

## The Book, the Napkin Ring and the Salad Bowl: Creating the Perfect Kitchen (or Not)

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This chapter investigates how ideas about individual and shared identities are played out in the domestic arena; in particular, in the space of the kitchen, and through the use (or ‘misuse’) of objects in that space. The kitchen has been termed the most political domestic space (where the home is itself a microcosm of society) ‘in its relevance to social function and its aesthetics of creation, preservation, and waste’ (Hellman, 2004, p. 1). As the place where food is prepared or recreated, and where well-used objects acquire a patina over time, the kitchen is arguably the site in the home which gives most rise to nostalgia and longing. Furthermore, a kitchen can be regarded as uniquely resonant in terms of the body’s relation to, and movement around, the space (presuming elements of design and function), and in terms of memories linked to childhood, sensuality and the potential for change. It is, variously, represented as the archetypal space of shared matriarchal experience; symbolic of the state of the family/society; part of the architectural infrastructure of service; the ultimate modern domestic space, planned and mapped by gadgets, and, contrastingly, a space of unpredictability, fantasy and improvisation.

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The kitchen is thus a site in which everyday life is experienced and performed, and where ‘embodied dwelling’ in space and place is evident in, arguably, a heightened and nuanced form. In the consideration of the kitchen and its material culture here, I am drawing on cultural geographers’ notions of the body’s relation to place, and its movement around spaces, applied to the domestic context of the kitchen. John Wylie argues that an embodied, tactile ‘being-in-place’, combined with movement, counteracts the danger of the notion of ‘dwelling’ being too closely tied to the non-urban and to a rootedness which is inseparable from a nostalgic construction of place (2003, p. 137). Although Wylie has primarily in mind the cultural constructions of a rural (non-urban) idyll, the interrelation of embeddedness (the sensual relation to objects and environment) and movement (repeated patterns and rituals) can equally apply to the kitchen; can mitigate against understandings of it as a perfect domestic space.

### PSYCHIC LIFE OF INTERIORS AND OBJECTS

The domestic interior has long been thought of as a sphere of self-expression, ‘neither an external object nor an inner experience’ (Heidegger, 1997 [1927], p. 106). Indeed, the actual—and imagined—domestic space reveals an unstable interdependency between the body and space and between the inner psyche and outward, material forms. The notion of traces (material and psychological) within the interior has been developed by cultural theorists to emphasise the relationship between place, habitation/home and the formation of self-identity. The autobiographical texts discussed in this chapter can, I suggest, be regarded as models of how awareness of one’s physical being moving around rooms—using and playing with things—relates particularly to the rooms of one’s childhood, and the kitchen is central to this. In this, they can be viewed in the wider cultural context of twentieth-century architectural theorists who posited that the body is in constant dialogue with the buildings around it.

It is difficult to assess the kitchens, as imagined in the cultural texts discussed here, though, without taking nostalgia into account. Space is central to the concept of nostalgia: from defining homesickness as a medical condition, the term came to have an emotive capacity as a longing for home (*algia-nostos*), or for what is past. Importantly, however, this emotive capacity has future as well as past relevance. In *The Future of*

*Nostalgia* (2001) Svetlana Boym usefully distinguishes between a reflective nostalgia (which has no place of habitation) and a restorative nostalgia (which aims to reconstruct a lost home): the latter can be seen to characterise the texts I investigate in this chapter.

Both memory and nostalgia are particularly bound up with the sensory nature of food preparation and consumption, enacted in the space of the kitchen where ingredients are transformed and meals produced and/or consumed. The rituals and contexts of food preparation and eating are connected with memory (synesthesia is a key component of remembering), particularly in relation to what David Sutton terms ‘migrant’ food: food which travels and is recreated in the new home. The kitchen is thus significant in shaping tangible everyday experiences which evoke the memories on which identities are formed (2001, p. 75). Furthermore, nostalgia arises from familiar, well-used kitchen objects which have acquired a patina over time.

