

Tales from the Kitchen Drawers

The Microphysics of Modernities in Swedish Kitchens

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The rather short history of the domestic kitchen as we know it is imprinted with values and practices from different epochs in modern history. The condensed nature of the kitchen, where artefacts emerging from different contexts coexist, offers an entry point for the study of cultural processes.

As part of a study of the changing meal and cooking habits,¹ questions about the role of artefacts in the kitchen emerged. What stories did the artefacts tell? Could the changing material landscape in the kitchen say something about daily life in different epochs, how food culture was developed, practiced, negotiated, and transformed? The aim of the article is to analyse changing practices and symbolic values related to the material objects in kitchens.

Kitchen, Artefacts and Cooking

Although neither kitchens nor cooking have been among the most prestigious research fields in cultural sciences (or any other research field for that matter), the development of food and design studies in recent decades has provided extensive research on different aspects of kitchen culture.

As an arena for conflicting interests and power struggles, the kitchen has been studied from different perspectives. Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren (1985, 1987), in their studies of the rise of the middle class in Sweden in the early 1900s, note how the kitchen became an arena for the struggle for modern values such as rationality and hygiene. Conflicting views of middle- and working-class relations to the kitchen were an important aspect of housing policies in the emerg-

ing welfare state. A similar perspective, but more focused on the design of the modern kitchen, has guided Rita Mielke (2005) in her study of the making of the modern kitchen. The ideas about the kitchen as a rational production unit was an important feature in the development of the kitchen (see also Lövgren 1993; Kjellman 1993).

The modernization of domestic life was part of an ideology of national progress in the Scandinavian countries in the twentieth century. The studies of Frykman and Löfgren mentioned above show some striking similarities to studies on Norway (Gullestad 1991), Finland (Saarikangas 1993) and Denmark (Thorndahl 2008). However, some national differences were also highlighted during the processes of modernization and standardization. Anders Linde-Laursen (2011:204ff) shows how the development of different kitchen standards, and thus different practices of dishwashing, in Sweden and Denmark led to notions of national differences, even though the standards were developed from the same ideal – the modern, hygienic and rational kitchen.

Elisabeth Shove's (2007) works on the design of everyday life include the theme of "the restless kitchen". According to Shove, the kitchen has become a projection of dreams of the good life. June Freeman (2004) has also studied the process of refurnishing kitchens, describing the dominant role that women in her study played in shaping the appearance of a new kitchen. The kitchen as a gendered space is Freeman's focus. While kitchens have been (and often still) belong to the female sphere, Nicklas Neuman (2016) and Marcus Klasson and Sofia Ulver (2015) inves-

tigate how men are gradually conquering the kitchen space, as a result of the growing interest in gastronomy and male television chefs as role models. Expensive knives and hi-tech utensils like siphons, as well as cooking practices such as sourdough bread and homemade sausages are tools for the regendering of kitchens and cooking.

Richard Wilk (2010) has discussed the power dimension of meals. Among other things, he points out the interconnectedness between people, artefacts, and food. Holding the casserole or pot and serving the members of the family (a common practice for mothers in many settings) is an effective way of controlling personal relations and maintaining hierarchies around the dinner table.

Despite the fascination for professional chefs, Gary Alan Fine (1996) is one of few scholars who has actually provided ethnographic descriptions of cooking in restaurants. Of interest here is Fine's notion of how different the cooking practices, and especially the utensils, are when one compares domestic and restaurant cooking.

Frances Short (2006) discusses the meanings of cooking and deconstructs the popular ideas of declining cooking skills in households. Besides the fact that very few studies about the practical knowledge of domestic cooking exist, there are no clear definitions of what cooking means, and especially not *cooking from scratch*. It is a fluid concept that is more a rhetorical tool for certain morally laden values than an actual description of cooking practices. The kitchen as an arena for morality, which few have studied but many have strong opinions

about, will become visible in the forthcoming ethnographies.

The Material

The empirical material for this article is a combination of questionnaires, interviews and observations. The bulk of the material comes from open-ended questionnaires, which have been used in the collection and documentation purposes of the Folklife Archive at Lund University since 1932. The questionnaires are sent out 3–4 times a year, on diverse topics. At present, there are 130 respondents, and each questionnaire usually generates between 70 and 90 responses, essayistic in form and with an average of 4–6 pages in length. The questionnaires are distributed to the archive's network of "solid respondents" (Hagström & Marander Eklund 2005). A questionnaire about the meal order (LUF 242), designed by the author, was sent out in 2016. It was distributed in two versions, one digital short version, and one regular (as described above). The idea was to make use of previously collected material to allow comparisons.

