Melusina Fay Peirce and cooperative housekeeping*

by Dolores Hayden

En 1868, Melusina Fay Peirce (1836–1923) proposa que les ménagères se regroupent en coopératives de productrices afin d'acquérir la reconnaissance de leur travail domestique, à Cambridge, Massachussetts, aux Etats-Unis. Elle démontra que des endroits de travail de quartier pour les femmes seraient plus rentables que des cuisines privées et suggéra l'introduction de maisons sans cuisines. Peirce mit sur pied une tentative expérimentale qui fait apparaître quelques uns des problèmes des femmes qui essayent de développer une industrie économique en socialisant les industries domestiques. Peirce a influencé quelques activistes féministes et des architectes entre 1870 et 1930, qui croyaient que les conflits de sexe et de classe qu'elle exposait pourraient être résolus par un meilleur agencement urbain. Cependant, la stratégie de ses successeurs comprenaient généralement des services domestiques organisés par l'état ou des entreprises commerciales organisées par des femmes entrepreneurs, éliminant de ce fait les coopératives de productrices de quartier, qui constituaient la base de sa théorie d'une économie domestique coopérative.

I Unnatural sacrifice

In 1868 Harriet Melusina Fay Peirce rebelled at what she called the 'costly and unnatural sacrifice' of her wider talents to 'the dusty drudgery of house ordering' (Peirce, 1884, 181). She proposed that women unite to take control over their own lives and work. One of the first women to make a detailed critique of domestic life in the United States, Peirce demanded pay for housework and organized the women of her own town to get it. Since she lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and her friends comprised its literary and intellectual élite, she was assured of publicity. The campaign she launched against traditional homemaking and traditional housing was carried on for six decades, engaging the attention of architects, social workers, domestic scientists, domestic servants, novelists, journalists and housewives.

In our own era, 'cooperative housekeeping' and 'kitchenless houses' are almost unknown phrases. Many middle-class American women are more involved with their homes than ever before as environments for isolated domestic work and private consumption, while others are earnestly engaged in 'consciousness raising' and 'role-reversals' to help them escape a culture which still prepares women for the 'dusty drudgery of house

* Chapter of *A 'grand domestic revolution'*, to be published by MIT Press in 1980.

ordering'. As Melusina Fay Peirce was one of the first[1] American feminists to propose an unorthodox approach to domestic ideology and domestic settings, it is especially important to understand the scope of her work, probe its limitations, weigh its influence, and enquire if her struggles offer tactical lessons for our own times.

Born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1836, 'Zina' Fay was one of six daughters and three sons of an Episcopal minister, and a descendant of the outspoken Anne Hutchinson. After the death of her mother, whose life, her daughter believed, had been shortened by an endless round of domestic work, she attended the Young Ladies' School of Professor Louis Agassiz in Cambridge. While in Cambridge, she met and married Charles Sanders Peirce, second son of Professor Benjamin Peirce, Professor of Mathematics at Harvard. Charles Peirce was also a student of Agassiz, and perhaps this was his introduction to Melusina Fay. They were married in 1862, and a year later he was invited to lecture on the philosophy of science at Harvard. One biographer reports that she 'joined him in his early scientific work'; another says she was 'something of a scientist in her own right'.[2] It cannot have been an easy marriage, for the thirteen years it lasted, but Zina Peirce made her protests against male chauvinism in general rather than against Charles in particular.

In 1868, after six years of marriage, 32-year-old Zina Peirce felt the 'costly and unnatural sacrifice' of her wider talents. She wrote of American middle-class society and its dampening effect on young women's aspirations:

> Has a wife an eager desire to energize and perfect some gift of which she is conscious, her husband 'will not oppose it', but he is sure that she will fail in her attempt, or is uneasy lest she make herself conspicuous and neglect her housekeeping. Or if a daughter wishes to go out into the world from the narrow duties and stifling air of her father's house, and earn a living there by some talent for which she is remarkable, he 'will not forbid her', perhaps, but still he thinks her unnatural, discontented, ambitious, unfeminine; her relatives take their tone from him; nobody gives her a helping hand; so that if she accomplishes anything it is against the pressure—to her gigantic—of all that constitutes her world. If her strength and courage fail under the disapproval, they rejoice at the discomfiture which compels her to become what they call a 'sensible woman' (Peirce, 1868a, 519).

Indeed, Melusina Fay Peirce never became a 'sensible woman'. Her indignation about many husbands' and fathers' patriarchal authority was exceeded only by her fury at their arrogance:

> The egotism of the French king who said to his subjects, 'I am the state', is far surpassed by that of educated gentlemen toward the ladies of their families—'Be contented at home with what I can give you', say they all—which, translated, means—'As far as you are concerned, I am the universe, and whatever portion of it you cannot find in me, or in the four walls where with I shelter you, you must do without (Peirce, 1868a, 519).

[1] Caroline Howard Gilman of Charleston, South Carolina, concluded her first novel, *Recollections of a housekeeper*, in 1834, with a brief proposal for neighbourhood 'cooking establishments' to relieve housekeepers. The novel is a series of complaints about servants. Melusina Fay Peirce was the author's grand-niece.

2 Her scientific work is mentioned in: 'Charles Sanders Peirce', *Dictionary of American biography*, p. 402; and Thomas S. Knight, *Charles Peirce*, New York, 1965, p. 24.

