

The restless kitchen: possession, performance and renewal

Elizabeth Shove (Lancaster University, England)

Martin Hand (Queen's University, Canada)¹

Abstract

The seemingly relentless pursuit of novelty is central to consumer society. In explaining how and why needs and wants develop as they do, theories of consumption tend to focus on the cultural and symbolic at the expense of the practical and the material. Meanwhile, scholars from science and technology studies have demonstrated that artifacts frequently configure the routines and aspirations of actual and potential users and consumers. Drawing upon both traditions and on the responses of forty householders interviewed about the arrangement, design and use of their kitchens, we suggest that people modify and replace in an attempt to synchronise or manage gaps between contemporary possessions and images of future performance. In analysing the always precarious relation between possession and performance we bring the material, cultural and symbolic dynamics of consumption together in a single conceptual model.

Key words: possession, performance, consumption, kitchen renewal

Introduction

The notion that people buy consumer goods because they need them is more common in daily life than in contemporary theories of consumption and material culture. Put baldly such ideas smack of a primitive kind of functionalism that denies the social construction of desire and bypasses all that has been written about the symbolic complexities of the world of goods (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). On the other hand, and despite the retrospective rationalisation that is almost certainly involved, such explanations allow that things are consumed not for their own sake but for what they make possible. However simplistically, consumers' own representations of need routinely foreground the complex relation between people, things (non-human actors), and practices.

We begin by suggesting that these practical relationships have been overlain and to some extent overlooked by more abstract explanations of what Campbell refers to as consumers' 'continuing desire for the new' (1992: 48). Efforts to explain seemingly insatiable patterns of demand make much of the fact that consumer goods function as signifiers of identity and carriers of meaning. But this is not all they do. As authors like Latour (1992) and Rekwitz (2000) make clear, things, people and practices interact in ways that are mutually constitutive. These relationships have been analysed by scholars interested in processes of sociotechnical change and

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innovation but what does the dynamic relation between possession (having)² and performance (doing) mean for the acquisition and appropriation of consumer goods? It is on this question that we focus.

We do so with reference to the kitchen. Over the last century, kitchens and their contents have changed dramatically. New appliances and technologies have arrived and old ones become obsolete. While freezers are now common (in the UK, 44% have a freezer and 46% a combined fridge-freezer Mintel (2001)) larders and pantries have become rare. In 2001, only 22% of UK households had a dishwasher (Mintel 2001), but their popularity is increasing fast. Other developments include the proliferation of kitchen gadgets, tools and small appliances. Just as important, ideas about what the kitchen is for are on the move. No longer a back-region devoted to the preparation of food, kitchens are promoted and represented as places of sociability - in the words of a recent advertisement the kitchen should be 'somewhere you want to spend time, where you feel comfortable, where you can simply live your life' (*Good Housekeeping* January 2002: 2). The fact that sales of kitchen furniture were £50 million more in 2000 than in 1990 (Freeman 2004: 55) provides further evidence that the kitchen is an important site of consumer investment.

Explaining kitchen renewal - theories of consumption and practice

What is going on? Why are kitchens being renewed and replaced in this way and at this rate? The paragraphs below outline four different but not mutually exclusive accounts, the first of which has to do with the pursuit of the new.

Colin Campbell identifies three interpretations of new: new as freshly created, new as improved or innovative and new as unfamiliar or novel. These distinctions are important for his more general project of understanding why people 'prefer the new to the familiar and hence desire new products' (1992: 48). The first sense justifies the replacement of items that are deemed worn out. The second is useful in explaining the acquisition of goods that promise additional functionality, though as Campbell points out, innovators often have to persuade consumers that they 'need' things they have not had before. Finally, consumers may simply crave the unfamiliar. All three are potentially useful in understanding kitchen renewal.

A second family of explanations revolves around the observation that homes are sites of identity and self-expression (Cieraad 1999; Young 2004). Taking these ideas forward, replacement and renovation have to do with positioning oneself with respect to changing genres and conventions of symbolic significance. Exemplifying this approach, Clarke concludes that 'the house objectifies the vision the occupants have of themselves in the eyes of others and as such it becomes an entity and process to live up to, give time to, show off to' (2001: 42). Other commentators argue that style is important not in its own right but for how it relates to valued cultural standards and orientations like those of respectability (Southerton 2001, Madigan and Munro 1996). By implication, kitchen tastes and kitchen transformations are caught up in and reproductive of the tides and eddies of social and cultural distinction (Bourdieu 1984, Holt 1997). In so far as the kitchen is a site in which tensions between economic and cultural capital are played out, so consumers are propelled toward certain forms of acquisition. In a word, the restlessness of society is manifested in the details of kitchen design and décor.

² By possession we mean having or owning material goods. We sometimes refer to specific possessions. In these cases, we write about the qualities and characteristics of particular artifacts.

A third set of arguments focus more specifically on the kitchen as a trace or record of the social, political and economic ordering of domestic life (Conran 1977). Design historians like Johnson and Lloyd (2004), Freeman (2004), Sparke (1995) and Cieraad (2002) follow gendered divisions of labour and leisure, tracking the emergence of the modern housewife through careful readings of furniture, floor plans and appliance design (Parr 1999; Nickles 2002). Patterns of acquisition and transformation are believed to reflect and embody changing methods of provisioning and household management. These are in turn understood as expressions of macro-social developments in relations between men and women, in patterns of employment and in the economy as a whole.

A fourth proposition is that 'practices, rather than individual desires... create wants' and that 'consumption occurs as items are appropriated in the course of engaging in particular practices' (Warde 2003). This approach places the burden of explanation on changing practices rather than on consumers or the abstract qualities of what they buy. By implication, consumers need new kitchens and new types of equipment in order to accomplish new kitchen-based practices. These might be eating and cooking but they might also include socialising, playing with children or formal entertaining.