Meal orders, cooking and kitchen artefacts are one of the best-covered fields of study in Swedish ethnology. The folklife archives have collected material about artefacts and practices of daily life ever since the start in the early decades of the twentieth century. It began as a documentation of vanishing cultural practices, aimed at kitchens without industrially manufactured equipment. In the 1970s and 1980s, a new round of collection focused on transitions from the mid-war and post-war period.

The previously collected material was examined and used for the design of a sur-

vey to collect contemporary material, suitable for historical comparisons. By reusing questions from questionnaires from 1972 (S 27) and 1988 (M 239), the 2016 questionnaire was developed to allow comparisons in time. In total, the responses from the questionnaires cover a period of a hundred years of cooking and eating in Sweden.

Seventy answers have been registered for the traditional questionnaire, and the same number for the online version. Participant observations in domestic kitchens have been conducted, but these have only been used as background material. Twenty-seven interviews, conducted in 2015–2016, constitute the other main source of material. Complementing the questionnaires, the interviews allowed follow-up questions and reflections from the informants about things that did not immediately come to mind while describing kitchen practices. It opened up for the analysis of visible and invisible changing of practice, especially in the sections about the “restless kitchen” and “kitchen dumpster diving”. As a guest teacher at the University of Iceland in February 2017 I assigned students to document artefacts in the kitchen that were rarely used. This material is used for the “kitchen dumpster diving” section, in addition to the interviews and questionnaires from informants in Sweden. The Icelandic material shows similar patterns to the Swedish material. The artefacts brought up by the Icelandic students were all to be found in Swedish kitchens. It shows how the modernization of the kitchens took similar paths in the Scandinavian countries, sharing similar experiences of social engineering, the de-

velopment of the welfare state and the embracing of modernity.

The Microphysics of Modernities

Kitchens are in constant transformation. From the open-fire kitchens via the rational laboratories of the 1950s to the designed kitchens with expensive appliances of the 2000s, everything from the basic spatial design to the smallest of tools has changed. The drawers and cupboards of the informants’ households reminded me of archaeological excavations, as the different layers of time became visible. There is a dynamic when new artefacts emerge, some are abandoned, others revitalized. What can these changes tell us from a cultural-analytical perspective? A modernity theory approach will be used to try to uncover the patterns behind the supposedly trivial kitchen artefacts.

Modernity and its presumed later incarnation post- or late-modernity were at the core of cultural theory in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars such as David Harvey (1989), Anthony Giddens (1991), Zygmunt Bauman (1997), Scott Lash (1999) and many more tried to capture the logic of the cultural changes in the twentieth century. Theories of modernity acknowledge the mutual interdependence of value systems and technological and societal development. An important starting point for modernity theory was Max Weber’s classical work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958), where Weber argues for the importance of studying the value system of Northern European Protestantism as a way to understand the development of modern capitalism. Following a Weberian approach, modernity can be described as an era during which indus-

trialism plays a significant role in production as well as in consumer mentality. Standardization, rationality, and the belief that society is making progress due to the development of science, technology and engineering were critical elements of the initial phase of modernity (Weber 1958). An important contribution of Weber was his discussion about how modernity led to a “disenchantment” (Weber 1963). It was not only the formal religious institutions and practices that were challenged by modernity. Perhaps even more important was the abandoning of magic rituals in everyday life, building on a folk belief that everything from the making of butter to illnesses relied on supernatural forces that were constantly active and present.

The second phase of modernity, labelled “post”, “late” or “second” modernity, is claimed to be characterized by diversification and continual transformation. The travel of goods, ideas and values over long distances in short spans of time gives rise to a space-time compression, while the increasing volume of consumer goods creates an environment that facilitates the blending of artefacts from different epochs. Consumer confidence in science, technology, and progress is thereby undermined and is superseded by a combination of an increased risk awareness (where risks often are associated with technological development), nostalgia, and an increased focus on hedonistic experiences. The mass production and standardization of the first modernity was followed by variety and differentiation in late/post/second modernity.

The historical chronology of modernity has been debated. Scott Lash (1999) contends that such conjecture is not produc-

tive and prefers to discuss modernities (which he defines as the first and second modernities) as different rationalities rather than distinct historical epochs. As such, the first and second modernities can exist simultaneously in different contexts.

