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Conclusion

Together and apart

During their century of cultural prominence, twin beds were much more than just somewhere to sleep. They were symptomatic of the reconfiguration of domestic, familial and marital notions of the modern home: its reach and influence, but also its responsibilities and dangers. At different moments, twin beds signalled a commitment to health and hygiene, to being modern or to a particular understanding of marriage. At times, they inhabited a territory defined by all three, their modernity guaranteed simultaneously by their inbuilt commitment to hygiene as well as their preservation of the autonomy of each spouse. This sleeping arrangement arose in response to concerns about disease transmission via the inhalation of the exhaled breath of a fellow sleeper, and a century later its demise resulted from concerns about twin beds' deleterious effects on marital intimacy. But in each instance, it was twin beds' ability simultaneously to keep the couple in close proximity while also putting a boundary or space between them that was at the core of their acceptance or rejection. In the late nineteenth century, they were seen to offer a harmonious balance of togetherness and separation, preserving the special intimacy of the married couple while protecting them from each other's capacity invisibly to transmit infection. But by the late twentieth century the interpretative emphasis fell differently, and twin beds were seen to drive a wedge between the couple, the longevity and success of whose marriage was increasingly seen to depend on their sexual relationship. By then, twin beds' capacity to keep fellow sleepers apart was pre-eminent, and their bringing of them together seemed merely formal and notional. Initially, the separation of the sleepers was understood to enhance and safeguard their togetherness, but later it had been reinterpreted as a threat to it.

The capacity of twin beds to render fellow sleepers simultaneously together and apart is their most distinctive feature. Both terms are, of course, culturally

loaded and contextually inflected. To be 'together' can signify intimacy and harmony, but also crowdedness or claustrophobia. To be 'apart' may have connotations of solitude and independence, or it might resonate with the associations of a separation hostile and alienated, or wistful and regretful, or of an experience of relief and liberation. While such associations are culturally determined, they are also materially mediated, in this instance by the form of the objects under scrutiny. Whether twin beds are perceived as primarily bringing the couple together or holding them apart, and whether these acts are understood as desirable or damaging, is refracted through a series of interpretations of the two beds' spatial arrangement. Diverse, and at times quite contrary, meanings are found in twin beds' adjacency or distance relative to each other. Not surprisingly, at least to twenty-first-century readers, the consequences of these attributed values are discussed most heatedly and at greatest length in relation to ideas about marriage. Here, it seems, there is a neat fit between the literal and metaphorical interpretations of being together and being apart, of proximity and separation, and of disposition. Even in the nineteenth-century discussions of twin beds as an innovation in domestic hygiene or individual health practices, conjugal compatibility was also seen to be at stake. However, a more precise understanding of how these beds figured in debates about marriage might be gained by considering the name by which these paired objects came to be known: *twin* beds.

Twin beds are, almost invariably, *identical* twins, and in this there might be found something puzzling. In the bedrooms of the twentieth-century English middle classes, the inner sanctum of the marriage, the room most associated with the privacy of the couple and the intimacy of the marital relation, a place where differences (whether physical, emotional or sexual) between husband and wife were thought to be fundamental and natural but were also required to resolve into a harmonious union of varied compatibilities – that is, the foundational heterogeneity of heterosexual marriage – the twin beds on which many couples chose to sleep replicated each other. All sense of difference and distinction was suppressed in favour of self-similarity or identicalness.

This was by no means the case for all household sets. A 1938 advertisement for a pair of Marcel Breuer's iconic Isokon Long Chairs (Heal's archive, AAD/1994/16/2847; Figure 24), for example, offers something akin to a visualization of the mid-twentieth-century ideals of the companionate marriage, most commonly articulated through ideas of an 'equal but different' complementarity.¹ The image makes much visual play with similarity and difference. The chairs are twinned, in that they are structurally identical, but this replication is counterbalanced by an individuality conferred by the different upholstery fabrics, one in checks, the other in stripes. The balance between similarity and difference is underscored by the chairs' symmetrical arrangement, whereby they comprise a reverse echo of each other. The composition of the

image also enhances the explicitly companionate character of the relation, for the couple are, with minimal movements of their heads, face to face (rather than facing the same direction, as in twin beds). The chairs' combination of difference and similarity produces a couple who are unmistakably together, optimally positioned for conversation, but also contentedly apart, each absorbed in their own reading.

