CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

A century of English cookery books: examining what they can reveal about trends in food preparation, recipes, and eating at home

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This discussion’s point of departure is a small study published nearly thirty years ago of images of kitchen technology in English domestic cookery books (Murcott 1983). That article noted that cookery books were a neglected sociological resource and rested the analysis on the assumption that they provided some version of collective understandings of home cooking and eating. Proposed here is a broad ranging development of the earlier discussion that has three fold intent. The first is methodological. It revolves around the question ‘what is the range of things study of cookery books can tell us?’. Examples include: the history of food writing; the analysis of textual instruction; the history of the availability of ingredients; images of gender in household economy. The second is substantive. This seeks to sketch a sociological perspective on more than one hundred years of selected cookery book content. Here examples include trends in: food preparation; recipe writing (especially fashions in vocabulary); twenty first century policy preoccupations of ‘food safety’ and ‘food waste’; images of ideals and virtues of domestic life and the disposition of the kitchen. The third intention is overarching, and aims to identify existing approaches and signal future lines of enquiry.

Reference
Murcott, Anne (1983) ‘Women’s place: cookbooks’ images of technique and technology in the British kitchen’ Women’s Studies International Forum 6(2)33-39

An Analysis of cooking from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity in transformation

Stephanie Baum, Institute of Education

Male cooking practice has long been observed in public and professional domains but increasingly it can be found in a domestic context as well (Aarseth und Olsen 2008:277). It is worth considering whether such a development represents a breakdown of traditional gender arrangements or if this is merely disguising well-known structures of dominance. This work systematizes different case studies focusing on masculinity and cooking to gain new insights into changes in male domestic cooking practices.
Cooking practices are influenced by social perceptions of masculinity (Methfessel 2005:31). The dominant ideal of hegemonic masculinity is different in every culture and has changed throughout history. R.W. Connell argues that we can talk about a transnational business masculinity being hegemonic in society nowadays (Connell/Wood 2005). This work aims to trace changing hegemonic masculinity to male domestic cooking practices.

Traditional hegemonic masculinity is characterized by social conservatism and a strongly marked symbolic and materialistic difference between male and female spheres whereas transnational business masculinity is based on values of modern management like teamwork and cooperation. Its dominance is stabilized by promoting knowledge and expertise. According to this meta-analysis, perceptions of masculinity change in the culinary context. Following the ideal of transnational business masculinity, cooking gains significant value in managing the own body and strengthening homosocial male relationships.

In this way, the kitchen remains a gendered space, although the traditional hegemonic ideology of separate spheres loses its prominence. The association between caring, cooking and femininity still exists. A modern domestic masculinity evolves, using cooking as expression of creativity and pleasure. This is a significant change insofar as male cooking today is much more oriented on everyday practices than on the exceptional event. Domestic masculinity is ambivalent because it doesn’t shake up the traditional division of household chores and yet profits from gaining possible distinctions.

Is the kitchen as ‘hub of the household’ a myth? Or is it the ‘hub of politics and social change’?

Rachel Scicluna, Open University

House form and culture are intimately linked and mutually constitutive. The spatial configuration of houses defines a strategy that works according to particular cultural patterns of living, which differ from one social group to another. Building on this theoretical framework, I seek to illustrate how a shift in western collective consciousness during the twentieth century brought about a change in patterns of living, which in turn influenced the identity of the kitchen and its design typology.

Within contemporary Western society, the kitchen is often framed as a location of warmth and love, and as a sanctuary for family meals and gatherings. Further, this discourse is often imbued with nostalgic memories and remembered as a lost tradition. As much as this utopic vision has been heavily criticised by feminists as being a female oppressive space and as a hub of a woman’s domestic efforts, the kitchen continues to be represented as a place of sociability. However, the kitchen’s role and function within the home has not always served this purpose.