### OBJECT, TEXT, SPACE

Drawing on theories from material culture and cultural geography, this chapter also focuses on the representation of culinary objects in constant dialogue with the self, in the context of the kitchen. Objects are seen as having agency—either as mnemonic devices in the narrative sequence of social change, or in their unpredictability. With the latter, the then malfunctioning kitchen becomes a metaphor for the culinary process and, more broadly, for the home as being about ‘making do with what you’ve got’ (Barnes, 2003, p. 127). Kitchen gadgets can map out the ultimate modern domestic space, while also defining that space as ripe for recollection, fantasy and improvisation. In doing so they are seen to occupy (in the spatial sense) an unstable relationship with the author/self in the text as he or she strains for culinary harmony.

In exploring how the resonance of the object (the kitchen ‘appliance’) highlights domestic paradox (the kitchen as a place of both routine and creativity), the chapter focuses on the imagined kitchen in a range of auto/biographical literary texts published since 2000, constituting what has recently been termed the genre of culinary fiction. The cultural popularity of all things culinary is evidenced in the numerous online inventories of kitchen and food-inspired fiction.<sup>1</sup> There is a fine line between culinary fiction, and cookery writing, which is usually by professional cooks and shelved with cookbooks. The literary texts focused on in this

chapter are Nora Seton's *The Kitchen Congregation* (2000); Penelope Lively's *A House Unlocked* (2001); Patricia Volk's *Stuffed: Growing up in a Restaurant Family* (2002); Julian Barnes' *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (2003), and Rohan Candappa's *Picklehead: From Ceylon to Suburbia* (2006). Other texts, such as Bee Wilson's *Consider the Fork* (2013), narrate a history of cooking through exploring the hidden life of an ordinary object or, like Lindsey Bareham's *The Trifle Bowl and Other Tales* (2013), organise an autobiographical narrative and recipes around the design history and memories associated with particular kitchen implements. Although these techniques also feature in the texts discussed here, I have chosen not to focus on cookery writing or memoirs by professional cooks (Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential* (2000) and Nigel Slater's *Toast* (2003) being other notable examples). Focusing on culinary, domestic space-based fiction by writers who do not fashion themselves as (or have the public persona of) a professional cook, arguably brings the notion of the amateur to the fore. In turn, the narrative and poetic potential of the kitchen is heightened.

Discussion of the literary memoirs is contextualised with reference to other cultural kitchen texts, to provide a broader cultural understanding of how we *do home* and the role of improvisation in this. The idea of improvisation is useful to an understanding of the space of the kitchen as simultaneously imagined and a body of distinct practices. To improvise is to 'compose, utter, extempore'—indicating the creativity involved—and also to *provide or construct*, suggesting an element of addition and recreation. Various techniques are used by contemporary writers, artists and theorists to reveal the structures of daily habit (in the kitchen) which are all too often naturalised. If the kitchen is a site of performance, a definition of improvisation borrowed from performance art seems particularly apt: Anthony Howell's description of the primary actions of performed improvisation as 'stillness, repetition and inconsistency' finds an echo in the kitchen as a place of routine but also unpredictability (1999, p. xiii). Performance art, as an elusive, temporary material, matches the rhythms of daily life in the kitchen.

Forms of life-writing such as autobiography or memoir draw the author (and reader) towards moments of revelation—or 'inwardness'—as Hermione Lee terms it (2005, p. 4). They contribute to an understanding of the life cycle of the kitchen, both in historical and psychological terms. In the texts considered here, a drive towards the interior life (on the part of the inhabitant of the domestic space, whether author/

character/performer)—and to insight, or revelation—is brought about by engagement with particular objects refracted through the interior (kitchen). As such, the texts become a ‘systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’ (Bachelard, 1994 [1958], p. 8). The kitchen is thus a site in which everyday life is experienced and performed, and where what cultural geographers define as embodied dwelling in space and place is evident in a heightened form. The chapter takes account of the critical literature on the unstable interdependency between body, material culture and the domestic interior.