She identified the cause of women's economic and intellectual oppression as unpaid, unspecialized domestic work. In a series of five articles published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1868 and 1869, she developed an accurate critique of women's economic position in the United States. Women, she argued, had made a major economic contribution in colonial times by helping with crops, caring for animals, and taking raw materials like linen, flax, and wool, to make cloth and clothing, soap, candles, and numerous other necessities. Industrialization began to remove these tasks from the home in the nineteenth century, leaving some women exploited as factory workers and servants, and others idle as lazy, parasitical 'ladies' who were forbidden to work at all. Peirce claimed that 'for healthy, educated, intelligent adults by the millions to be supported by the extra toil of the rest of the community, as educated women are now, is a state of things entirely contrary to the natural division of labor . . . (and) the most fruitful source of disorder, suffering and demoralization . . .' (Peirce, 1868a, 518). For women to regain the economic importance they had enjoyed in colonial times, she felt they must be well organized, economically self-sufficient and emotionally independent of men. Agriculture and manufacturing were productive branches of the economy already dominated by men. Distribution and service industries were still developing and Peirce believed women could successfully take them over because of their role as consumers. This was the economic basis of her proposal for 'cooperative housekeeping'.

What was cooperative housekeeping? As Peirce defined it, groups of 12 to 50 women would organize cooperative associations to perform all their domestic work collectively and charge their husbands for these services. Through membership fees, such a group could purchase a building to serve as their headquarters, furnish it with appropriate mechanical equipment for cooking, baking, laundry and sewing, and supply a cooperative store with provisions. One or two members would manage the association, and many members would work there, although some women might choose to develop other careers or spend more time with their children. Some workers in the association might be former servants, but all must become shareholders in the producers' cooperative. All workers would be paid wages equivalent to those paid to men for skilled work. The association would charge retail prices for cooked food, laundry, clothing, and provisions—cash on delivery.[3] Yet because of the economies of scale in this system, achieved through the division and specialization of labour, and through increased mechanization, charges to households would be reasonable. The association would put an end to the private employment of cooks and maids (whom Peirce criticized as often inefficient and lazy) in middle-class households. It would enable many housewives to find time to use broader talents. It would provide economic rewards for women who were efficient and skilled at domestic work, whether they were former mistresses

[3] She was guided by Eugen Richter, *Cooperative Stores*, New York, 1867.

or former servants. Indeed, Peirce hoped to bring 'the whole moneyed and employed class among women into direct and responsible relations with the whole employed or industrial class'; women experienced at working together would be better able to solve the problems of gaining women's independence, despite the class barriers dividing them (Peirce, 1868b, 691).

The vast changes in domestic organization which Peirce proposed had sweeping implications for neighbourhood planning and housing design. She described the physical facilities (Figure 1) a cooperative housekeeping association would require:

> On the first floor should be the counting room, sales room, consulting-room, and fitting room; on the second floor should be the working rooms; and on the third a dining-room (with dumb-waiter), a gymnasium, and a reading-room: all of them being so connected they could be thrown open in one suite when the cooperative housekeepers wished to give their workwomen a ball. The two lower floors should each have a comfortable dressing-room, with lounges, easy-chairs, and toilet conveniences; and not only health, but beauty and cheerfulness, should be consulted in the arrangement of the whole establishment (Peirce, 1868b, 691).

When cooperating women had successfully established these industries in a central building, Peirce argued that women architects would design neighbourhoods of kitchenless houses for (Figure 2) family life:

> . . . I am sure women would succeed in planning the loveliest and completest of homes. Houses without any kitchens and 'back-yards' in them! How fascinating! Think how much more beautiful city architecture will now be! The houses, instead of being built around a square, could be set in the middle of it. . . . Every tenth block would contain the kitchen and laundry and clothing house; and for these domestic purposes the Oriental style could be adopted, of interior court-yards with fountains and grass, secluded from the street (Peirce, 1869, 293).

She predicted that in western towns of intermediate size, where social hierarchies were not too rigidly established and women were used to doing their own housework without servants, cooperative housekeeping would have the best chance to grow. In rural areas, she argued, cooperative farming and cooperative housekeeping could work together, ending the exhaustion and even insanity caused by the isolation of some farm women. In big cities, many cooperative housekeeping societies might exist, and sort themselves out socially, but residents of a single apartment house could form groups to utilize the possiblities of this new housing type, just being developed for the middle classes most fully.

Within her discussion of cooperative housekeeping she included a note on 'womanhood' suffrage. She argued that just as women could take more control over their domestic lives, so too they could take more control of political affairs. She advised women not to wait for 'manhood' suffrage but to gather in towns and cities, elect their own officers, and set up committees to deal with public issues such as education, health, and welfare. While some conservatives no doubt read this as a modest, 'womanly' rejection of the franchise, Peirce was actually proposing an early version of the 'social housekeeping' strategy later accepted by many suffrage campaigners. This

did not often mean asking men for help, however. Peirce advocated direct, voluntary action by women, whether taking up political responsibilities or organizing collective housework. Her lack of respect for male power is appealing to contemporary feminists but was very difficult to work through in practice. Thus, she said that 'womanhood suffrage' could work without men's approval, but she stated that cooperative housekeeping societies required the approval of 'Councils of Gentlemen' for their financial dealings. Peirce, the unconventional feminist reformer, could appear to be a proper Victorian clubwoman: an important reason for her early popularity, but not a stable state.