After the new millennium, much of the discussions in cultural theory took other paths. In the field of food culture, however, it seemed as if it was difficult to skirt round modernity. Works such as Fonte (2002), Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007), Ekelund and Jönsson (2011), Spaargaren et al. (2012) and Coghlan (2014), continued to use the modernity theory framework. It seemed as if it was something about the food itself, the cooking practices, and the utensils that made modernity theory a good tool to use if one sought to understand the disruptive changes of meals and cooking practices during the last few decades. Building on Scott Lash, Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2010) discusses how the concept of first and second modernities is relevant for understanding the meaning of cooking and meals in a contemporary context. Kaufmann claims that the first modernity taught us to save time, to streamline, rationalize, and focus on life in work and the public sphere. This leads to a meal ideal consisting of convenient and fast food requiring minimal preparation. The second modernity is characterized by the importance of emotionality, experiences, and self-fulfilment, which turned cooking into a lifestyle project with an emphasis on taste and culinary experiences.

With this framework, I have studied the artefacts and practices of the kitchen, in order to understand the materialization of different modernities in everyday life. In

the following, case studies of the microphysics of modernity will be investigated. The first section deals with technology shifts, and how these affect cooking, the kitchen, and the meal order. However, some of the practices in the kitchens have not been changed by disruptive technologies entering the scene, but have remained basically the same. A case study of one such practice, whisking, leads to a discussion of how both practices and the artefacts themselves have been affected by the rationalities of modernity. The re-design and fashion objects from the kitchen boom in last few decades are examined in a section about restless kitchen. These objects are in turn contrasted with the objects left behind, collecting dust in the drawers and cupboards, accessible only by “kitchen dumpster diving”. The combination of nostalgia and hi-tech is the final topic in the article, leading to a concluding discussion about kitchens as laboratories for modern rationalities.

Technology Shifts, the Kitchen, and the Meal Order

Technological shifts alter both food and cooking. One such example is the transition from open fire to the stove. Without much thought it is obvious that fried foods became more common than when almost everything had to be prepared in the same big pot, hanging over the fire. But the technology shifts affected more than the preparation of food. More importantly, the division of the meal into several components was facilitated. From cooking root crops, vegetables and meat in a pot, the components were split into meat, potatoes, gravy and vegetables. The ideal of how a “proper meal” would be composed

changed. If Mary Douglas (1972) had conducted her groundbreaking study on the meal fifty or a hundred years earlier, the answers to the question of what is a “proper meal” would have been significantly different. Most likely a proper meal would have been formulated as different varieties of pot-au-feu.

There is also a spatial dimension to the introduction of the stove. It would probably not have occurred if it has not been for the introduction of new ways of heating. The kitchen as we know it today, a separate room in a house or an apartment, is quite a new phenomenon. Apart from the wealthiest households, the heating of food and the heating of house came from the same source, the open fire in the middle of the house (or hut). The tiled stove with its superior way of heating created a spatial revolution in domestic life (at least for the ones that could afford it). The kitchen as a separate sphere, which was so important for the emerging middle class, with its connotations of femininity and low-status manual labour (see Frykman & Löfgren 1987) would not have been possible without the new ways of organizing cooking and heating.

If we move on in time, the same processes of interconnected changes of technology, cooking, meals and space can be traced. After World War II, kitchens were filled with technological innovations that made their mark on the kitchen work. Refrigerators, freezers and electrical stoves were important technological changes that affected both domestic work and ultimately the food that was cooked and served. The refrigerator, and its larger counterparts in the form of refrigerated containers and cold stores which could transport and

store perishables in the earlier parts of the food chain, led to an increase in the proportion of fresh products. The freezer enabled new ways of preserving goods like vegetables and fish instead of resorting to drying, salting, or preservation in jars. It also meant that the number of times when meals had to be cooked could be reduced. Meals could be frozen, as could bread and buns, and then taken out and warmed even by household members who were not skilled in cooking. In the 1980s came the microwave oven, which facilitated individualized eating by making it easy to heat up food if for various reasons a person could not or did not want to eat at the same time as the other members of the household.

The new technologies also affected the surrounding objects. “The electric stove meant that older pans were unusable because of their uneven bottoms, new ones had to be procured” (M239, 35025). There is a direct parallel to today’s upgrade of the stoves: “Three years ago I switched to an apartment with an induction stove, so I had to buy new pots and pans” (Interview No. 16). Another informant mentions that the pressure cooker became outdated after the introduction of the induction stove (Interview No. 15).

A similar phenomenon is the mixer or blender. It partly replaced previous tools like food mills and double blade chopping knives. It was also a driving force for new eating habits. Several informants mention smoothies as the most common use of a blender. The smoothie is an innovation not only in terms of preparation, transforming fruit salad into a drinkable fluid. It also facilitates an eating pattern where more meals are snacks, easily consumed

standing or walking on the way to the bus or train, or in the car.

However, the rationalities of kitchen work do not have to be related to technological shifts. Even some of the most primitive practices can contain clues for understanding the transformation of kitchen experiences. We will turn our attention to one such practice: whisking.