The selected texts, through their concern with the adult’s relation to childhood kitchens and homes, and their focus on culinary implements, recipe books (and ultimately, food) raise questions of wider cultural relevance to do with history and the process of remembering. Crucially, and collectively, they articulate a tension between control (fixity/design) and creativity (change over time/improvisation in the moment). It is the objects in the kitchen around which the narratives are structured, which resonate beyond the texts and highlight the paradox inherent in the notion of domestic ‘routine’.

Penelope Lively’s *A House Unlocked* (2001) is a memoir of Golsoncott, the author’s grandparents’ country house in west Somerset where she spent a lot of time as a child, and which was inhabited by generations of the family for over 70 years, from 1923–1995. Golsoncott is a ‘mansion in the mind’ (p. ix). In the Preface, Lively recreates moving around the house, focusing on different objects (which are then replicated in the chapter titles or ‘contents’—‘the knife rests, the grape scissors and the bon-bon dish’). She likens it to the mnemonic devices of the classical and medieval art of memory (where each new room is a stage in the argument and the ‘trappings’ act as prompts for flights of language). ‘The house itself becomes a prompt—a system of reference, an assemblage of coded signs. Its contents conjure up a story; they are not the stations of an oratorical argument, but signifiers for the century’ (p. x). In this context, the kitchen, more than other spaces of the house, reveals a narrative of historical references and social change. Specifically, it is emblematic of an architecture which ‘assumed an infrastructure of service’ (p. 198) while offering up clues to the disruption of that infrastructure.

In order to understand the spaces of everyday life there is a need to reconsider the relationship between the producers (architects) and consumers (residents), as theorists since Gaston Bachelard and Henri Lefebvre have observed. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, the context

of the Golsoncott life cycle which Lively recreates, the kitchen became a key site for the re-evaluation of domestic design, practices and the relation of the body to space. This revisioning was informed by the principles of scientific management (enacted, for example, in time and motion experiments). It centred, as Mark Llewellyn in his essay on gender and the geographies of the British kitchen has commented, ‘on the potential change from an unplanned, illogical kitchen to a rational, efficient workspace’ (2004, p. 45). Of course the management of the kitchen, and the activities which connected it to the rest of the (middle-class) house, was dependent on domestic labour. In the unlocking of Golsoncott, and of Lively’s memories of it, the (unacknowledged) revelation is that the author and her grandmother differed greatly in their attitudes towards washing-up. This crystallises a wider social upheaval in the realm of domestic labour in the 1930s and 1940s, when many middle-class women found themselves unable to employ domestic servants, and there were better housing standards/opportunities for working-class women. Lively charts the reduction in staff from ten to none. Post-war, we are told, Lively’s grandmother found washing-up a ‘personal affront’, the ‘final rupture with the world in which she had grown up’ (2001, p. 199) whereas the adult author, noticing a similar rupture with the world of her childhood, regards washing-up on a domestic scale as rather a satisfactory job.

It is clear that the kitchen signified ‘women’s work’ in the Golsoncott of the 1940s. The notion of drudgery was, however, being challenged by housing reformers and British architects of the time such as Jane Drew. In *Kitchen Planning* (1944) Drew advocated arranging the components of a kitchen in accordance with the sequence of operations, which would offer a form of liberation. Paradoxically, the potential freedom and empowerment was fixed within and achieved through planning. Yet it was also important, argued Drew, to understand the kitchen’s relation to ‘outside’, to avoid being isolated in an enclosed space. For Lively, this is realised in the kitchen garden, whose interplay of the cultivated and the natural is an extension of the interior spaces of the home. With its ‘combination of structure and furnishings’ the kitchen garden renders any boundary between inside and outside permeable, and, like the house, it is a sensual place, with its own ‘dark privacy’ (2001, p. 129). A wider cultural interest in the kitchen garden—evident in, for example, the BBC Radio Scotland show *The Kitchen Garden* (September 2013); the

popular *Kitchen Garden* magazine, or lifestyle articles in the media<sup>2</sup>—reveals a desire to construct the kitchen garden as another room/space of the home. Like the kitchen, the kitchen garden can be both designed and wild.