II The house on Bow Street

Between November 1868 and March 1869, Zina Peirce's articles reached a broad audience through the *Atlantic Monthly*, with her cries of protest about women's situation, and her proposed solution, to develop domestic work on a sound financial basis through the organized buying power of cooperative housekeeping. Her social circle in Cambridge was a wide one, where she was liked and respected; intellectual support led to practical support. On the evening of 6 May 1869, the Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society had its first meeting, at the Quincy Street House of her in-laws, Professor and Mrs Benjamin Peirce. Among those who attended were Mr and Mrs Nathan Shaler, Mrs Horace Mann, Reverend and Mrs Joseph H. Allen, Mr and Mrs H. O. Apthorp, Professor J. J. Child, William Dean Howells, Professor George W. Lane, Dr Estes Howe, and Charles Peirce. (A committee was appointed to deal with membership—Reverend Joseph H. Allen, Dr Estes Howe, and Zina Peirce.) At subsequent meetings a report was drafted, calling for a public meeting:

> The undersigned, citizens of Cambridge, invite those who may feel interested, to meet, at some time and place to be appointed, to consider the subject of *Cooperative Housekeeping*. They desire to learn, by actual experiment, whether it is possible to apply to the Manufactures of the Household—namely, Cooking, Laundry-work, and the making of Garments—the methods which are found indispensable in every other department of modern industry—the Combination of Capital, and the Division and Organization of Labour.[4]

Zina Peirce consulted authorities on nutrition and on large-scale food service. She was ready to begin as soon as a suitable headquarters could be established and new members recruited.

In the room back of the Post Office in Cambridge, 75 to 100 women gathered on 10 June 1869 to hear Zina Peirce describe her experiment, and the gathering was reported in newpapers in Boston, New York, and

[4] Loose page, contained in Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society, 'Record of the Proceedings of the CCHS', May 1869 to March 1870. This unpaged manuscript notebook includes printed announcements and clippings. Collection of Sylvia Wright Miterachi.

London.[5] On 6 July 1869, a constitution was approved, and committees to seek building lots were appointed.[6] On 5 October 1869, a Prospectus was printed and circulated to encourage additional subscriptions, signed by 33 women subscribers and two men, Gordon McKay and T. S. Perry. It stated that women in nine towns were ready to begin similar ventures.[7]

In the next few months many men and women were active on committees. Some discussion of purchasing an old armory came up in November 1869, but the group eventually voted to rent the old Meacham House on Bow Street for its headquarters. By December 1869 a Board of Managers was established.[8]

On 20 April 1870, the first regular meeting at the Bow Street headquarters took place and Mrs G. W. C. Noble was elected as the new president. Mrs E. M. Richardson was running the laundry, Mrs Mann, the bakery. By July 1870 the laundry was directed by Zina Peirce, who managed to just about break even financially. A committee of men was called in to help drum up business for the store and kitchen, which had not yet opened. They asked members for more orders for the store, arguing that 'a similar scheme among officers of the Army stationed in Washington in the past five years' had resulted in substantial savings.[9] Still, many families were away for the summer, and not much happened. By October 1870, when business had not picked up, Peirce understood that a good number of her acquaintances had joined the Society, without intending to see it through.

Other women who were committed were struggling with their husbands' animosity. 'What!' said one man, described by Peirce as a distinguished Cambridge abolitionist, '*My* wife 'cooperate' to make other men comfortable? No indeed!' Another husband complained that the

[5] *The Cooperator* (London) 28 August 1869, p. 613, reported this meeting as well as papers in New York and Boston: 'The future household', New York *Times*, 23 July 1869, p. 6, is a reprint from the Boston *Times*, 18 July 1869.

[6] In September 1869, 'Cooperative Housekeeping Association' was amended to 'Cooperative Housekeeping Society', suggesting some second thoughts about the Fourierist connotations of the term 'association'. 'Record of the Proceedings of the CCHS', unpaged.

[7] Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society, Prospectus, 5 October 1869 (pamphlet collection, Widener Library, Harvard University). This announcement was reported in the Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, 5 October 1869, p. 2. The nine towns probably included Medford, Massachusetts, since Peirce had told the New England Women's Club the preceding March that a group there was ready to undertake a kitchen and laundry. See the entry for 28 March 1869, New England Women's Club, 'Record Book of the Weekly Social meetings of the NEWC', 1868–71, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe. Women and men in Greeley, Colorado, were also discussing her ideas under the leadership of Nathan Meeker, a journalist who wrote about her ideas in the New York *Tribune*, (semi-weekly), 31 August 1869. In 1870 cooperative steam laundries were launched by women in Winchester and Springfield, Massachusetts, according to Peirce, 1884, p. 95.

[8] President, Mrs N. S. Shaler; treasurer, Zina Peirce; directors, Mrs Horace Mann, Mrs H. W. Paine, Mrs N. P. Willis, Mrs James Fisk, 'Record of the Proceedings of the CCHS' unpaged.