Whisking Modernities

An informant in a questionnaire answered the question about whether he missed any tools or appliances by saying that he missed his *tvara*. For readers unfamiliar with traditional Scandinavian kitchen utensils, a *tvara* can be described as a sort of whisk, made from tops of a young pine or fir-tree. The material was available to anyone living in a rural region. Peeling the needles and shaping the *tvaras* was a typical task for winter days, when outdoor work was only possible for a few hours due to the darkness. The shape of the *tvara* made it very efficient in pots with round bottoms, typically used in an open-fire kitchen where the pots hung from the ceiling. The informant mentions how excellent it was for making barley porridge. The stickiness of the porridge made cooking a delicate practice, but the *tvara* was designed to clear the inside of the pot to prevent burning. Since the *tvaras* were handmade, many different varieties could be found, and other names were used in different regions. But the similarities in both cooking practices and utensils were greater than the differences.

The *tvara* was more than a whisk. It was also one of the artefacts most heavily loaded with symbolic value in Nordic folklore. In one of the common tales the

tvåra could be used to unravel a troll. Trolls were known to capture a child, then taking its place in a family as a changeling. If anyone suspected their child to be a changeling, they could make a really long tvåra and put it down the chimney to stir the pot. Then the troll would expose itself by starting to laugh and say with the voice of a troll, “that was a long whisk for a small pot”. In another version of the tale, the tvåra should be used in an empty eggshell. Then it was a big whisk instead of a long one, but the same message – by doing something really odd, the changeling would forget about the disguise and expose itself as a troll (Persson 1977).

The tvåra was thus not only a cooking utensil, but an artefact which could be attributed magic qualities. It is a good example of what can be called pre-modern enchantment as Weber (1963) defined it. The tvåra was attached to the overarching meanings, animistic connections (the trolls) and magical expectations that characterized the traditional world. Following modernity theory, such connotations were about to fade out as a result of the modern processes of rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization. So what happened to whisking in the first modernity?

During the gradual modernization of the Swedish kitchens, the tvåra became outdated. The electric stoves required ground flat pots, in where the tvåra was no longer a good tool. Barley porridge went the same way. Industrially produced rolled oats and semolina took over as the main ingredients of the porridge. For modern times, new utensils were needed. During the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of industrialized or semi-industrialized varieties in metal

were introduced on the market. But how rational were the whisks, really? This was a matter of concern for the social engineers in the emerging welfare state. As it turns out, the story of whisking is not as straightforward as simply a transition from hand made to industrialized. The symbolic qualities of whisks were still there, but in another context.

In 1944, the Domestic Research Institute (Hemmens Forskningsinstitut, HFI) was founded. Inspired by similar institutes in Germany, Norway and the US, the aim of HFI was to rationalize domestic labour (Lövgren 1993). An important task that HFI undertook was to evaluate utensils on the market and, if possible, replace them with more functional varieties. One of the first of HFI's reports was a critical review of whisks on the Swedish market (HFI 1948). With a scientific approach, the varieties were tested by the qualified staff of HFI. Over forty different types of whisks had been found. This led HFI to conclude that there was an *overflow of varieties*. Such diversity is now generally interpreted as something positive, as a freedom of choice for consumers. For HFI, it was just confusing for the consumers, making it difficult to rationalize domestic cooking. HFI advocated that the overflow of varieties should be dealt with. The scientific studies concluded that only two types of whisks could be considered to be rational. These were the spiral whisk and the balloon whisk. The balloon whisk was primarily suited to larger households and professional cooking, while the spiral whisk was ideal for an average household with up to three children.

For a contemporary reader, accustomed to the numerous reports and recommenda-

tions published without much notice from the public, one would imagine that the influence of HFI's report on whisks would be rather limited. But the strong networks behind HFI, where not only experts in domestic labour, but also representatives from industry, retail, politicians, home economics teachers and others joined forces, made some dramatic impact on domestic labour in Sweden. In 1950 HFI published recommendations for basic equipment and additional equipment for the kitchen. The very same recommendations were enclosed as an attachment to one of the questionnaires used as source material in this article, the 1988 questionnaire on kitchen utensils and appliances. After more than thirty years, most respondents could well relate to the equipment. With the exception of the coffee pot and milk jug, the standard equipment of the 1950s was virtually identical to that of the late 1980s. One reason for the successful standardization of kitchen appliances was that HFI worked in close collaboration with the R&D departments of the major retail chains. These chains had both the will and capacity, not only to sell the products, but to start manufacturing in their own industries. Through the extensive work of national standardization and industrial production, the selection of products became rather limited. From a fairly diversified flora of cookware, most households in Sweden came to be united by the similar experiences of what was in the kitchen cupboards and drawers.