The house is a physical entity which is eventually dismembered and dispersed. During this process, Lively records, ‘its furnishings, its functions—seemed like a set of coded allusions to a complex sequence of social change and historical clamour’ (2001, p. xi). Significantly, it is objects, the material culture of the interior, which prove more durable than people. The memoir dwells on a number of objects whose meanings stretch beyond the seeming confines of the interior, and yet these go unrecognised. A napkin ring found in the pantry, once an essential object in the connecting narrative between kitchen and dining, is a mystery to the author’s daughter. Other objects and their use have adapted over time, particularly the furniture, such as the gong stand, symbolic of vanished rituals (and domestic staff). A single china coffee cup is the catalyst for comparing the kitchen facilities and equipment at Golsoncott with those in the home of a Soviet writer who the author visits (as part of an official trip) in 1984. The contrast is stark, yet the focus on an object as a repository of history and personal memory is the same.

‘A house is given resonance by its inhabitants’, creating a ‘complex texture’ of place, Lively observes (2001, p. 108). This texture is made vital through the ‘kaleidoscopic vision of childhood’ and the ‘shadow presence of other worlds’ (p. 107). Paradoxically, the interior and its objects are testament to both social change and the seeming absence of change—although light falls in exactly the same way on a particular object, the place is ‘secretly recording’ (p. 84).

For Julian Barnes, the writer and self-confessed kitchen pedant, the kitchen of his English, middle-class childhood home was also a secret place, recognised as such only in retrospect. ‘Meals and my mother emerged from it’ (2003, p. 1). In the collection of essays *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (2003), the author constructs himself as an ‘anxious pedant’ on a quest for precision in the kitchen. Yet although he trusts ‘instruments rather than myself’ (p. 4) he also yearns for creative freedom, for release from enslavement to the recipe book and the latest kitchen gadget (even the old kitchen implement!). With this text it is clear that the kitchen is a space shaped by the psychology of the writer—it mutates

‘from a place of resented necessity to one of tense pleasure’ (p. 9)—and central to this is the author’s relation to, and reflection on, books and implements; the stuff which will facilitate the production of meals to share with one’s partner and friends.

In Barnes’ essay ‘By the Book’ the reader/cook is offered guidelines for arriving at a core kitchen library. Included in this must be your own book of recipe cuttings: like a photograph album, this is an archive of ‘emotional and psychological history’ (p. 32). It is interesting to note that the collection and incorporation of recipes was deemed particularly significant by Agnes Jekyll in her preface to *Kitchen Essays*, which were published in *The Times* (1922). At this time, ‘when homes dissolve and re-form, or the main prop of a household is withdrawn, it is often found that a good tradition or a valued formula, painstakingly acquired, has vanished beyond recovery’ (2009, pp. vii–viii).

Barnes goes on to assert that the more ‘decorated’ (by mess) a cookery book is, the more marked it is by ‘heroic kitchen carnage’ (p. 66), the more honour it should be afforded. Whereas the writer appears to exercise a degree of control in the area of the kitchen library, he is less able to cull objects and implements. An old-fashioned mincer which migrates from drawer to drawer to shelf inhabits a kind of limbo; the unplanned spaces and movements of the kitchen. The satirically-named ‘Drawer of Spurned Machinery’ (p. 78) is a place of stowed and forgotten gadgets, ‘where everything is tangled up and furtive’ (p. 121). ‘The self emerges out of material things’ and, as Ellen Lupton and other theorists of material culture have argued, these things (particularly the ‘mechanical devices’ found in kitchens) ‘appear to take on lives of their own’ or, at the very least, they ‘animate [the interior] and the scenes of daily life’ (Lupton, 1993, p. 8).