Just such a counterbalancing of signs of similarity and difference is a frequent characteristic of the design of paired or grouped household objects. Like the Isokon chairs, objects as diverse as salt-and-pepper sets, nests of tables, three-piece suites and other furniture sets are designed to make clear that, despite their formal differences, these objects belong together. Moreover, unlike twin beds, other mid-twentieth-century pairs which share an explicit designation as 'twins' – twin tubs and twin sets – are notably *non*-identical. Their nomenclature identifies them as a pair, and their complementary similarity-in-difference ensures that together they form the perfectly functioning couple: after all, what would be the point of a pair of spin dryers? And two identical cardigans could scarcely be worn together as a set.

This impulse towards the materialization of an equal-but-different complementarity could easily have extended to the design of twin beds, such that the distinctly differentiated yet harmoniously mutual 'his-and-hers' character of the marriage was figured. The two bedsteads could have

FIGURE 24 Marcel Breuer's Isokon long chairs.

shared the design of their heads and ends, for example, but the frames could have been constructed on different scales: the husband's bigger, more robust, and the wife's proportionately smaller, lower and more delicate. If differently scaled beds were felt to disrupt the aesthetic imperative too greatly by making too weak a set of visual associations between them, their essential complementarity could have been materialized in strong repetitions between the two bed-heads and ends, or in a design whereby two individually asymmetrical beds achieved a perfectly symmetrical form when brought together, side by side.² Alternatively, the covers might have deployed differently gendered styles and colour schemes: the husband's in a plain and masculine blue check, for example, the wife's marked as feminine by its use of pink or peach, perhaps with a ruffle or flounce. Complementarity could have been introduced in the counterpointing of the two colours across the two beds. Any number of design features could have answered the desire to underline the heterosexual imperative so frequently articulated in other cultural domains – from clothing and shoes to cars, toys and reading matter – in which masculinity and femininity, similarity and difference, individuality and union are so clearly marked.

On the exceptional occasion that identity between the twin beds is abandoned, the impact is stark and startling. In 1923, the avant-garde Bauhaus designer Peter Keler entered a furniture competition organized by Walter Gropius for the experimental Haus am Horn in Weimar, intended to be 'the architectural and livable expression of a new attitude toward life for modern mankind' (Friedewald 2009: 45). Keler's design (Figure 25) was as radical as was the house: beds for a man and a woman, and a cradle for a baby, where each artefact has its own basic form distinct from the others, based on Kandisky's theories regarding the relation of colour to form: 'The square was red. The circle was blue. The triangle was yellow' (*Financial Times* 4 July 2015: 19). Here, the differences between 'mann' and 'frau' are paramount and total: the bed of the former is characterized by the square, the latter by the circle. Their pairing – the sense of them as a set embodying the heterogeneity of gender as the basis of the couple – is achieved through stylistic consonance and juxtaposition rather than through visual continuities, and any sense of complementarity results from an inference of the gendered associations inhering within these basic geometric forms and primary colours. To break the pair apart in this way is a radical breach undertaken in a spirit of high modernist innovation and iconoclasm, and in a movement whose commitment to experimentation extended to their sexual relationships as well as their artistic agenda. It was not an innovation that found its way into the furniture shops of the Tottenham Court Road.

The twin beds found in English furniture stores and bedrooms eschewed not only the experimentation of Keler's design but also the non-identical

FIGURE 25 Peter Keler's design for beds for a man, a woman and a baby.
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character of other design twins and sets such as the Isokon Long Chairs. The typical form of twin beds suggests not complementarity but indistinguishability and, by extension, interchangeability and equality. Certainly, in all instances illustrated in the marketing materials of Heal's, Maples or Staples, as well as in the bedrooms featured in exhibits and in magazines such as *Ideal Home*, the paired beds are almost always indistinguishable and side by side. These new beds were in general not significantly different in design from the singles which they had always sold – and indeed they could be bought singly – but this newly fashionable mode of sleeping demanded its own visualization, achieved by accentuating the 'twinness' of the two beds. This was the case not only in the marketing materials of the furniture stores, where it might be understood as necessary to draw the attention of potential buyers to this new product, but it was also manifest at the design stage. The archives of the Birmingham bedstead manufacturers Hoskins and Sewell and of the London-based Staples & Co. both include pattern books in which designs for twin beds show not just one bedstead, but two. Sometimes the design is fully realized for both beds (Figure 26), but more often one bedstead design (for headboard or footboard, in effect) is fully worked up while only a segment of the other is shown, sufficient to confirm that it indeed replicates the first