The shifting identity of the kitchen, and modern kitchen practices have evolved out of larger social and political processes, such as, the Industrial Revolution, capitalism and material feminism. Through such processes Western ideology, living patterns and house form started to change. For instance, during the twentieth century, the advocacy for women’s rights equality in the public domain by feminist and socialist movements highly influenced politics. This advocacy called for a reformation and re-planning of twentieth century urban and suburban life, where the domestic unit, especially the kitchen, was at the fore of this political agenda (Hayden 1978). The need for a transformation of the social system was argued.
through the rhetoric of kitchenless houses and apartments, which required a reconsideration of domestic work (Hayden 1979, Matrix 1985). Reformist experiments uncover a history of feminist designs for cities, districts and houses which promoted women’s economic emancipation and work outside the home (Hayden [1981] 1985, Matrix 1985). Politicians also used this feminist rhetoric as a basis for their political agenda to eradicate social injustice. In fact, public kitchens or British restaurants emerged out of such feminist debates and were also linked to wartime poverty and famine.

Since the 1950s the kitchen has taken another turn. Its minimalistic design reflects yet another social change. It has transformed into a performative space, where the art of food presentation at home levels the housewife with a highly paid male chef. Having kitchen gadgets similar to that of commercial kitchens, show off wealth, class and capability.

When these different discourses are juxtaposed, it starts to become clear that the identity of the kitchen and its design are culturally loaded. Thus, I contend that not only is the kitchen a hub for family warmth and sociability but also a hub of politics and social change.

**Foodways in the Heritage House: a Case study from Ham House, Surrey**

*Sara Pennell (Department of Humanities, University of Roehampton)*  
*Victoria Bradley (House and Collections Manager, Ham House, National Trust)*

This presentation will explore the challenges of utilising extensive archival material for a historic property, in concert with surviving (but altered) interiors and artefacts, to present a new interpretation of the role of food provisioning and presentation in one of England’s best-preserved late Stuart houses.

Ham House (nr Richmond, Surrey) built in 1610, has a basement kitchen (one of the first to be built in this country), and a surviving array of ancillary service rooms relating to food preparation and storage (including scullery, larders, beer cellar and stillroom). Three inventories, dating from the 1650s, 1670s and 1680s provide copious detail as to the contents of these spaces, while household account books from the 1660s right through to the 1690s supply a rich level of detail about supplying a house used by one of the most visible courtier couples of the 1670s, the Duke and Duchess of Lauderdale.

In opening up the basement area of Ham House for extended visiting from Spring 2012, the National Trust however faces several key challenges around the presentation of this property’s ‘foodways’, relating to authenticity, interactivity and legibility to a diverse (and growing) visitor population. How for example, can the kitchen (with an irremovable 19th century cooking range and other nineteenth-century inclusions) be presented to evoke a space and activities suitable to the late seventeenth century? And how can the volumes of food a house like this consumed (and the sources thereof) be communicated effectively and elegantly? Moreover, how important are such spaces to visitors, who might be able to connect to Victorian and twentieth century spaces as recognisable sites for their own ancestors’ labour, but find it more difficult to situate themselves in the working environments of seventeenth century servants and their masters?
Continuity and Change: Aspects of the Food Environment across the Life Course

by Sheila Peace, John Percival, Faculty of Health & Social Care, The Open University; Martin Maguire, Colette Nicolle, Russ Marshall and Ruth Sims, Loughborough University Design School.

Across the life course, the kitchen can be a central hub of activity. Long discussed as gendered space, in ageing populations the kitchen provides a perfect case study for addressing issues of person-environment interaction where age, gender, class, culture, health and well-being are central.

This paper reports on research involving social gerontologists, ergonomists and designers which studied ‘Transitions in Kitchen Living’ (TiKL) as part of the ESRC’s New Dynamics of Ageing Programme. The aim was to work with a purposive sample of people in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s living across the range of mainstream and supportive housing where the kitchen was still very much a part of everyday life. Following detailed pilot work, two interviews were conducted with 48 older participants (aged 61 to 91 years, born between 1919 and 1949) in Bristol and Loughborough. Prior to the first interview, people were asked to record a housing history and then using an oral history approach people’s experiences of kitchens throughout their lives were recorded prompted by key life events. A second interview concerned their contemporary kitchen and how well it met their needs. Other tools gathered personal demographic details, routine activities, and photographs recorded aspects of the kitchen that were particularly liked or disliked.