Barnes moves towards the moment of insight that holding on to these things is a sign that one day the perfect kitchen will be attained. Yet the gap between suburban reality and the fantasy of the perfectly designed and efficiently functioning kitchen is all too evident in the kitchen bible of the author’s childhood home: the 1915 edition of *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*. ‘Illustration 1: The Kitchen’ has as its component parts: ‘a towering Welsh dresser, huge tables, a station clock, and [...] a plump and dutiful cook’ (p. 51). The pedant’s attempts to work with a kitchen design expert come to nothing, and he notes that even the cook and writer Elizabeth David’s dream kitchen could not be realised, due to the configuration of her Chelsea home. In an oft-quoted



comment (replicated in Barnes' text), David directly links the kitchen to artistry and creativity. The perfect kitchen would 'be more like a painter's studio furnished with cooking equipment than anything conventionally accepted as a kitchen' (p. 126). With some relief Barnes is able to accept that the kitchen is more a place of 'individualizing adjustments' (p. 124), and that it is permissible to reduce the kitchen to chaos. In other words, the kitchen can be homely, human and ad hoc. In this sense the text reveals the legacy of the 1930s popular view of modernist, designed kitchens as somehow *alien*.

Patricia Volk's *Stuffed: Growing up in a Restaurant Family* (2002) charts the author's New York Jewish family history in relation to their restaurant (known as 'the store'), their other 'home' and the processes surrounding food. Four generations of the family lived within a six-block radius of 'Morgen's' and just as they are defined geographically by kitchens, the book is spatially structured by food: the 'contents' being, for example, 'cucumber salad' followed by 'scrambled eggs'. Each chapter (memory) is about Volk's relationship with a member of the family and the written text is interspersed with reproductions of old family photographs. The rituals surrounding the preparation of food associated with particular individuals, characterise the text: the grandfather who would first 'dig out the precut segments with a serrated grapefruit spoon...' (p. 118). Imaginatively reconstructed, even the apartment interior is visually edible: 'Our hallway was the color of ballpark mustard. The living room was cocoa, my mother's wall-to-wall, iceberg green' (p. 3).

Visiting her old apartment in New York with her sister, the author specifically asks to see (revisit) the kitchen. Whereas her sister thinks the kitchen is 'exactly the same', to Volk 'it looks tiny. Everything looks tiny' (p. 27). This process of miniaturisation—indeed the miniature itself—'typifies the structure of memory, of childhood [...] like all objects [...] locates a version of the self' (Stewart, 1993, pp. 171–172). Elaborating on the *action* of experienced space on us, Gaston Bachelard comments that distance composes a miniature of a particular place and that 'in distant miniatures, disparate things become reconciled' (Bachelard, 1994 [1958], p. 172); that is, objects appear to coexist harmoniously. Furthermore, due to its smallness, the miniature allows experience to be domesticated and manipulated. Linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and the past, it also represents a version of experience 'protected from contamination' (p. 69). The protected experience can only remain so, though, if boundaries are maintained. That is, if control is exercised over the material conditions of the kitchen.

Later in *Stuffed*, the author's mother visits: 'You've got to fix that kitchen. Your daughter will be bringing boys home soon' (p. 59). The author acknowledges that her kitchen 'looks like hell' (p. 60) with its broken broiler, uninstalled fridge, rusty dishwasher and uneven floor tiles. However, she questions whether she wants her daughter 'to marry a man who won't marry her because of my kitchen?' (p. 60) Where *The Pedant in the Kitchen* reveals the narrator/cook's internalised dilemma between a desire for functioning (mechanical) perfection in the kitchen and a longing for creative (human) unpredictability, *Stuffed* presents us with more explicit, generational opposites. 'Mom' symbolises perfection and newness (rather than the worn, the old), whereas the author is '...unfinished, something she [mum] can't stop sculpting...' (p. 61). The writer cherishes objects which have been repeatedly used over time. In the last chapter she visits the empty restaurant with her Dad after the lease to the 'store' has been sold and asks to take something from the kitchen. The object selected is a huge wooden salad bowl that her favourite Morgen's chef salad was chopped in. 'It has a honey patina and more cross-hatches than a Dürer' (p. 236).