FIGURE 26 *Design for twin beds by Staples.*

and to give a sense of how they would appear side by side (Figure 27). The designer imagined and represented these beds expressly as twins, not just as a pair of singles. Their self-similarity distinguished and defined them, and the visualization of their matching forms was a necessary element of the design project. These were not two single beds, side by side. These were *twin* bedsteads.

The visual uniformity of twin beds is underlined by their disposition relative to each other. Invariably, they are shown or described in a symmetrical arrangement, as in John Gloag's description of the modern bedroom: 'The twin beds are of wax-polished mahogany, with semicircular heads and ends ... ; between them is a bedside cupboard of mahogany, with a set of bookshelves above it Fan-shaped lights of clouded white glass are above each bed' (Gloag 1929: 116–17). The beds in Gloag's verbal tableau exhibit bilateral symmetry, in which 'the arrangement on one side of the central axis [is mirrored] on the other side' (Gombrich 1979: 126). The beds are disposed across a line of vertical symmetry running through the bedside cupboard and bookshelves. The twinning of the beds across this line is amplified by the twin fan-shaped lights, one above each bed and echoing the semicircular heads. The symmetry guarantees the harmony of the arrangement of the identical twins of beds, heads, ends and lights, and perhaps also of the marital ideal of those who occupy them.

FIGURE 27 *Design for twin beds by Hoskins and Sewell.*

The illustrations of twin beds in marketing brochures and exhibits, in the stylish bedrooms depicted in *Ideal Home* magazine and in the twin-bedded rooms recorded in photographic archives were likewise composed in such a way that their symmetry and identicalness were mutually reinforcing. For the most part they were shown either contiguously, mimicking the appearance of a double bed, with matching bedside tables on either side, and sometimes with a single shared headboard, or else they were – as in Gloag’s tableau – side by side but further apart, separated by a single bedside table. Exceptionally, twin beds might be shown more widely separated, on opposite sides of the room, as in John Gloag and Leslie Mansfield’s *The House We Ought to Live In* (1923: 75) and in Heal’s ‘painted bedroom’ exhibit at the 1925 Paris Exposition (Heal’s archive, AAD/1978/2/180); and on very rare occasions, they were set end to end (Smithells and Woods 1936: 68). But, without exception, the two identical beds were positioned symmetrically.

Bedsteads that fail to observe the typical pattern of design and disposition – and there were a few – illuminate further what was at stake in twin beds’ identicalness and symmetry. The aesthetic importance of this combination is apparent in the writing of Hermann Muthesius, in which he denounces those

few twin beds that deviated from the norm. Muthesius was an architect, cultural attaché to the German embassy in London from 1896 to 1903, and an enthusiast for innovations in late nineteenth-century English domestic architecture. During his posting in England, he undertook a rigorous study of his subject, visiting many houses and recording what he saw. This resulted in a three-volume study, first published only in German as *Das Englische Haus* (1904–5), but later made available as an abridged English translation entitled *The English House* (1979).³

