne* styling showcased in Hollywood interiors. In all these design environments, with their distinctive politics and agendas, twin beds were flexible enough to be foregrounded for their modern credentials.

As late as 1960, to celebrate the store's centenary Heal's 'Designers of the Future' exhibition selected twin-bedded designs from both Britain and Germany to carry the banner of futurity (Figure 18). The social pendulum was unquestionably swinging back towards the double, but nonetheless the design agenda of modernity could still be embodied by twins. The choice of twin beds was not only about hygiene, or convenience or comfort. For more than half the twentieth century they were also, in their radical formal difference from the ornate double Victorian marriage bed, a manifestly modern choice for married couples.