Nora Seton's *The Kitchen Congregation: A Memoir* (2000) can be seen as an anatomy of the domestic kitchen as the heart of the house and of, primarily, women's lives across generations. The chapters chart time and changing space: 'Alone in the Kitchen' leads to 'Too Many in the Kitchen'. In this sense the text represents the kitchen as a refuge and a repository of memories. It is the process of ordinary everyday domestic acts (not necessarily the end product of the meal, though that too will be consumed) and the tips handed down which are important. The kitchen is a place where life was 'learned and absorbed' (p. 38).

The author's mother becomes a piece of the culinary landscape, even to the extent that 'her being was informed by the broad steppe of the open kitchen' and left an 'imprint' (p. 43). Here there is a direct relation to theorists of space and place who regard a 'being-in-the-landscape' as embeddedness. This is achieved by how people 'mark and map through their bodies, through their repeated experiences' (Cloe, 2003, p. 163). The repetition (a defining characteristic of performed improvisation) of actions and experiences is itself repeated in the process of remembering. 'When I miss my mother, I miss her in the kitchen. It is the room I return to again and again, to pull at the cupboards and open the refrigerator door in my mind' (Seton, 2001 [2000], pp. 3–4). Yet, as with the other cultural texts analysed in this chapter, we are cautioned against

romanticising the kitchen (the past): ‘there would be no kitchen to go back to, no familiar size and shape and smell’ (p. 7). There is a shared acknowledgement that objects and interior fittings are constantly rearranged. In *The Kitchen Congregation* the author takes only ‘my memories and two wooden spoons’ (p. 6) which her children chew on. The objects carry the weight of lives lived.

Seton asserts that ‘It’s important not to confuse kitchens with food. Kitchens are about process...When I am alone, no recipe is a means to an end; it is a choreography of connection’ (p. 57). Yet it is also difficult to disassociate food preparation from the space of the kitchen, wherever it is found or from culinary objects and utensils. The story (process) of a food is also about mapping a cultural geography and the formation of multi or cross-cultural identities. Tangible, everyday experiences have the power ‘to evoke the memories on which identities are formed’ (Sutton, 2001, p. 74). Recipes are part of this and should be read as cultural texts, linked to debates about lifestyle and national identity (Floyd & Forster, 2003).

In common with many texts in the culinary fiction genre, recipes feature in the works by Seton, Volk and Rohan Candappa. Yet in memoirs or autobiographical narratives about food, the incorporation of recipes serves multiple functions. The recipe becomes a means of ordering the narrative, excavating family histories and sharing a secret with the reader. Candappa’s *Picklehead: From Ceylon to Suburbia* (2006), subtitled ‘a memoir of food, family and finding yourself’, charts the author’s family’s itinerant history. Candappa’s mother’s recipe for Chicken Kyaukswe, recreated in the text, is a link from 1970s south London to the wandering street sellers in Burma. Moreover, it will lead to ‘artistry’ (p. 30) in the kitchen.

Significantly, the author provides a dissection of his grandmother’s handwritten cookbook, handed to him when embarking on writing *Picklehead*. The book is ‘dilapidated and disintegrating’ (p. 135) and comprises recipes cut from newspapers, a pencil-traced outline of Britain, rhymes, knitting patterns, a list of birthdays, handwritten recipes, and an article entitled ‘All the World’s Cooks in One Kitchen’. These displaced, reassembled elements come to represent a kind of home, rather as ingredients are assembled and their meanings transformed in the alchemy of cooking. In the nostalgia for a long-lost, Anglo-Indian world, the cookbook seems to take on a life of its own. Candappa asserts that ‘all recipes are approximations’ (p. 141), with the sinking realisation (rather than the tempered joy of Barnes) that recreating perfection is an impossibility. Even the instructions on a jar of korma sauce state ‘All cooking