[9] This committee included Gordon McKay, Nathan S. Shaler, James C. Fisk, J. C. Watson, Theodore A. Dodge 'Record of the Proceedings of the CCHS', unpaged.

directors came too often to his wife's house for meetings, and on one occasion, he was furious because he had to wait for the end of a meeting before his wife would sew on a button for him. A third husband permitted his wife to pay her subscription on the grounds that she promised never to attend any meetings. A fourth husband would not let his wife become president because if the society failed he felt it might 'injure *his* position'. Another hostile man convinced his widowed mother that the Society was mismanaged. She had time to spare and became a continual 'thorn in the side' of the directors (Peirce, 1884, 108-9). The directors themselves were at first chagrined at the men's opposition and the members' lack of orders. Then some of them avoided the Society's rooms, and only one or two women worked really hard to make the enterprise succeed. Peirce's own husband kept imploring her to give it all up and join him in Europe on a scientific expedition, and for several months in the winter of 1870, she did.[10] In light of the harassment the women received, it is significant, perhaps, that Charles Peirce, Howells, Fisk, Perry and others among the members' husbands lauched an élite Cambridge dinner group, 'The Club', which met for all-male dinners on the second Tuesday of every month in the members' homes in 1870. While scholars have assumed that these eminent men discussed intellectual matters, probably their wives' plans to alter their subordinate status and become self-supporting came in for a good deal of ridicule and sabotage, since the men's private behaviour was often patronizing.[11]

By April 1871, the Bow Street house was closed. Only 12 out of 40 member households had given their patronage to the laundry and store. The kitchen had never opened. The society dissolved with the unanimous vote of the Council of Gentlemen, who were true to the middle-class model Peirce had once described. Most of them never forbade their wives to undertake the project, but merely called them 'unnatural, discontented, ambitious, unfeminine'. Peirce judged that 'a few men sustained the attempt most loyally, but most of the husbands laughed good-naturedly at the whole thing, prophesied its failure, and put their wives out of heart and out of conceit with it from the beginning' (Peirce, 1884, 109). She reserved her special rage for 'HUSBAND-POWER which is very apt to shut down like an invisible bell-glass over every woman as soon as she is married', and she excoriated the husband of one subscriber, who attended the final meeting on the question of continuance, 'determined that the attempt should end then and there', despite the fact that his wife was not an active member

[10] This was perhaps his first public acknowledgment of her scientific training, as she wrote a section of the report, *Report of the Superintendent of the US Coast Survey Showing Progress for Fiscal Year 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office), 125 ff. Cited in Arthur W. Burks, *Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce,* Cambridge, 1958. Scholars have been quick to point out when his ideas are expressed in her work, but are often vague about her contributions to his work, or their collaboration.

[11] For mention of 'The Club' see Edwin H. Cady, The road to realism, Syracuse, 1956, pp. 145–6, and Van Wyck Brooks, *Howells,* London, 1959, p. 59.

(Peirce, 1884, 107, 110). He prevailed. At the time of dissolution, other husbands expressed themselves as wanting to 'prevent misconception on the subject of the feasibility of cooperation in this community'.[12] In other words, *never* again.

III Falling back on polemic

While Melusina Fay Peirce found that her practical experience of cooperation in Cambridge was frustrating, she was more and more acclaimed as a theortician of cooperative endeavour. Her articles were discussed in the frontier houses of Greeley, Colorado, and the drawing rooms of London.[13] A book composed of her articles was published in Edinburgh and London in 1870. Reviewers acclaimed the author's original approach to 'cooperation'. When her Cambridge experiment was finished, Peirce decided to travel to Europe in search of new insights. She considered that the Cambridge experiment had taught her a good deal about business management, especially the necessity of adequate capital and steady trade, and she saw how women had been blocked from devoting their full time and energy to her enterprise by their families. On a trip to London, she met Thomas Hughes and E. O. Greening and discussed cooperation on the Rochdale method. She visited the 'Union' stores there, and in August 1875, in Berlin, met Frau Morgenstern, organizer of the Housekeepers' Union, a cooperative store with 4000 members. Upon her return, she addressed the Fourth Woman's Congress in Philadelphia, 4 October 1876, about the success of cooperation in England among men and the prospects for it in the United

[12] Theo. A. Dodge, J. C. Watson, Mrs N. S. Shaler, *Report of the CCHS*, Cambridge, 1872, (Selling-off report), Cambridge Public Library.

[13] Her influence in England was at least as great as it was in the United States. In June 1869, a British journal, *The Cooperator*, reprinted extracts from her *Atlantic* articles, and they were issued as a book in London and Edinburgh in 1870 (Peirce, 1870). Subtitled, *Romance in Domestic Economy*, the frontispiece showed a couple in a sailboat, with a woman at the wheel. Following the publication of Peirce's work, a spate of articles and building designs celebrated this new advance in social theory, for England had its full share of Fourierist 'associationists' actively proselytizing for Associated Homes and Social Palaces, as well as its passionate 'cooperators'. Mary C. Hume Rothery reviewed her book in April 1871 in *The Cooperator*. Mrs E. M. King reviewed her book in a long article on 'Cooperative housekeeping' in the *Contemporary Review*, December 1873, and then published another article in *The Building News* in 1877, accompanying plans for an elaborate architectural project designed by Godwin. Roswell Fisher published 'The practical side of cooperative housekeeping' in *The Nineteenth Century* in September 1877, mentioning the success of Queen Anne's Mansions (a residential hotel), arguing that this was 'no socialist utopia', but merely the application of modern economical principals and mechanical appliances in a somewhat new direction. *The Queen*, a woman's paper, enthused over the same project in 1879. In 1887, *Work and Leisure*, a magazine for working girls, had a competition for the design of a cooperative housekeeping project for them. Despite Peirce's complaint in her 1884 book, that 'Englishmen and Americans like a woman to be cross or compromise between an equal companion and a slave, and English and American women achieve the moral paradox very cleverly', she clearly had real effect in England, and created a very favourable climate for the reception of Bellamy's and Gilman's work, and the development of cooperative housekeeping in the British Garden Cities movement.