There are indeed processes related to modernity involved in the history of whisking. A bureaucracy in the shape of HFI, with rationalization and standardization as ideology, and the networks of the

industrial society led to a remarkable standardization of the equipment. The spiral whisk became dominant in households, while the balloon whisk dominated in restaurants and other professional cooking arenas. Needless to say, the whisk was disenchanted; no connection between the spiral whisk and the supernatural could be found.

HFI's fight against the overflow of varieties was successful, but only for a short period. The number of items increased again, and the ambitions of the social engineers were ridiculed. HFI went through a number of reorganizations and was finally transformed into the National Consumer Agency in 1973. The aim was then no longer to lead the development, rather to control the actors and educate the general public. The movie *Kitchen Stories* from 2003 tells a heartbreaking story about an HFI mission to Norway (Köstlin 2017). A bureaucrat from HFI is installed in a hut, inhabited by an old bachelor. He is drawing maps of how the old man moves in the kitchen. Needless to say, the moves are very irrational. It is clear from the start that the sympathy is not with HFI. It is rather the pre-modern bachelor that is the role model. The bureaucrat gradually gets convinced that his life is too strict, controlled and boring and starts to long for a more authentic life. It is indeed a late modern way of looking at the ambitions to secure a better life through rationalization.

Another late modern characteristic is said to be the deconstruction of the borders that were guarded in modernity. A side effect of the whisk case was that differences between different types of cooking (private and professional) were manifested. Working as a chef in the 1980s,

one of the most obvious differences from the cooking I have experienced in the home was the balloon whisks. These, as in restaurant kitchens were considered to be the only whisks worthy of the name, had been relegated from Swedish homes, through the influence of HFI and its network. By whisking, a generation or two of Swedish citizens learnt the differences between domestic and professional cooking.

It was a gendered division, too. Domestic cooking was for women, while at least some parts of professional cooking were considered to be masculine. When the male TV chefs entered the private arena in the 1990s, a number of new ingredients and utensils conquered the home. Among them was the balloon whisk, preferably hanging on an S shaped hook, imitating the design of a restaurant kitchen. With the balloon whisk, a new generation of domestic cooks learned that cooking is not primarily about housekeeping, but about sensory sensations, experiences and self-realization.

The new generation was to an increasing extent male. Sweden is one of the most gender-equal nations when it comes to cooking. The preparation of meals, which not long ago was considered to be a female task, was in 2015 almost equally distributed in the younger cohorts in a big quantitative study of domestic labour in the Nordic countries (Holm et al. 2015). Nicklas Neuman (2016), who has studied cooking practices among Swedish men, found that cooking has become a way of expressing values of gender equality. In order to do so, the men turned to the only male role models that could be found in cooking, the male top chefs in the restaurant world. The upgrading of gastronomy

in domestic cooking (Jönsson 2012) is thus not only a result of commercial forces and cooking as entertainment in a new media landscape, but also about a will to find new gender roles.

Among the features of the late- or post-modern condition is the diversification and the restlessness of the consumer society. It would not be fair to argue that there is a diversification only by adding a balloon whisk to the bowl. But there are indeed other whisks that have been introduced during the last decades. One such is the cappuccino whisk, and its sister (or possibly brother), the milk frother. With these whisks, a new generation was skimming milk, at the same time creating an image of breaking up from previous generations of boring, thrifty and inward-looking Swedes. Milk, long considered to be a symbol of the nation (Jönsson 2005) became ridiculed if drunk from a glass during a meal. If, on the other hand, it was heated, whipped and blended with an eighth of strong coffee and served in a glass (preferably not in a cup, at least not a small cup looking like a typical Swedish coffee cup), it was trendy, cosmopolitan and gastronomically correct.

With balloon whisks, cappuccino whisks, milk skimmers and other variants in the diversity of the second modernity, the informants learnt the new ideals about indulging in everyday life. Ideally, there should be no boring days. Even a Monday morning deserves some glory, and a fresh cappuccino when getting out of bed is perhaps not the worst strategy. But it does indeed take some energy and commitment to indulge oneself at all times. The new artefacts came with images of a good life, but often ended up as being reminders of

something one could do when having more time. The re-enchantment of the whisks rarely lasts long. After a while they end up as yet another artefact, of which there are already too many.

The overflow of varieties is one of the most common everyday experiences of contemporary life (Czarniawska & Löfgren 2015). When it comes to kitchen utensils, one of the most common strategies seem to be to shove them into the drawers or cupboards. The milk frother was actually one of the items that informants singled out as not being particularly useful. Even for someone who could really enjoy a good cappuccino, it was just lying there in the cupboard, collecting dirt. Skimmed milk became an ideal rather than a reality during the stressful mornings in the domestic kitchens. This is another key feature of the late modern kitchens – dealing with the overflow. We will now look at how consumption practices are dealt with in contemporary kitchens.