appliances vary in performance” (p. 143), while the author wryly comments that this should also apply to cooks. Shoved at the back of a cupboard (a parallel with Barnes’ ‘drawer of spurned machinery’) gathering dust, behind a Moulinex food processor and other appliances, sits the author’s grandmother’s pestle and mortar. On the rare occasions that the author uses the pestle and mortar, ‘the very action of twisting and turning, with irresistible force into an immovable object, feels like at last I am doing something real. I’m getting in touch with something I’ve lost’ (p. 144). This object, what it embodies, and the actions of using it, are a stark contrast with the mass-produced sterility of the jar of Sainsbury’s korma sauce, bought for a chicken curry, and the collection of underused cookbooks with glossy colour pictures on a shelf in Candappa’s kitchen. As Nicola Humble (2005) points out, cookbooks have historically been repositories of fantasy, as well as revealing the eating habits of a nation.

### CONTROLLED CREATIVITY

A key issue in the construction of identities played out among, and in relation to, the ‘stuff’ of the kitchen is the perceived tension between control (the fixed or designed) and change (time or creativity). The objects and furnishings—what we might term the paraphernalia of the kitchen—resonate with this domestic paradox. In Golsoncott, the ‘house unlocked’ of Lively’s text, the kitchen illustrates the change—contemporary with the re-evaluation of domestic design practices from the 1920s to 1950s—from an unplanned kitchen to an efficient workspace. In *The Pedant in the Kitchen*, the author constructs himself as an ‘anxious pedant’ on a quest for precision in the kitchen. Yet although he is reluctant to rely on himself, he also yearns for creative freedom, for release from enslavement to the recipe book and the latest kitchen gadget. Whereas the writer is, to a degree, able to organise a kitchen library, he is less able to sort objects and implements, which seem to move undetected between one space and another in the kitchen. As theorists of material culture have argued, things appear to take on lives of their own particularly in the domestic imaginary. It is therefore important to pay attention to the material imaginary (representations of the home) in order to better understand human-object relations.

The texts discussed in this chapter are illustrative of the ways in which the kitchen speaks to a wider cultural validation of chaos, or at least an imperfect (rather than perfect) creativity. In another kitchen

text—Bobby Baker’s performance piece *Kitchen Show* (1991)—a mischievous improvisation of kitchen behaviours is something to celebrate. Highlighting the heroism of ordinary domestic and culinary routines, Baker’s performed tasks take on a surreal dimension, to the extent that boundaries between artist and domestic worker break down. It can be argued, then, that a malfunctioning kitchen is a metaphor for the culinary process, and the constant adaptability of living: ‘making do with what you’ve got’ (Barnes, 2003, p. 127).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated, across a range of texts, the tensions between the kitchen as a designed interior and as a space which facilitates creative thinking and practice. As further illustration of this, we can turn to Bent Hamer’s film *Kitchen Stories* (2003), contemporary with Barnes’ *The Pedant in the Kitchen*. The tensions (revealed in Barnes’ text) between the quest for precision in the kitchen and a desire to escape from efficiency’s demands are given an absurd dimension in Hamer’s film. *Kitchen Stories* draws on post-war research on the efficiency of the Swedish housewife, to explore what happens if the efficiency researchers of the Swedish Home Institute instead observe and chart the kitchen habits of single men in Norway. However, the aim of rationalising the behaviour of bachelors in the kitchen is frustrated at every point. Reminiscent of AMPS (the assessment of motor and process skills), the official observer, Folke Nilsson (perched on an umpire’s chair in the kitchen) observes the movements of the reluctant farmer, Isak, over a six-week period. Mostly silent, and in an ‘undesigned’ kitchen, Isak adapts objects and behaviours to suit his own purposes. He sits at the table smoking a pipe, never cooks in the kitchen (there is a ring in his bedroom), and when the telephone rings he doesn’t answer. In the end, the observer and observed swap places, and the two men become friends.