States among women.[14] Appended to a copy of her address was a new set of rules for new experiments in cooperative housekeeping. She was then 40 years old and had been separated from her husband for about a year.

In the fall of 1880 Peirce was invited to address the Illinois Social Science Association and the text of her talk on cooperative housekeeping was expanded into a book, *Cooperative housekeeping: how not to do it and how to do it, a study in sociology*. Her feminist rhetoric was sharper than ever, especially in trenchant asides to the main argument:

> No despotism of man over man that was ever recorded was at once so absolute as the despotism—the dominion of men over women. It covers not only the whole political area. It owns not only the bodies of its subjects. Its hand lies heavily on their innermost personality, and its power is so tremendous that whatever they are, it is because these absolute lords have willed it (Peirce, 1884, 184).

Criticizing an historian 'of the English people', who 'hardly alludes to the existence of one-half of that people, its women, from one end of his work to the other', Peirce noted that 'the absolute obliviousness of women by men is most extraordinary . . . In view of all its incalculable consequences, it is the most colossal fact in history' (Peirce, 1884, 187). Warning women of 'HUSBAND-POWER', exhorting them to take control of their lives, reiterating her criticisms of middle-class women's idleness and lack of economic power, she once again asserted that cooperative housekeeping was the solution to women's problems. Yet another set of rules for an experiment was attached, and she appended another plea for women to elect an all-female 'Woman's House', through 'womanhood' suffrage, and predicted that it would in time take the place of the US Senate (Peirce, 1884, 141–2), when women became economically more powerful through developing the domestic sphere.[15]

[14] Melusina Fay Peirce, *Cooperation*, paper read at fourth Woman's Congress, Philadelphia, 4 October 1876.

[15] Melusina Fay Peirce's views on 'womanhood suffrage' were expressed fully in a speech given in New York in 1869, and are repeated in the records of the New England Women's Club, of the meeting 15 November 1869. She wanted to bring 'a pure and elevating feminine influence to bear directly upon society and the world'. She suggested that all women over 21 should not wait for 'manhood' suffrage but immediately gather in towns and cities and exercise 'womanhood' suffrage, by electing women officers and committees to see about women's affairs. 'Let them (women) not wait any longer for men to invite or command womenhood on the stage of life . . . For women to ask for the right of regulating their own affairs was simply ridiculous. They possess it already . . .' She called for women to form standing committees, and the first was a domestic committee on household reform, followed by committees on education; health; pauper and criminal protection; aesthetics; fine arts; innocent recreation and festivity; gardening and landscaping; newspapers and magazines. The primacy of domestic reform implies cooperative housekeeping as an economic base, followed by basic areas of concern such as health, education and welfare, while the emphasis on 'innocent recreation and festivity' recalls the Fourierist 'festal series' or group dealing with celebration and parades, found in most Fourierist utopian communities.

This is really an early version of the 'social housekeeping' arguments later presented by suffragists and domestic scientists who justified their work in the larger world as part of their womanly duties.