A Restless Kitchen?

Elisabeth Shove noted how kitchen interiors were replaced every seventh year, in contrast to previous habits of replacing them after 20 years or more. With the term “restless kitchen” she analysed how kitchens have acquired a new role as a projection of a search for the good life. Indeed, most informants find that their kitchen equipment has changed a lot during their lifespan. One person says that as his interest in cooking has increased, so has the amount of kitchen equipment:

When I was young and moved away from home ... I did not have much stuff then. I think I got my first electric mixer when I was twenty-six or something. Now I've got much more kitchen uten-

sils but I also cook more food too than I did then (Interview no. 18).

Another person says that kitchen equipment has changed a lot and gives examples such as the dishwasher, convection oven and egg boiler. The blender, digital scales, kitchen aids and almond choppers are other examples of change. An older respondent tells of a comprehensive development throughout life. She says that the first thing she bought when she left home and lived in a room with a hot plate (no kitchen) was a red tin mug. “The equipment was very minimal for several years and then gradually emerged. Nowadays, the kitchen cupboards are full of stuff” (Interview no. 5).

Shove has a point in the idea of the restless kitchen. Although it costs a small fortune to replace kitchen furniture even today, both the supply of products and the opportunity to gain inspiration for innovation are significantly larger than before. It is easy via an Internet connection to get a guided virtual tour of a large number of kitchens. Previous generations had to rely on other sources of inspiration such as the mobile exhibitions that went to rural areas. These exhibitions, together with the stores' window displays, became places where the possibility for renewal was made visible. At the same time, nothing says that these kitchen displays did not function as projections of a good life. The social engineer's visions of a new modern life was also an idea of a swift route to a new, modern and happier life. Not everyone, however, favours renewal, at least not for its own sake. Most informants say that they don't have any fancy design or interior. At the same time as the new items can be tempting, there is also a sort of re-

sistance against too much change in the space of daily life. “The kitchen should not be subject to fads. It should work” (ULMA 35024). That is not to say that kitchens don’t change. Even small items can make quite a dramatic impact on the daily habits, also for the more conservative. A woman says that she found new technical equipment difficult but admits that it can be handy when she has grown accustomed to it:

in terms of technical equipment or stuff, according to my son I’m hostile to technology (laughs)... I got a hand blender a few years ago and I thought: No, why should I want that? I have an old potato press, it will do well. But I have accepted it, and find it quite good. You can make funny little things with broccoli and all sorts of vegetables. As purees that can be soup base and the like. It takes some time for me to accept new things. (Laughs) I have become more tolerant towards new utensils (Interview no. 7).

It was not easy to obtain information about cookware and appliances in the interviews. Their triviality made the theme difficult to reflect on. Even the ones used several times a day were more or less invisible. One informant who lives with his parents has to think about the equipment he uses:

there is not much equipment here, well there is ... a toaster! And knives, pans, pots, no blender [...] We have a deep fryer. It’s getting a little old ... so it has been quite a long time since it was used, so it’s a little dirty (Interview no. 19).

After some consideration, most were of course able to say something about the kitchen artefacts. Frying pans, knives, and pots were mentioned frequently. So was the kettle, used not only for tea but also for boiling water when some of the younger informants cook pasta. Electric mixer, stove, oven, cutting board are other im-

portant things, and so are food processors, spatulas, garlic press, peeler, refrigerator, dishwasher and microwave ovens. Even the most unglamorous items have a place in the mind. A 23-year-old man who was asked, “What cookware and kitchen appliances do you use most?” answered; “Kitchenware ... well, since I wash up a lot (laughter) I guess that it is the dish brush” (Interview no. 10).

Most of the informants’ views of shopping must be a bit of a nightmare for any retailer with premium-priced luxury design. When asked how much resources they spend on interior design and appliances, some say they do not use the kitchen appliances often and that their equipment is simple. The reasons may vary. One informant says that the household does not spend a lot of resources on kitchenware, and they do not have a lot of stuff they do not use, while another person also says that they do not invest a lot of resources in kitchen objects, but for another reason. There is already so much in the cabinets that is not used.

Discussions about late modern consumption have a tendency to focus on the glamorous items, made to shine as a sign of identity. There are informants who have chefs’ knives on magnetic holders, pata negra ham on a stand, and spend both time and money on redecorating the kitchen. But the vast majority have a more relaxed attitude, not least because they have more or less everything they need, and more. What unites rich and poor, trendy and traditional, hipsters and retirees is the fact that they have a lot in the drawers that they don’t use. We will now turn our attention to the kitchen items that have been put to rest.