The *contents* of the kitchen, and their relation to memory and interior worlds, I have argued, are underpinned by a mythologised, ideal kitchen. Janet Floyd has drawn attention to how, in the 1990s, British television cookery programmes in particular presented a view of the supposedly ‘domestic’ kitchen (inhabited solely by the professional cook and presenter, ‘at home’) as an ideal (and aesthetic) to aspire towards (2004, p. 64). Yet the image constructed—of ‘ambiguous, half-defined spaces’—is devoid of human interaction, clutter and mess (p. 63).

An increased focus on the kitchen as symbolic of a lifestyle—rather than as the enabler of styling a life—is increasingly evident in British television cookery programmes of the first decades of the twenty-first century. The supermodel and writer Sophie Dahl’s six-part television series ‘The Delicious Miss Dahl’ (2010) conjures up an arcadian ideal, characterised by the desire to share—and return to—the tastes of childhood. Ironically, the kitchen—reviewed as the star of the show—was not Miss Dahl’s, but the centrepiece of a north London house on the market, and rented for the series. Contrasting in size, the little kitchen of cookery writer and chef Rachel Khoo was the *raison d’être* for the bestselling book and television series ‘The Little Paris Kitchen’ (2012). The limited dimensions of a ‘real’ domestic space are seen as the very conditions which produce enhanced creativity and inventiveness.

Inventiveness—and irony—also characterise recent kitchen texts. Following in the surreal footsteps of Bobby Baker, Company Gavin Robertson’s physical theatre piece *A Space Oddity* (2010) uses two men and a kitchen to explore the world of science fiction and cult movies. At centre stage are ordinary kitchen implements, recontextualised as spacecraft. In this sense the performance echoes the comedians Morecambe and Wise’s 1976 *Breakfast Sketch*, where kitchen implements and food-stuffs feature in a dance around the kitchen, in a parody of striptease. The neuroses of cookery writers are parodied in comedian Miles Jupp’s BBC Radio Four series *In and Out of the Kitchen* (first broadcast in 2011), while the pretensions of television chefs are parodied in the 2003 BBC Two series *Posh Nosh*. In their country house kitchen, festooned with faux greenery, self-styled celebrity chefs Minty and Simon Marchmont like to think they are bringing ‘extraordinary food to ordinary people’. Even the instruments of this endeavour do not escape a send-up in Minty’s food philosophy: ‘take your ceramic bone-bowl down from the dresser. Grab the dessert spoon from the antique drawer that’s been in your family for generations. Food is for everyone. Enjoy!’ (BBC, 2014).

As I have suggested, the nostalgia of what could be termed the ‘kitchen memoir’ is not locked into the past or interior, but is defined through embodiment and lived practice. Edwin Heathcote has highlighted the kitchen as being at the heart of the paradox between the ‘homely’ and the ‘high-tech’ and psychologically linked to the notion of ‘miraculous transformation’ (Heathcote, 2012, pp. 59–60). I have adapted this idea in consideration of the extent to which unpredictability

(where the *agency* of kitchen clutter is viewed as creative rather than problematic) can be incorporated and lived within a home. If the kitchen is not fixed, either spatially or ideologically, its meanings are also multiple and unpredictable. Ultimately, it is both a laboratory for creativity expressed in multifarious ways, and a space which facilitates reverie: as the blurb on the back cover of *The Kitchen Congregation* states, ‘while the hands are busy, the mind is free to roam.’

## NOTES

1. See AbeBooks (2015) *Fiction in the Kitchen: 30 Culinary Novels*. <http://www.abebooks.co.uk/books/cooking-culinary-cooks-chocolat/fiction-kitchen.shtml>. Accessed 31 March 2015; Goodreads (2015) *Popular Culinary Fiction Books*. <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/culinary-fiction>. Accessed 31 March 2015.
2. Lifestyle articles such as John Hind’s ‘From fork to fork: five cooks and their kitchen gardens’ in the lifestyle section of *The Guardian* (23 August 2015); or Francine Raymond’s ‘Urban kitchen gardens: fine food in small places’ in the lifestyle section of *The Telegraph*.

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