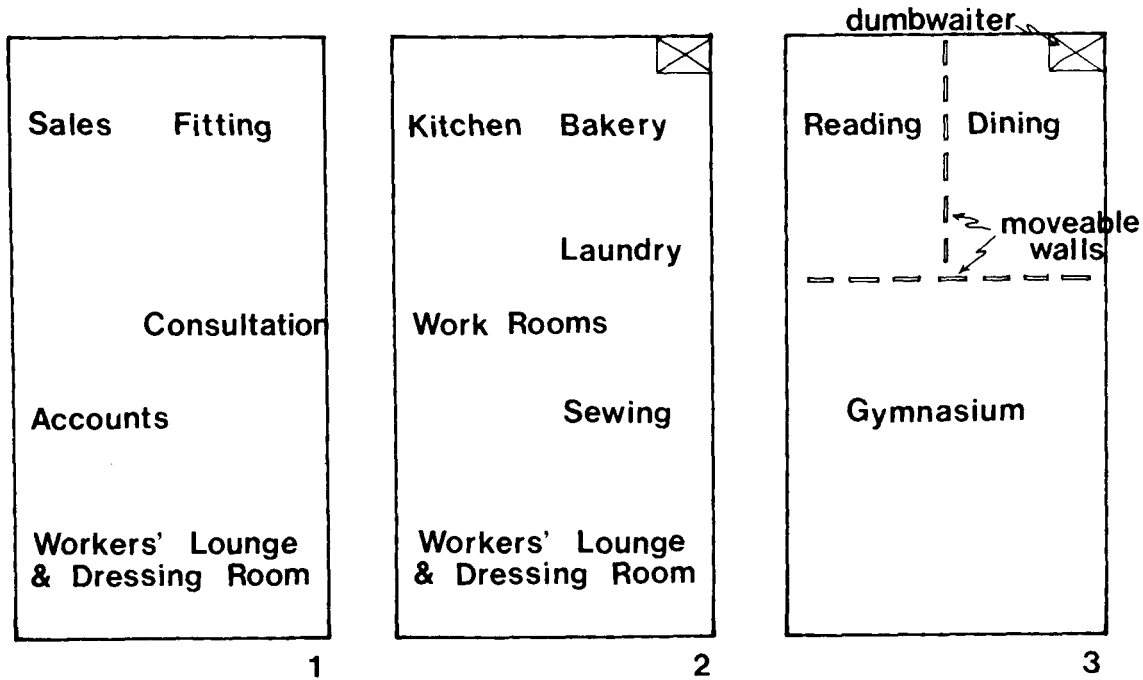

Figure 1 Diagrammatic plan of headquarters for a cooperative housekeeping society, drawn by Beth Ganister from verbal descriptions by Melusina Fay Peirce.

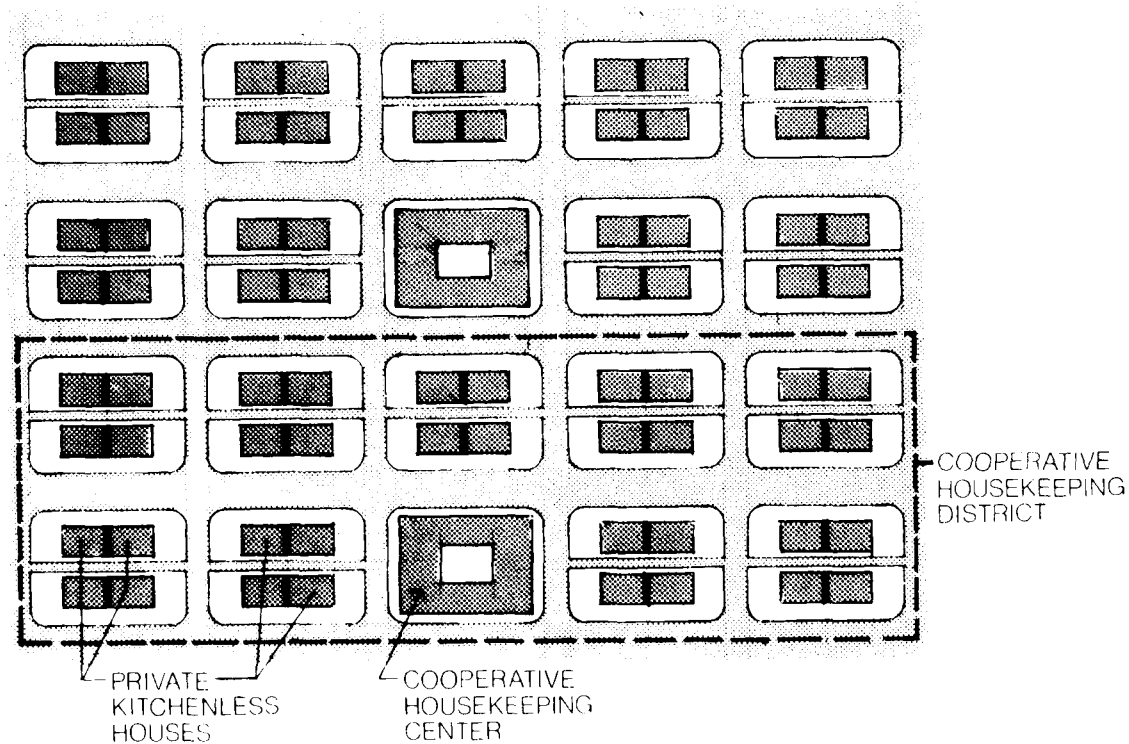

Figure 2 Diagrammatic plan of cooperative residential neighbourhood, 36 kitchenless duplex houses and one cooperative housekeeping centre, drawn by Paul Johnson from verbal descriptions by Melusina Fay Peirce.

The effects of her book were wide-ranging. It received extensive reviews in major papers, by male reviewers who were both intrigued and fearful. The New York *Times* congratulated her for 'telling women many harsh truths about themselves', but warned the author about making equally strong criticisms against men. 'This peppery element does her cause no good . . . Let her concentrate her fire on woman and paint her blacker than she deserves, if by so doing she may be goaded into the change which is to turn the domestic inferno into a cooperative paradise' (New York *Times,* 1884, 3, column 1). The New York *Daily Tribune* called her 'somewhat extravagant in her conclusions, wild in many of her statements, and often hysterical in manner', while commending 'sensible suggestions' likely to become 'at no distant day the basis of a domestic reform'. The reviewer suggested that some energetic young ladies 'give the plan a fair, persevering trial' (New York *Daily Tribune,* 1884, 8).