Our focus here is the oral history data which following group thematic analysis derived seven main themes: space, equipment, tasks, storage, social etiquette and meanings. Issues raised in these narratives will be used to address the conference themes - ‘foodwork’ and ‘foodspaces’, ‘cooking and identity’ - demonstrating issues of continuity, sustainability and change in kitchen living. For example early experience of cooking in a coal fired oven led to the coming of gas and electric cookers while ‘staying put’ may now depend on microwavable food.

Digital symposiakotita @ new foodspaces

Lida Papamatthaiaki, UCL

I started following food blogs more than 2 years ago and always found extremely interesting the way they would mediate something so material which required all our senses, on the Internet. The visual and digital result, the different concepts of sharing (sharing on the Internet — food is for sharing) intrigued me ever since and I decided that I’d study it. The subject of my study brings together two crucial aspects of our contemporary domestic lives, food and technology, which are the two main frames that I’ll be focusing my analysis on. The blogs, I am referring to could be considered as “multi-blogs”, for most of them include recipes, restaurant reviews, travel reviews. I chose to interview people who are blogging as a hobby, while having a full time job, working from their kitchens or offices. I conducted both virtual life and real life ethnography primarily focusing on the aspects of food blogging as a hobby in urban environments; most of my interviewees were mainly based in London.
It’s not just that bloggers love to talk about food, they also enjoy photographing it, telling stories about it and about themselves sharing a “private” practice as as cooking and eating at home. I concluded that the most important aspect of food blogging is the importance of the community sense, which led me to argue about digital symposiakotita (συµποσιακότητα - meaning the sharing of values, memory, feelings, and essences from a collective above of friends) through their communities. The study of food blogs as a representation of food activities at home will help us analyse aspects of food consumption, how culinary skills and knowledge are mediated but also how technology enhances the cooking experience and food blogs form new digital foodspaces.

Margarine, social class and the home: exploring ‘the margarine mind’ in rationed Britain

Dr Alysa Levene, Oxford Brookes University

Paper proposal for the SSN annual conference 2012, What’s cooking? Food and eating at home

In the early 1950s one of the Sunday newspapers ran a series called ‘The margarine mind’, ‘the aim and object of which is to encourage people to live more positive and interesting lives and to warn them off easy satisfaction with the shoddy and second rate.’ As a contemporary Mass-Observation report commissioned by the margarine manufacturer Stork summed up rather mournfully in response, ‘When a product can be used in this fashion to symbolise a whole attitude of mind, there would seem to be something rather gravely wrong.’

This paper is about the socio-economic associations attached to margarine during its first period of mass consumption: under rationing from 1940 to 1953. Margarine was from its invention in the 1870s configured as a cheap alternative to butter, but in this paper I show that it did not lose this association with poverty and lack of social refinement even when its taste and nutritive qualities had been greatly improved and when a wide range of people had first-hand experience of it. Even when taste tests in the 1930s and again in the 1950s showed that most people could not tell the difference between margarine and butter the ‘snob value’ attached to butter as the pure and unadulterated fat remained, with margarine thought of as impure, of inferior quality and inferior taste. As this paper will show, much of the stigma attached to margarine was linked directly to private versus public consumption in the home: while what one ate among one’s family was a private matter, to serve it to guests in one’s own home continued to be treated as an insult. Through this discussion margarine is shown to be an important but overlooked symbol of domestic material culture, and a visible marker of a family’s social and economic status.

1 Stork ‘Spreading’ Campaign report, 1937, Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, MO67/1/A, Margarine Surveys.
“Of course I know that; you told me that years ago”: the acquisition of culinary knowledge in British families

Dr Angela Meah, University of Sheffield

In an age in which media representations of cooking have reconstituted it from ‘women’s work’ to a leisure activity, where cookbooks and cookery programmes are ubiquitous, and where television chefs can have as much influence over food policies as they do over what consumers are interested in cooking and eating, it would seem that the tradition of passing down cooking knowledge and skill via processes of gerontocratic authority has been rendered obsolete. Is anyone still interested in Steinberg’s question: “where did my grandmother acquire her culinary magic?” (1998: 296).