When Muthesius's survey identifies elements of English design that violate his taste and principles, he does not hesitate to write forcefully against them. He is scathing about what he calls 'absurd rubbish', such as a wine-cooler in the shape of a Roman sarcophagus, or the kind of 'nineteenth-century art in which it was to be considered the ultimate triumph to construct a clock in the shape of a hound that wags its tail with the swing of the pendulum and has the face incised on its flank' (1979: 153). And while he has no objection to twin beds *per se*, merely noting them as still the exception in England rather than the rule, the design of certain of them breaches his code of good modern design: 'Pairs of bedsteads are being made that embody the idiotic idea that the head and foot of each bed shall rise towards the central dividing-line, which means that each bed is asymmetrical. Thus the old double bed with the central ornament now makes its appearance chopped into two' (ibid.: 227).⁴ Like many other twins, these beds mimic or reference double beds in their appearance, but they do so at the expense of both identicalness and their individual symmetry of design (Figure 28). For Muthesius, it is not enough that these adjacent twin beds demonstrate bilateral symmetry, for here the symmetry exists only in the pair, and is compromised by each bed's inherent asymmetry. Each is askew, out of kilter with its other self. Despite their obvious pairing, and despite the symmetry achieved through their combination, each bed looks different from the other. The twins, in this case, are not *identical* twins. They commit a stylistic affront, a crime against true symmetry. This mattered to Muthesius. He requires not only that the beds be arranged symmetrically, nor that each achieve symmetry only in combination with its twin, but that symmetry govern the design of each individual bed. His-and-hers beds were not to be visually distinct. On the contrary, their very indistinguishability was an essential part of their aesthetic.

Such stylistic choices, for Muthesius, relate not only to questions of taste, but materialize more inchoate matters of culture more broadly conceived. The English house, he suggests – or, at least, those examples of contemporary domestic architecture and interior design whose virtues he extolled – must be understood as an expression of the English character: 'No nation', he wrote, 'has identified itself more with the house' (1979: xv). As well as a commentator on architecture and design, the book shows Muthesius to have been a *de facto* anthropologist of Englishness: 'If we are to give an illuminating account

FIGURE 28 *Asymmetrical twin beds by Hoskins and Sewell.*

of conditions in England we must widen our scope beyond a bare description of the house; we must describe the conditions that govern it, i.e. English domestic life, its *mores* and, indeed, the Englishman's whole philosophy of life' (ibid.: 4; original emphasis). The best English houses and their inhabitants are, to his mind, of a piece, and mutually illuminating. The defining characteristics of both are 'simplicity, homeliness and rural freshness', such that 'a sound down-to-earth quality is combined with a sure feeling for suitability. What we principally find here is a practical, indigenous and pre-eminently friendly house' (ibid.: 4). Practicality and simplicity characterize both the English nation and their homes, and, true to his Arts and Crafts allegiances in both architecture and furniture design, this is required to be apparent in a perfect fit between character, practicality and suitability, as between form and function. Bad design is not only an affront to the eye, nor is symmetry merely an element within a schema of design aesthetics. These are also matters of national character and family values.

Muthesius's insistence on the non-negotiability of symmetry confirms the critical consensus regarding the centrality, even ubiquity, of symmetry

within most design contexts and milieus. One recent handbook for design students, indeed, goes so far as to call it 'the most basic and enduring aspect of beauty' (Lidwell, Holden and Butler 2010: 234). Some critics have sought to understand symmetry's pervasive cross-cultural presence through the laws of mathematics or geometry, while others account for it through reference to biology, noting it as a feature of natural formations as diverse as snowflakes, patterns of leaf growth and the human body just as much as it is a feature of material culture. Others attribute its cultural prominence to perceptual predispositions based on the evolution of brain structure and function.⁵ Whatever the underlying reason, as the archaeologist Thomas Wynn notes, 'Symmetry is ubiquitous in human material culture. It appears in the form of artifacts, buildings, and built environments all over the world. It is a central component of decorative systems in almost all human culture and also a component of games (e.g., string games) and mathematical puzzles (e.g., tessellations)' (2004: 27). He notes too that symmetry is 'often endowed with meaning, carrying explicit and implicit information about fundamental values of a culture' (ibid.). Symmetry is at once natural, biological and neurological, but also actively and productively social and cultural.

