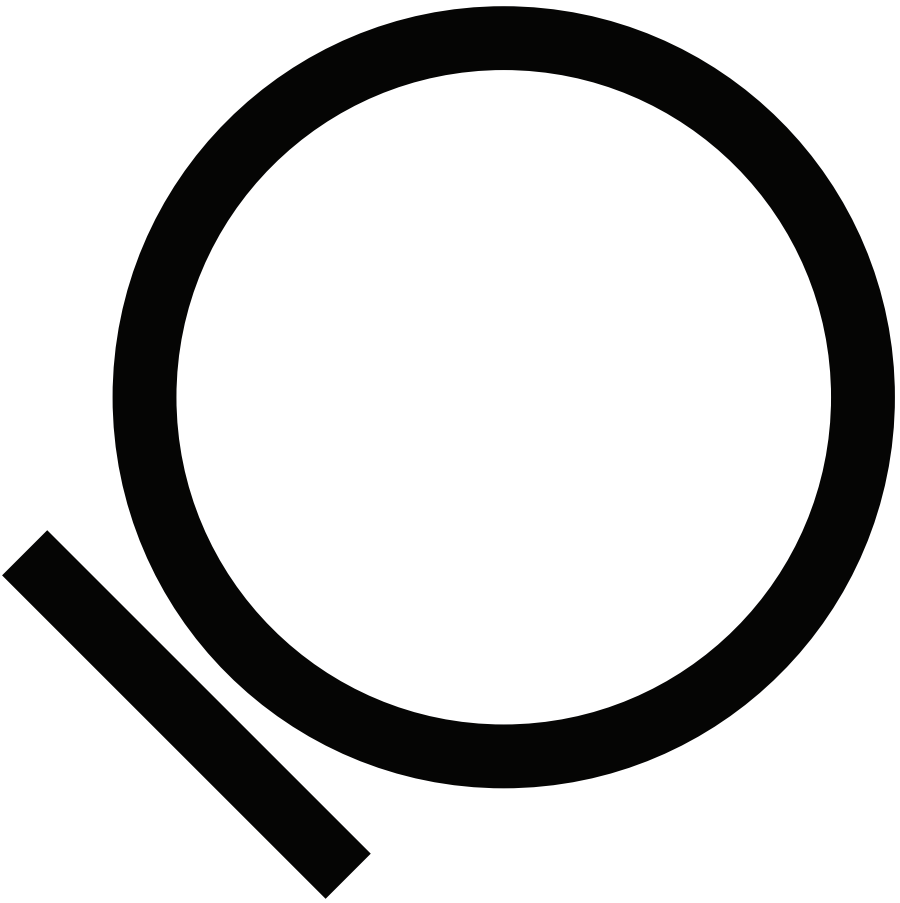


This bulletin is a slightly more starched version of an essay first published as "Time for You" in a book assembled by artist Gavin Murphy, *On Seeing Only Totally New Things* (Dublin: Royal Hibernian Gallery, 2013). The subject of the book was English architect and interior designer Oliver P. Bernard (1881–1939), who had provided the plans for the tower section of the IMCO building that sat on the Merrion Road of Dublin bay from 1932 to 1975. IMCO was, at its height, Ireland's largest dry cleaning operation, the Dublin factory being the central processing and distribution point for a nation-wide service.

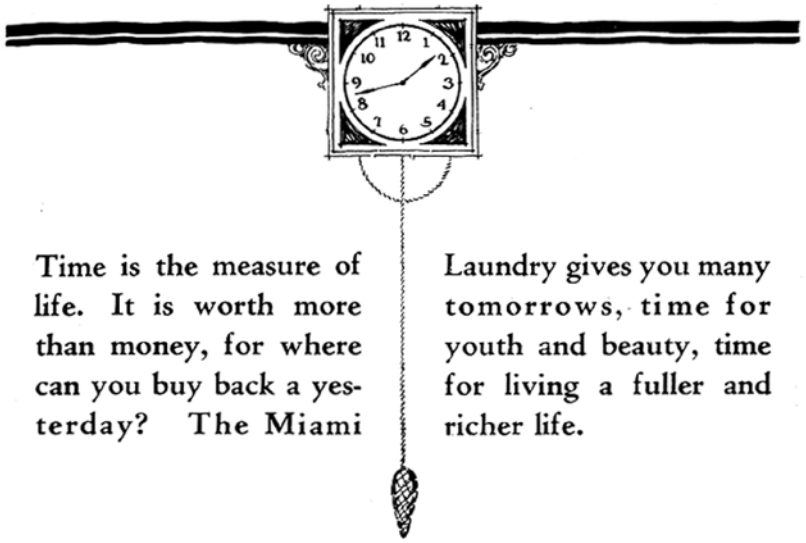
Cover image: the universal symbol for Dry Clean Short Cycle