Kitchen Dumpster Diving

The cultural biography of things, as Igor Kopytoff (1986) developed the concept, indicates the changing meanings of things. They could be filled with meaning, emptied, and new meanings added. Kitchen items get abandoned, reused or recycled for different purposes. I wanted to get access to the dark spots of the kitchen by asking about which artefacts informants had, but seldom or never used or perhaps even dumped. I became inspired by the concept of dumpster diving, where people try to retrieve useful things hidden or thrown away in containers. What is actually there, in the bottom of kitchen drawers or at the rear end of the cupboards in people's kitchen? This task was also given to a class of folklore students as part of a guest lecturer visit to the University of Iceland.

It was actually easier to get the informants to reflect on the tools and equipment they do not use, than of those they employ. Most respondents report that they have had utensils they have thrown away. Mixer, toast-maker, ice cream maker, food processor, coffee maker, blender, waffle iron, deep fryer, vegetable peeler, food processor, hand chopper, electric corkscrew, bread maker, pressure cooker, wok, steam juicer, mandolin, meat grinder, kettle, coffee grinder, kitchen scales and juicer are some of the objects mentioned. Fondue pots, bread makers and woks are other examples. Reasons for objects to be discarded, given away or put away vary. It could be that they serve no function, they can be too complicated to clean (such as the kitchen aid or the deep fryer) or that the informants have bought

new equipment or appliances that made them less useful.

The semi-automatic appliances also seem to be overrepresented in the category of unused artefacts. They were often launched as a budget version, neither giving the full value of rational production as the automatic ones, nor the handicraft feeling of knives and such.

But how did all these unnecessary things enter the kitchen? Apparently, many of them were not purchased by the informants, but had come in the shape of gifts. With gifts come special obligations, making them difficult to throw away. They are annoying items, collecting dirt, at the same time a reminder of social relations with other people. People that perhaps should have shown better judgement than to give away such things...

Marcel Mauss's analysis of the gift may be of explanatory value for the gift problem. "The gift is thus something that must be given, that must be received, and that is, at the same time, dangerous to accept. The gift itself constitutes an irrevocable link especially when it is a gift of food" (Mauss 1950:58). The kitchen appliances are not food, but still linked to the production of meals. And it is indeed still a delicate balance. On the one hand you have the risk of giving away something a person already has in his or her possession. If not, you run the risk that the item is useless, since most people hopefully have the items needed for cooking. To not accept a gift is impolite, so they remain in the drawers as a reminder of the irrevocable link with family members and friends, yet sometimes threatening the trustful relationship.

But even if you manage to find a useful gift that is not already in the possession of the receiver, problems may occur. A girl who received an electric whisk as a gift from her boyfriend found it offensive. She took it as a hidden message that she was not taking care of the household in an appropriate way.

Things to be used only for special occasions is another theme where artefacts seem to face a high risk of not being used. They are also difficult to get rid of, especially if they are inherited from ancestors. It is not only the respect for the older generations who baked complicated cakes, taking time to prepare butter in artistic shapes and making sausages by hand. Their utensils are also a connection to memories, often good ones. They are reminders of the possibility to put in some extra effort once in a while, and try to create the same magic as grandmother or some other relative once did when they were young. This leads us to the final theme of the tales from the kitchen drawers, that of nostalgia.

Nostalgia in Hi-tech Kitchens

Jean Baudrillard outlined two distinctive features of postmodern consumption: “firstly the nostalgia for origins, and secondly the obsession with authenticity” (1998:76). While nostalgia is present all through the different phases of modernity, it has a distinctive presence in the last phase. A comparison between the questionnaires of 1972 and 1988 shows how nostalgia became more prominent in the 1980s. The values attached to rationalization and standardization were no longer positive. There was a longing for something more and a growing desire to get

unique experiences related to food and meals. The work with time-saving equipment and design clearly had not always been successful in providing greater satisfaction in housework. “I think that housework is actually something you can do with pleasure if you have time. If you haven’t got the time, it’s no fun and machines are no fun either – even if they rationalized everything” (M239 / 35015). Technology and equipment were at this time, at least in some circles, regarded as a problem, in order to get an authentic experience and high quality in cooking.

But nostalgia is not necessarily related to old utensils, used by hand. It seems more appropriate to talk about processes of upgrading and downgrading. Among the artefacts that have returned and gained renewed status is the coffee grinder. It went out of fashion when cheap ground coffee in square cartons made the grinding of coffee a thing of the past. With the renewed interest in artisanal coffee, grinding once again returned to the kitchens as a daily practice. One of the informants tells us about how an electric appliance can go through a full circle from luxury to a neglected thing and back to luxury.