If symmetry speaks of the social and cultural, and is a bearer of a culture's fundamental values, as commentators as diverse as Muthesius and Wynn suggest, what does it say and how does it signify? More particularly, how might the symmetry of twin beds, both in their design and in the way in which they are situated as simultaneously together and apart, contribute to their condensation of a range of cultural values and verdicts? The art historian Ernst Gombrich's *The Sense of Order*, a comprehensive study of the psychology of decorative art, offers a series of observations and analyses of the cultural purchase of symmetry that begins to allow these questions to be addressed. Bilateral symmetry (the typical disposition of twin beds), he suggests, spontaneously creates 'the impression of "balance"' (Gombrich 1979: 126): 'No doubt it [this impression] seems obvious if we think of elements of identical weight and equal size being placed on opposite scales We do not expect such an arrangement to be unstable and we transfer this confidence to the symmetrical design' (ibid.: 129). The trust associated with the concept of 'balance' transfers, through implicit association, to symmetry. Yet Gombrich reminds readers that this attribution of balance and stability to symmetry, this transfer of confidence from one to the other, is the result of an identification and substitution indicative of metaphorical thinking. There is nothing inherent or inevitable about the identification of symmetry with balance: 'Neither in mechanics nor in design is balance always dependent on such identity' (ibid.). Rather than being an inherent property of such a figure or arrangement, connotations of balance are conferred on symmetry.

This metaphorical identification of symmetry and balance lends to the former the extensive and culturally loaded vocabulary and connotations that attach to the latter. This correspondence leads Gombrich to suggest that symmetry's regularity and repetition present 'a great economy' in meaning-making: 'Faced with an array of identical objects, whether they are the beads of a necklace, the paving stones of a street, or the columns of a building, we rapidly form the preliminary hypothesis that we are confronted with a lawful assembly' (ibid.: 151). The assembly of objects is perceived as 'lawful' because of its repetitions and its consequent perceptual orderliness and predictability. Through a series of further accretions, substitutions and extrapolations, order is taken to work towards harmony and integration, and so ultimately symmetry itself 'implies cohesion' (ibid.: 158).⁶

What better way to suggest the cultural associations of a pair of twin beds than by thinking of their symmetry as marking them out as a 'lawful assembly'? Identical, side by side, they are manifestly, irrefutably, 'together', their symmetry endowing them, through a series of metaphorical transfers and translations, with connotations of balance, stability, regularity and unity. It is a small step to further extend this list of harmonious, orderly and reliable epithets from the beds themselves to the relationship of those who choose them as the platform on which to stage their nightly encounters.

It is the specific constitution and terms of the order embodied by twin beds, however, that is striking, for not all kinds of order are underpinned in their rationale by an association with balance. To keep the comparison close to home, it is necessary to look no further than to other furniture sets to see how they have been understood as indicative of an order of a quite different kind. 'To own a suite, rather than a mixture of individual and unrelated chairs or items of bedroom furniture, was to stress one's taste for order and totality', argue Oliver, Davis and Bentley in their study of English suburban domestic life in the twentieth century (1981: 176). It was indicative of 'the capacity of the breadwinner to provide for his family; it was a symbol, too, of the completeness of the family and the hierarchy of its members. Father sat on one side of the fire in "Father's chair"; his wife sat on the other, or embraced her children on the settee' (Oliver, Davis and Bentley 1981: 176–8; see too Attfield 2007: 68). The suite does not simply seat the family members, but it confers and substantiates the distinctions between them, while simultaneously underwriting their harmonious togetherness. In contrast, the order promised by the symmetrical and lawful assembly of twin beds is one not based in hierarchy and difference, but in equality and self-similarity. They formally enact the erasure or denial of any distinctions between fellow sleepers.

Symmetry's contribution to the associations conjured by twin beds, however, extends beyond an articulation of cohesion and stability. The other essential structural element of bilateral symmetry analysed by Gombrich is

the central axis itself. Far from being a mere boundary or point of demarcation between the entities reflected on either side of it, it plays its own part in the symmetrical ensemble. The central axis, he suggests, 'must offer a "magnet to the eye" since it is the only area which, by definition, is not repeated in the array' (1979: 126). Its singularity in a field otherwise characterized by repetition ensures that it draws and holds our attention, suspended as it is 'between two equal attractions'; consequently, the viewer 'locks in on [it as] the point of maximal information' (ibid.). Perhaps counterintuitively, the repetition found on either side of the axis de-emphasizes these two elements by de-individualizing them. 'It is precisely by draining the individual elements of their identity', Gombrich argues, that their overall orderliness is strengthened such that they are seen to 'fuse into a larger unit which tends to be perceived as an object in its own right' (ibid.: 157).⁷ The axis – the space between – does not simply or only separate twin beds. Paradoxically, it also unifies them.