Drawing upon qualitative and ethnographic data collected via a multi-generational study in Northern England, this paper reports on the diverse ways in which culinary knowledge has been acquired, practiced, revised, rejected and transferred between members of eight extended families (aged 17-92). Mapping historical and biographical time via a life-history approach, we report the different sources of knowledge which had currency during different historical periods, along with the life-course transitions which prompted participants to take their place at the stove. Our data illustrate that cookbooks were no less influential 50 years ago as they are now but, equally, family members are as likely as celebrity chefs to feature as contributors to the culinary know-how of participants aged up to their 40s.

Sharing food as a social tool for the exchange and knowledge of past histories and contextualisation into contemporary life

Inês Amado, De Montfort University

My particular approach to research is one that sifts through memory and material culture blending notions of anthropology, temporality, globalization and migration, through the process of story telling. By utilizing an organic method of exchanging stories, I have been able to make deeper connections and encounter threads of common memories and rituals of my own past. I am solving issues of communication through an organic, ordered, but fluid process of exchange, thus finding diverse and flexible ways of interacting and communicating like a thread that expands and shrinks, connects, reconnects and traces back, ultimately reaching a collective memory archive. It is when one is at the table sharing food and exchanging stories that this process becomes much more acute and organic. Thus I will be presenting a piece of video, which will be focusing on a family meal, bringing forth issues of ritual, hospitality and the passing of knowledge by the sharing of food and of this ‘precious’ time together. By sharing food, memories and interconnected stories, a participatory and interrelated process of story telling/story exchanging is established and some associations and links are created, to a past that is still present but being simultaneously altered by mass culture, media, globalisation and the Internet.
Food consumption and the practice of everyday life in two Brazilian mixed households in Harlesden, London

Maria das Graças Brightwell, Royal Holloway, University of London

This ethnographic informed research of two migrant households in Harlesden draws from a recent study of Brazilian diasporic food culture in London. The paper provides a detailed examination of the dialectic relationship between diasporic food culture and the domestic space. This relationship is analysed in terms of some changes and continuities (such as those affecting domestic practice and routines); in terms of the gendering of domestic and familial social relations; and in terms of the imagined location and identity associated with home. Food consumption was considered one of the main domains in which migrants had to accommodate change. Considered as a matter of routine everyday life, shopping, cooking and eating practices had to be re-considered and reconfigured to accommodate the realities of working lives as migrants and the domestic contexts they now inhabited. There was a constant pressure in the migrant household to be ‘practical’, especially in terms of the time and money spent with food preparation and consumption.

Food played a vital role in forging new forms of diasporic domesticity. These changes were sometimes cast as losses; but they could also be perceived as positive, for example as liberations from established gender roles and as stimulating exposure to new skills (such as men learning to cook), new tastes and London’s cosmopolitan commercial foodscapes. Here, then, domestic food practices could be considered as rehearsals for new ways of being, as creating and innovating.

Although food practices were still a key site is for the (re)production of ‘family’ and gender relationships, substantial changes provoked by migration led to a reconfiguration of such practices. Family meals allowed for a continuity of family life by recreating the sensory landscape of home, and food still retained its importance in family life even when all the members could not be bodily present to share a meal. Domestic life in the diasporic home also allowed for alternative conceptions of masculinity. However, such acceptance of changing gender practices and acts at home did not necessarily change hegemonic understanding of gender relations more generally, especially among men.

The analysis also has recognised the complex location of home for migrants. ‘Home’ was often located in Brazil: implied in what migrants left behind, their longing for it, or in their plans of working and saving money to build it in the future. But home was also being constructed, and at stake, in London, both in a wider circuit of relations and places of sociality and in the socio-material relations of domestic space. The mixed nature of the two domestic settings under consideration here certainly brings interesting insights into the complex arrangements in migrant households.
Feeding and Eating 'Proper Meals' at Home and Beyond

Manpreet K. Janeja, University of Cambridge

Current debates on child obesity in contemporary Britain have brought issues of parenting, cooking and eating practices at home, and at school to the fore. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork amongst secondary school students from migrant households in east London, this paper focuses on the dynamic interactions between 'food-work' and 'food-spaces' at 'home' and at school. It highlights the taut negotiations integral to such interactions that feed into what come to be defined as 'proper meals'. It explores, for instance, the role of religion and ritual in the context of such meals. In so doing, it examines the forms of belonging and not-belonging that emerge through such everyday feeding and eating practices.