I did get a nice thing that has become modern now and it’s also a rather imaginative story. I had a job in the seventies where I came in contact with international companies and various big shots and I once got a gift in the form of a Bosch coffee grinder, electric, to grind coffee beans. And I thought it was a bit ... Well there I went and bought coffee beans and I learned how to do it. But then the ability to buy whole coffee beans disappeared, until now. So now I have started to buy coffee beans again and returned to this ancient luxury thing. So it’s a bit special, I think (Interview no. 27).

For some reason, grinding items has a high density of nostalgia. Meat grinders and spice grinders, especially manual versions, have gone through the same processes. But the same thing could be said about other things, such as preservation jars, which have experienced a renaissance.

At the same time, other artefacts, such as the can opener, have declined in status. A respondent born in the 1910s, reported in the questionnaire from 1988 that the practical wall-mounted can opener was one of the few new objects she acquired in recent years. But the can opener, which in the 1970s and 1980s was a prominent wall-attached object, is no longer there. During one of the kitchen refurbishments it lost its place as a wall decoration and is today tucked away in a kitchen drawer or thrown away. The meat hammer is another artefact that acquired lower status.

Consumption studies have often emphasized the identity aspect of consumption. But this approach has also been criticized for being too focused on individuals, not taking into account either the relation-making aspects of consumption (Miller 2001) or the power relations involved in consumption, namely gender (Schroeder 2003) and class (Burrows & Marsh 1992). It would not be fair to deny the identity-building aspects of the kitchen and its artefacts. The informants' stories often revolve around how they created their sense of self in kitchens. The stories of kitchens and cooking are also life stories, about breaking up from some relations (parents and siblings) and creating new ones in single households, in couples and families with kids. That is not to say that everyone is involved in conscious identity building

and distinctions by consumption. *Navigating* might be a better metaphor than *creating* when it comes to consumption practices in the kitchen. Karin M. Ekström and Torbjörn Hjort (2010) have used navigation as a way to capture the practices of families with low income, which indicates how the practices may be more about adjusting to cultural norms with limited capital (both economic and cultural) than actually creating a consumption space for the individual.

The Kitchen – a Laboratory of Modern Rationalities

The first modernity came with the ideal that the kitchen should be a laboratory for domestic work. And perhaps this is exactly what it turned out to be? Even though the informants do not conduct experiments based on rational science, they are experimenting with ideals and practices of life, dealing with the frictions between life as it is, as it should be, and perhaps one day can become.

With regard to modernity theory, there is some empirical material in the kitchen that supports the theories of different phases of modernity. From the enchanted pre-modern *tvara* to the rational equipment designed by HFI, to the overflow and nostalgia of the post-modern kitchens – at least if we take into account Jean Claude Kaufmann's remark that modernities are rationalities, not epochs, and this can co-exist in the same places. This is exactly what is seen in the informants' rhetoric and practices about their kitchens. The different rationalities exist in the same kitchen drawer. Brand new electrical screwdrivers can be found next to baking tins that have been inherited for genera-

tions and the scientifically designed whisks of the 1950s. It also points towards the processual aspects of modern rationalities, being results of the interaction between people and artefacts. By whisking a cake or using a French press coffee maker, the cultural processes are shaped, negotiated and developed in the trivial practices of everyday life. The unglamorous artefacts of the kitchen drawers and the outdated kitchen interiors should therefore not be neglected. They are important parts of our material cultural heritage, and excellent empirical material for the study of the cultural significance of meals and cooking.

The results call for further studies of abandoned and invisible objects, rather than more studies of iconic design utensils in order to grasp the spirit of certain epochs. The resting kitchen is as important as the restless one if we want to dig deep into the transformations of the practices of everyday life. Another aspect for future research is the remaking of place-bound identities by the interaction with artefacts. The material used in this article coincides with the peak and decline of the nationalization of everyday life. The will and power to design the kitchen and its artefacts is declining for nationally based institutions, in both the public and the private sectors. National guidelines and standards are being replaced by European and/or global standards and both manufacturers and retailers become less bound to (and dominant on) national markets. The assortment of global retailers like Amazon may create new reference points for kitchen practices across the globe. Media representations of the good home is also becoming more diverse in terms of

geographical origin. What does the increasing flow of goods, people and ideals do to the trivial practices of the kitchen? Which new conflicts, alliances, anxieties and joyful moments arouse during the interactions between humans and artefacts in the twenty-first century? Further studies, using the framework set up in this article, will be able to answer such questions and others, related to the microphysics of modernities.

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Note

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