Not only does the axis unite the repeated elements symmetrically arranged, it also makes a further contribution to the ensemble. A consequence of the decentring of the importance of the individual elements through their repetition, Gombrich argues, is that 'gradients of meaning' intensify towards the central axial point: 'So strong is this feeling of an organizing pull that we take it for granted that the elements of the pattern are all oriented towards their common centre' (ibid.). So it is that the space between twin beds becomes 'the point of maximal information' (ibid.: 126). It teaches us to attend to the reiterated elements disposed to left and to right, it brings them into relationship with each other, and it indicates how to read them. The separation produced by the space between is as integral and communicative an element of the lawful assembly of twin beds as the objects themselves. Consequently, they have truly to be read as simultaneously and necessarily together *and* apart to grasp the range of meanings they have, in their time, been asked to bear.

The semiotic contribution made by twin beds' symmetry of design and disposition, with its associations of order, balance and cohesion, is still clearer when contrasted with the visual symmetry available to the double bed. In the latter, the claims of symmetry are more muted, visible only in the way the design might be focused around the central ornament at the head or foot, or, at the fin de siècle, in the sweep of the single canopy over it. The togetherness promised by the form of the double is of the merging of the couple who sleep in it – the 'duity', as Marie Stopes termed them (1928: 24) – with no formal counterbalance offered to its claims such as twin beds introduce in the space between.⁸ If the double blends the pair into a duity, twin beds refuse this kind of union. While they embody much more than a chance encounter between two distinct and separate individuals – their identicalness and symmetry preclude this interpretation – they nonetheless do not reify the combination

in a formal instantiation of two-into-one. Twin beds instead work on a model of one-plus-one, preserving the individuality of each while yoking them into an unmistakable pair. Proximity and adjacency stand in the place of the double's merging and union; and identicalness, proximity and symmetry bring equivalence and equality with them, instead of a complementary equality-in-difference. Twin beds insist not only on the relatedness of the pair, but also in their form insist on their separateness and continuing individuality.

This balance of associations between twin beds' simultaneous modelling of being together and being apart extends, as this book has argued, deep into diverse cultural domains and debates of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries regarding domestic hygiene, modernity and marriage. At the heart of the home, twin beds organize and fashion the relations and values of those who sleep in them. Symmetry plays its part in these formations as just one means among many of bridging the conceptual, the material and the social; the anthropologist Dorothy K. Washburn, for example, notes the correspondence between the 'symmetries [that] pervade social relationships' and 'the physical representations we make of these relationships that shape and enable our daily lives' (2004a: 1). However, the currents of continuity between twin beds and the social relationships explored in this book suggest that these acts of shaping and enabling operate within a correspondence much more diverse than that of a reflectionist continuity. Twin beds consistently enact much more than a mirroring or bodying forth of prior relational symmetries, as expressed by the cultural values associated with balance, order, equality and cohesion of those who sleep in them. Instead, these material objects need to be credited with a much less straightforward and transparent engagement with their occupants. Perhaps their symmetrical promise of balance and equality might at times be understood not as descriptive but as a decoy or a ruse, an instance of bad faith, or even as a coercive 'gaslighting', achieved by obscuring or denying the inequalities or hierarchies of those who sleep in them. Perhaps the disappointment attributed to those sleeping in twin beds is less to do with their chaste prudery, their interruption of marital intimacy, and more to do with the false promises of equality and independence they peddle. By this reading, if twin beds had only proved more robust and zealous in their safeguarding of the identity and autonomy of each sleeping spouse, then maybe they would not have suffered their ultimate ignominious fate of cultural ostracism.