Many women took the advice of the *Tribune's* reviewer. In 1885 Marie Howland and her collaborators Owen and Deery published more extensive architectural plans for cooperative housekeeping (see Hayden, 1978, for a brief discussion of Howland.) In 1886 Mary Livermore reported community dining clubs and cooked food services in Boston, New York, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Berea, Ohio; and Evansville, Wisconsin. Livermore gave her enthusiastic support to this cause, declaring that 'isolated housekeeping must be merged into a cooperative housekeeping' (Livermore, 1886). In 1887, Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward,* a novel describing Boston in the year 2000 as a city of kitchenless apartments. As one of his characters explained: 'Our washing is all done at public laundries . . . and our cooking at public kitchens. The making and repairing of all we wear are done outside in public shops . . .' (Bellamy, edn 1967, 169). As Bellamy's followers formed groups to discuss domestic architecture, many more experiments in cooperative housekeeping developed, and authors such as Bradford Peck produced still more detailed plans. Charlotte Perkins Gilman came out against private domestic work in 1898 in *Women and economics:* stating that 'where now 20 women in 20 houses work all the time, and insufficiently accomplish their varied duties, the same work in the hands of specialists could be done in less time by fewer people, and the others would be left free to do other work for which they were better fitted . . . we are going to lose our kitchens . . .' (Gilman, edn 1966, 245, 267). Because Gilman believed what she called 'professional' cooks and nurses should replace 'cooperating' housekeepers, she never used Peirce's term 'cooperative housekeeping'. Thus Gilman developed a solution without a name to what Betty Friedan was later to call 'the problem with no name', over-emphasis on female domesticity or, the 'feminine mystique'.

It is not within the scope of this paper to develop an extended discussion of exactly how much Livermore, Bellamy, Gilman and others borrowed from Peirce nor to discuss in detail the popularity of cooperative housekeeping between 1885 and 1930.[16] Although Gilman's advocacy of collec-

[16] I am currently working on a book on this larger subject.

tive housekeeping has been much misunderstood in our own times, she was read by a broad, symphathetic middle-class audience. Many men and women believed the domestic changes she described were inevitable and worked to bring them about, including architects and planners such as Ebenezer Howard, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin in England, Charles H. Whitaker, Rudolph Schindler and Alice Constance Austin in the United States. Between 1918 and 1927 popular magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal, Woman's Home Companion,* and *Woman Citizen* sponsored articles and essay contests on the subject, with provocative titles such as: 'Shall the kitchen in our home go?' and 'The cooperative home service I use' (see Gale, 1919; Richardson, 1923).

Despite the fact that Peirce had begun agitating for a new approach to domesticity in 1868, it was usually Gilman who was the heroine of reformers looking for feminist approaches to domestic life, not Melusina Fay Peirce. Peirce developed a broad range of other activities.[17] During the years after 1871, when the Cambridge experiment ended, Peirce, living in Cambridge, New York, and Chicago, was active in many other groups dealing with women's education and culture, promoting such causes as Radcliffe College, cheap concerts, preservation of historic buildings, and a women's orchestra. She helped her sister Amy in her musical career and worked as a music critic in Boston and Chicago. She wrote and lectured about the Democratic Party, and campaigned for better street cleaning. She completed a rather good novel about the difficulties of family life and isolated housekeeping in 1892, entitled *New York, a symphonic study* (Peirce, 1918). In 1903, at 67, she revealed her remarkable talent for architecture when she patented a design for duplex apartments with gallery access.[18] The building would have suited cooperative housekeeping admirably but Peirce confined herself to pointing out many varied activities which could be included on its roof story. Programmatically and structurally it was an innovative design which antedates many architects' experiments along similar lines after 1920, and it was an improvement upon many contemporary apartment hotels.

As she grew older, Peirce became less inventive and more conservative. Anti-immigration propaganda and anti-suffrage propaganda were included in the same volume with her novel, *New York, a symphonic study,* when it appeared in 1918, and all her exhortations took on a spiritualistic cast concerning 'world-brothers', 'world sisters', and 'two universal industries', 'national farming', and 'national housekeeping'. She argued that through cooperative farming and cooperative housekeeping, poverty

[17] According to John Howard Brown (1903, 200), she worked hard on other causes such as the establishment of Radcliffe college (1872); the Boston Woman's Education Association (1871); the Cambridge Woman's Union (1877); the New York Women's World's Fair Committee (1876); the New York Women's Movement for Cheap Summer-Night Concerts (1895); the street cleaning committee of the Ladies Health Protective Association of New York (1887–88); and the Women's Philharmonic Society of New York (1898–99).

[18] Melusina Fay Peirce, 'Dwelling Block', US Patent no. 734, 938, 28 July 1903.

could be eliminated. At 82 she was crotchety as well as moralistic, complaining that Edward Bellamy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman had stolen her ideas.[19] Certainly she had anticipated almost everything both of them had to say on the subject of domestic industry in the future. Later writers on domestic life, such as Lucy Salmon, Mary Hinman Abel, and Arthur Calhoun noted Peirce's influence, but for the most part she was forgotten.[20] In order to see just why her version of cooperative housekeeping was less acceptable than Bellamy's or Gilman's, it is essential to understand Melusina Fay Peirce's extraordinary synthesis of popular and unorthodox political sentiments: she attracted capitalists and socialists, anti-feminists and feminists to her work.