He taps his squeegee against the bucket again and brings it across the top of the pane, staggered dribbles of water running down to where he could get the satisfaction of swiping them away, only to create a new set of drips. It's a game that speeds the job. A whole front of tall glass that needs to be washed every single week. There's a shudder through the whole rig from the incessant wind coming off the bay, drying the suds on the windows before he has a chance to wipe them off. He sees a resilient spot, pulls out his cloth and pushes at it with his fingers until it disappears. It's only the second time he's done this place, hanging his rig from the top of the pavilion jutting into the bay's skyline. Just inside the partially gleaming tower he sees the company's offices go about their business, while the women downstairs sift through mounds of bed linens, coats and gloves. It's not going to stay this shiny for long, he reflects, spiting his own handiwork and lowering himself slowly down to the next tier of salt-flecked panes; but at least I'm outside, embattled by the wind as it is, and not down there mired in the high acrid stink of chemicals …

A survey of the early 20th-century illustrated advertisements for dry cleaning from Europe and North America sees two distinct categories: luxury and technology. In one set of illustrations, by far the more prominent, women sit in parlors wearing elegant dresses and fur-lined coats. Carefree, vacant-eyed: "Let the Laundry do it!" In the other, images of delivery trucks or rows of washing machines sit expectantly, boasting of capacity, facility, savings. Often the towering white façade of the factory stretches into the background distance. One version attempts to portray elegant quietude, the other, a relentless motion. Both rely on a sense of dislocation: Relax, it all happens elsewhere.

For decades, thousands of families sent their laundry to centralized chemical washing factories. For some, such as the single businessman living in a city, it was perceived as a necessity. For others, it was a special occasion or expense for the "Sunday best," those clothes that couldn't be washed at home and were rarely worn. Long after its heyday, it still bears the aura of luxury: the "best" you can do for your clothes. Following the thread of Virginia Smith's dictum that domestic dirt is "a little-examined yet ever-present axis of social organization," we find that the widespread use of dry cleaning sits on an expansive and precarious intersection of some of the defining social shifts of the past 150 years. Industrial developments that led

TIME for YOU



Time is the measure of life. It is worth more than money, for where can you buy back a yesterday? The Miami Laundry gives you many tomorrows, time for youth and beauty, time for living a fuller and richer life.

The manager of a home spends, doing the family laundry or superintending the family laundress, under conditions that upset the pleasantness of the home, at least one day a week, fifty-two days a year, or 1300 days in twenty-five years—enough time for a college education.

The various departments of our modernly equipped plant—the largest in Florida—are outlined for your information on the following pages. You will marvel at its completeness and be astonished by its magnitude.

TWELVE COMPLETE SERVICES

Page from "Time," Miami Laundry Dry Cleaning brochure, c.1905

to chemical advances and the invention of new, synthetic textiles, as well as the rise of urban centers and suburban middle classes, are just two broad historical currents that preside over the largely unspoken, perhaps even unspeakable range of minutiae, desires and disputes that form the living body of that organization.

The organizing rhythm of centralized dry cleaning facilities — bundles brought to an office, delivered to a factory, cleaned by an extended group of workers, and delivered back again — carries the marks of an atomized society. But what's interesting to note is the internalization and rationalization of this rhythm; the maintenance of clean clothes, clean appearances, but also, presumably, the socially visible act of dropping off or picking up one's latest load, all transmit status and prestige. Zoologically speaking, outsourced cleaning is a form of "allogrooming," the act of grooming others, or of being groomed by others. As a ritual act of performed grooming, parceling out the dry cleaning has its precedent in the 19th and early 20th centuries, before in-house washing machines, when aspiring middle classes could have their laundry done "out" by a laundress.

Mechanization changed the amount of work that had to be done in the home — i.e. by women. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan points out in *More Work for Mother* (1985), "the woman endowed with a Bendix would have found it easier to do her laundry, but, simultaneously, would have done more laundry, and more of it herself, than either her mother or her grandmother had." Hence the allure of the dry cleaners as a marker of distinction, control, and calm, creating what Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell portrayed in their 1992 book *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*, as "an idealized picture of home and family which continues to be a remarkable pervasive middle class fantasy: 'the dogs bounding round the lawn, the children with their ponies, a gentle, balanced life.'"

Aldous Huxley, taking a walk on a shoreline south of Los Angeles with Thomas Mann in 1914, describes a point when they stopped along the beach to realize they were surrounded by thousands of used prophylactics. The anecdote spurred his 1956 essay "Hyperion to a Satyr." He writes:

Dirt, with all its concomitant odours and insects, was once accepted as an unalterable element in the divinely established Order of Things In the Age

of Faith, homo sapiens was also homo pediculosos, also homo innundus — a little lower than the angels, but dirty by definition, lousy, not *per accidens* but in his very essence. [In the 13th century] there was hardly any soap … Moreover, even if soap had been abundant, its use for mitigating the "stink and nastiness," then inseparable from love, would have seemed, to every right-thinking theologian, an entirely illegitimate, because merely physical, solution to a problem in ontology and morality — an escape, by means of the most vulgarly materialistic trick, from a situation God Himself had intended, from all eternity, to be as squalid as it was sinful. A conception without stink and nastiness would have the appearance — what a blasphemy — of being Immaculate.