Less gloomily, however, twin beds might be seen not as compromised, duplicitous or mealy mouthed, but as in the vanguard of progressive thinking about social and marital change. They might be understood as embodying a certain spirit of reform, of idealization or of aspiration, announcing as an intention a future moment when the symmetry, identicalness and equality that shape their formal contours will truly triumph over the asymmetrical differences that shape the conjugal relationship (itself disingenuously posing

as 'equal but different') of these fellow sleepers. From this perspective, their promise might be accused of being naively utopian or over-ambitious (if only a change of nocturnal habitat alone were enough to secure such change), but certainly not of speaking with forked tongue.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, it is challenging to entertain the possibility that twin beds were not always understood as indicative of abject lack or marital failure but as aspirational objects emerging from commitments to improvement and change, whether in the fields of domestic hygiene or, latterly, of marriage, invoking ideas of progress and marital autonomy. By bringing into focus the optimistic, dignified and aspirant lineage of twin beds, their histories within the 'progressive' discourses of domestic sanitation and twentieth-century marriage, their power to signify fashion and innovation, they begin to lose their aura of endemic outmodedness and permit instead a glimpse of their now lost patina of modernity, the excitement of choosing their simpler, more minimalist lines and forms, and perhaps even the frisson and freedoms of the innovatory practice of separated conjugal sleep. Perhaps these associations become more imaginable if they are read with reference to a particular configuration of the modern companionate conjugal ideal: nothing to do with formality or prudishness but premised on a commitment to 'the pair' counterbalanced by an independence within and beyond it. Such an ideal was not articulated through the reification of likeness in dissimilarity, but in proximity, adjacency and identicalness.

The implications of the form of twin beds, and their 'twinness' and identicalness, however, complicate their identification as fully or tidily located within twentieth-century discourses of the companionate marriage. Indeed, as we have seen, Marie Stopes excoriated the twin bedstead and eulogized the double precisely because she saw twins as violating the sacred marital principle of intimacy in proximity. The version of the modern married relationship materially legible in twin beds was in tension with the version animating the 'equal-but-different' discourses of the modern companionate marriage. It is not the case that the double represented a sexualized version of marriage and twins a companionable but asexual one, for a heavy and increasing emphasis was placed on sex as a key element within the ideal of companionate conjugality. Just as symmetry has no intrinsic connection to balance, so twin beds had no necessary relation to the desexualization of the marital relationship, with spouses seen as 'chums' rather than lovers. It is more the case that twin beds formally modelled the companionate relationship of the married couple not as complementary, 'like but dissimilar', as Stopes put it (1928: 24), but as based in identicalness and equality. Twin beds certainly invoke the notion of the pair; the two elements are clearly announced as 'together', in a close and mutually confirming relation to each other, and not as the random or contingent juxtaposition of two single beds. However, they figure not the

merged pair, the duity, as does the double, but a pair of separable equals who can be, and sometimes are, 'apart', equal in their sameness rather than in their difference. They speak of a commitment to marital autonomy, though not of an absolute or fully individuated independence. Rather, they suggest a *relative* autonomy, an interdependence premised on a necessary, close but nonetheless separable relation with the other element of the pair.

Twin beds articulate a conjugal ideal of autonomy in proximity at odds with the dominant contemporary marital paradigm. As identical and autonomous elements within a defining relation, rather than as dissimilar elements within a merged duity, they offer a formal challenge to the dominant interwar paradigm of conjugal complementarity. Their relative autonomy suggests a more egalitarian and autonomous version of the companionate pair than that celebrated in articulations of the twentieth-century companionate marriage. Now, ironically, their capacity to be simultaneously together *and* apart marks them out as a risibly outdated and conservative mode of co-sleeping. Returning twin beds to the discourses of modernity redefines their materialization of the pair as indicative of a marital aspiration based on equality and autonomy, and recalls their capacity to be read as signs of something altogether more noble, expansive and idealistic.

In their disposition as well as in their form and design, twin beds took the early twentieth-century home into the front line of modernity. Originating in the health anxieties of the old century, they came to embody the excitement and iconoclasm as well as the agendas and aspirations of the new. Twenty-first century readers might with good reason not yet be ready to regret, let alone admire, this particular venture into domestic and marital innovation. Nonetheless, twin beds' abandonment of convention and embrace of the new deserve the recognition and respect prompted by an understanding of their cultural history. In acknowledging their capacity to rearrange and redefine the marriages as well as the bedrooms of those who chose to sleep in them, twin beds can now assume their rightful place in the pantheon of bold and idealistic, if short-lived, twentieth-century experiments in living.