In her praise of industrial methods, Peirce sounds like many American capitalists of her time, viewing a profitable new field of endeavour. Her rhapsodies over the specialization and division of labour, her contempt for unskilled workers, her plans for training skilled domestic workers, appeal to the entrepreneurial capitalist. Her arrangements for workers, however, such as lounges to rest in, a gym to exercize in, the eight-hour day, dress reform, and pay for women at male wage levels, would put her among the most benevolent capitalists. Yet when she offers to bring the moneyed class of women into responsible relations with the servant class, in aid of women's greater self-reliance, and admits that this is not a profit-making scheme but a cooperative economic strategy aimed at women's power, she alienates the very businessmen who might have found her techniques appealing.

In her faith in the power of voluntary 'association' or 'cooperation', and in her belief that one successful cooperative housekeeping society would serve as a model for others across the country, Peirce was a true disciple of the Rochdale Cooperators, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and the American communitarian socialists, whose successful experiments at New Lebanon, Amana and Oneida were in the public eye. Thus she borrowed the strategy of these leaders, who urged idealists to secede from capitalist society and form more egalitarian cooperative communities. But when she urged women to secede from the existing domestic world, and form more egalitarian, cooperative housekeeping centres in American cities and towns, she pushed 'cooperation' to a new extreme. Many men of the cooperative movement felt very threatened by female separatism, especially if they, as husbands, would suddenly be asked to pay for household work performed by 'lady-cooperators'.

In her belief in separate spheres of economic and political activity for women and men, and in her desire to develop women's traditional skills in domestic work, Peirce appealed to very conventional women. Many

[19] See Peirce (1918, 13–16).

[20] Lucy Salmon, *Domestic Service*, New York, 1897, 186–93; Mary Hinman Abel, 'Recent phases of cooperation among women', *House Beautiful*, XIII (April 1903), p. 364; Arthur Calhoun, *A social history of the American family*, III, New York, 1945, 179–98.

would have found the ideas of Catharine Beecher congenial, whose domestic economy manuals, published between 1841 and 1870, insisted that woman's only place was in the home, where she could exercize power through self-sacrifice. Peirce went beyond the 'professional' self-sacrifice advocated by Beecher when she insisted that women take control of domestic life by removing housekeeping from the home and charging money for such services. As a feminist separatist, who refused to share the potential economic power of domestic productivity with men, Peirce outraged many conservative women who were at first drawn to her proposals because of the high value she placed on domestic life and women's control of the domestic sphere.

In her desire to improve society through women's associations, Peirce attracted many of the more liberal feminists of her times. During the Civil War many American women had developed their skills as administrators and public speakers on behalf of abolition or war relief. In 1868 the New England Women's Club was formed to bring women out of their 'small circles and solitary ways' to act on larger public issues.[21] Peirce partook of this spirit of sisterly association, soon to become the basis of a national network of women's clubs and the suffrage, temperance, and social housekeeping movements. She demanded, however, that middle-class women confront the pressing contradictions in their own lives (economic dependence on men, and economic exploitation of their domestic servants) before they attacked the larger issues of political representation and economic deprivation. In her pragmatic insistence that justice and charity begin at home, and in her stubborn assertion that middle-class women should use their energies to change their own condition, Peirce pushed the middle-class suffragists and clubwomen of her own era far closer to modern 'consciousness raising' than many of them were prepared to go.Thus she offended the suffragists and socialists who believed that winning political representation or developing strategies to aid workers were more important than having women take economic control of domestic life and deal with conflicts of both gender and class on this basis.

A woman of extraordinary talent and energy, Peirce displayed great agility in exploiting the weak points of industrial capitalism or consumer cooperation, traditional conceptions of the home or bourgeois feminism. She merged radical ideas of cooperation and women's emancipation with prevailing concepts of industrial method and the separateness of women's work because she was seeking a practical economic basis for women's work. Cooperative housekeeping was for her a strategy of attack reflecting more fundamental aims:

> Cooperative housekeeping may be wholly practical or wholly visionary. But two things women must do somehow, as the conditions not only of the future happiness, progress, and elevation of their sex, but of its bare respectability and morality.
> 1st They *must* earn their own living.
> 2nd They *must* be organized among themselves (Peirce, 1869, 297).

[21] 'Record Book of the Weekly Social Meetings of the NEWC', 18 February 1868.

Long after the term 'cooperative housekeeping', and the concept of the kitchenless house have disappeared from feminists' vocabularies, Melusina Fay Peirce's call for action remins valid. Her imaginative proposals for new domestic settings, as well as her critique of traditional domestic ideology, spurred others to invention. Some, like Bellamy, minimized the idea of women's economic power through proposals for nationalized domestic industry, while others, like Gilman, avoided the idea of decentralized socialism through proposals for large-scale domestic industry on a capitalist basis, without neighbourhood cooperation. For the undiluted, unorthodox, original version of 'cooperative housekeeping', one must turn to Melusina Fay Peirce.

Peirce took several incompatible popular ideals of her time—technological development, voluntary cooperation, domestic separatism and feminist organizing—and forced each to its logical conclusion. Capitalists could not accept her ideal of non-profit cooperation. Socialists could not understand her feminist separatism. Conservative advocates of 'woman's sphere' found her emphasis on women's economic power distasteful. More radical women were frustrated by her insistence that women deal with the political and economic issues raised in their domestic lives. In sum, she had a genius for making everyone uncomfortable, because she attacked the interlocked oppression of gender and class in a new way.

University of California, Los Angeles

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