Only in recent times has society aimed for the achievement of the immaculate, a desire manifested in the apparent perfect care of clothes that will last indefinitely, food that will never spoil, as well as other more obviously aspirational markers of time, like architecture. While technological and industrial developments have enabled more durable materials, we can outline the personality traits that might drive these aspirations. Writing in his 2001 pamphlet *The Eyes of the Skin* about materials recently used in building, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa claims:

All matter exists in the continuum of time … But the machine-made materials of today — scaleless sheets of glass, enamelled metals and synthetic plastics — tend to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material essence or age. Buildings of this technological era usually deliberately aim at ageless perfection, and they do not incorporate the dimension of time, or the unavoidable and mentally significant processes of aging. This fear of the traces of wear and age is related to our fear of death.

The good name and reputation of the dry cleaning industry remains relatively untainted, despite its repeated use in life and fiction as a front for illegal activities. A dry cleaner's, with its regular comers and goers, is perhaps *the* perfectly nondescript place. Agents of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* would walk into Del Floria's dry cleaners through a door behind the hanging clothes. Of the numerous dry cleaning services that lined the streets of Harlem, several were stores originally run by brothers of Frank Lucas, who imported heroin from Thailand in the late 1960s

until his arrest in 1975. Whether or not he was deliberately being ironic in creating the businesses for the literal laundering of money, he was portrayed by Denzel Washington in the 2007 Hollywoodification of his story, *American Gangster*.

The origins of dry cleaning are well-mythologized: in 1825, a maid working for a French dyer named Jean-Baptiste Jolly accidentally spilled camphene on a tablecloth, and found that the chemical removes some of the stains from the white sheet. The confusing term of "dry" cleaning that launched a thousand early 20th-century "What IS dry cleaning?" manuals, has come to refer to those processes using (mostly liquid) organic solvents to clean fabrics. The Jolly-Belin Dye-Works in Paris are noted as the first commercial dry cleaners, though benzene and turpentine had been commonly used as non-soap cleaners for at least a hundred years before that. Manuscripts have even been found from a 15th-century antiphonary detailing the use of ants' larvae to remove color stains.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of documentation on dry cleaning consists in scientific accounts of its chemical processes and devlopments. Hand-in-hand with the dye trade and burgeoning textiles industry of the late 19th century, dye works were able to carry out chemical cleaning in the same equipment. The original solvents used were by-products of the petrochemical industry. The gasoline used for cleaning in the USA, for instance, was left over from the refinement of kerosene, and other petroleum products were often used to augment the solvents. Benzene replaced camphene, benzene was replaced by carbon tetrachloride (which is toxic, and currently banned in many places, but offers the significant benefit of being relatively nonflammable), and perchloroethelyne replaced carbon tetrachloride.

The cold business advantages are also well noted, most expediently itemized in Albert E. Johnson's no-nonsense 1971 technical history, *Drycleaning*: 1. Garments could be cleaned whole, there was no need to dismember them as was the custom in using wet cleaning methods; 2. Dry cleaning was a much faster process, so labor costs could be reduced; 3. Dyes and finishing agents affected or removed by water were not necessarily affected by dry cleaning solvents; and 4. Pressing and finishing operations were simpler to carry out. This continued from the 1860s to the 1950s, in large central factories, with specialized teams of workers

running the large machines for different types of garments, spotters ensuring stains had come out, and finishers pressing the clothes.

But an examination of the quotidian minutae of dry cleaning — its social significance, the design, feeling, and inhabitation of the small, localized pick-up points and larger factory spaces, and a wider archaeology of the technology as a social phenomenon — is entirely absent, as these details are by and large undocumented. Economic accounts simply say that dry cleaning was efficient; technological accounts still don't answer the question of why it was so popular. London entrepreneur Stanley S. Bloom's 100-page missive *The Laundrette: A History* (1988) does some service to history by documenting, in zealous detail, the development of the self-service laundry industry in the UK: from Bendix's founding of a flagship location in London's West End Bayswater in 1949, to 225 laundrettes in 1954, 8000 in 1975, and 4000 in 1988. Bloom lists his financial findings with a detail worthy of Daniel Defoe, including down-to-the-penny costs, equipment lines, and the tribulations of founding and running a launderette in mid-20th century Britain. He predicts that "the number of laundrettes in Britain will stabilize at 3,500 to 3,750" ; a 2010 BBC report puts the figure at 3,000. He mentions in passing that although the self-service industry flourished in areas of dense but mixed populations, such as those inhabited by immigrants and students, it was typically placed in middle-class areas in order to avoid a "downmarket image."

For Bloom, though, the dry cleaning industry is just a footnote. Although coin-operated dry cleaning machines took off in the USA, dramatically reducing the cost of the service and effectively normalizing it as an integrated part of laundry habits, he laments that "the American public took to coin-op dry cleaning in a way the British never did." Developments in Europe meant that by the 1960s, smaller machines could carry out the same work in the localized drop-off branches, eliminating transportation costs and making the dry cleaning service one of the few big industries that both grew and was dismantled by decentralization. The large factories closed, and many of the smaller shops became independent businesses. These small, innocuous spaces are what remains of the practice. The rest is a fading short-term memory, a lost time.

*