It is worth elaborating on this idea and on the relation between materials and practices. Reckwitz defines practice as 'a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (2002: 249).³ Accepting this definition, materials, tools and technologies are themselves implicated in the reproduction and development of practices and associated forms of consumption. There are different ways of thinking about the qualities and characteristics of this relationship. Miller suggests that his Victorian home demands repair and décor in a way that he finds difficult to refuse. He is, as he puts it, 'possessed' and haunted by his property - or at least by a strong feeling of property-related propriety. Scholars from science and technology studies have less to say about the emotional aspects of human and non-human interaction (Illmonen 2004). But by articulating the parts that artifacts (for instance, key fobs, photovoltaic kit, or even kitchen units) play in the conduct of action, authors like Akrich (1992) and Latour (1992) suggest that possession (having) and performance (doing) are really very closely intertwined. The terminology of 'scripting' provides a vocabulary with which to analyse these interdependencies, object by object. There are, however, other more systemic aspects to consider. As we have argued elsewhere, appliances like freezers and washing machines have multiple consequences for how systems of food provisioning and clothing care are organised, and for what it means to do them well (Southerton and Shove, 2000; Shove 2003). Technologies do not simply generate new habits and conventions but the point that social and technical systems co-evolve (Bijker 1997; Rip and Kemp 1998) is an important corrective to overly social understandings of practice.

Together, these four approaches generate an impressive array of possible reasons why people might invest in a new kitchen and why they might pick certain designs, styles and appliances. Though not exclusive there are significant differences of emphasis and orientation. The first two deal with novelty and taste in ways that are largely unrelated to the specific objects involved. A new oven is thus as new as a

³ It is important to distinguish between practice-as-performance, this being what people do, and practice-as-entity, this being routinised types of behaviour that are reproduced through 'doings'. We use the term 'performance' as shorthand for practice-as-performance and the term 'practice' to refer to practice-as-entity.

new freezer. In both the first two accounts, the meaning of ownership matters more than the hardware itself. By contrast, the third and fourth positions attend to the materiality of consumption and the relationship between individual objects and the particular practices of which they are a part.

In the rest of the paper we develop a conceptual framework that allows us to draw these threads together. We do so by analysing householders' own accounts of what they have done to their kitchens and what they would like to do next.

Respondents' explanations of kitchen renewal

Members of forty households⁴ were interviewed as part of an ESRC funded study of sustainable domestic technologies. The sample was designed to include people living in terraced, semi-detached and new town houses. As indicated in the table below, respondents' material and domestic circumstances differed widely.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Number of households in each category				
House type	Terrace: 12	Semi-detached: 15	Town House: 13	
Respondents' Age	Under 30: 5	Age 31-45: 15	Age 46-60: 11	Over 60: 9
Resident children	None: 22	One: 11	Two: 5	2+: 2

Interviewees were invited to describe the qualities and characteristics of their current and previous kitchens and to explain what changes they had already made or would like to make to the present arrangement. As their comments make clear, there is no single kitchen and no shared model of domesticity to which people aspire. We comment later on differences within the sample but begin by noticing that investments in new appliances and in kitchen make-overs were commonly desired, anticipated or justified as a means of bridging between the dissatisfactions of the present and an image of a better, more appropriate future. Having requisite tools and materials was not in itself sufficient for it was also important to live up to the images and ideals associated with them. In effect it was the *relation* between possession and performance that counted.

The following sub-sections illustrate three ideal typical formulations: one in which possessions are missing, one in which performance and possession are in balance and another in which it is the performance that is deficient. In presenting the interview data in this way, we set the scene for a more detailed discussion of kitchen renewal (by which we mean the acquisition of materials, tools and appliances) and kitchen-based practice and of how both are structured by past experiences and by images of the future.

a) Missing possessions

In describing the inadequacies of their current kitchens, respondents from all three house types identified constraints and limitations that prevented them doing things they deemed important, or from doing them as well as they would have liked. They

⁴ There was one interview per household, and in each case there was a primary respondent. In practice, other members of the household often joined in.

explained, sometimes stoically, sometimes with a quiet sense of satisfaction, how they made do, how they got by and what compromises they had to make.

One of the most frequent complaints was about insufficient space. This constitutes a problem when people are unable to accommodate objects they want and could otherwise have. In describing her wish for a kitchen table, Jane lists the ways in which it would be useful.

We quite like the idea of having a bit of a table in there for breakfast and lunch like when there's just a couple of us in. It makes it more of a living room ...you see there's nowhere in there to sit at all at the moment... if we had a table that would be much easier for doing things like paintingif we had a little cheap table in there they (the children) could use it for things like things like that, just a bit of company in the kitchen as well as eating, having breakfast....

Jane could afford a table but at the moment there is no room for one in the kitchen. Most of the terrace houses included in our sample had two small rooms upstairs and two down. In these properties, there was no place for a dining table either in the kitchen or in the living room.

'we were talking about families eating together .. if you have a three piece suite in those little houses, you ain't got room for a table so they don't sit down to a meal at the table'

Whether the lack of a table matters or not is a question of *orientation*. In the cases cited above, much depends upon how people value the idea of eating together or of having company in the kitchen, and upon whether the present state of affairs is 'normal', temporary or has arisen because of a change in circumstances. Our respondents conceptualised 'lack of space' - and hence lack of desired artifacts and appliances - in one of three ways. For some it was a source of dismay and disappointment.

Divorce, unemployment or loss of a second income prompted respondents like Caroline to downsize and in her case move from a substantial semi-detached house to a much smaller terrace. In the following extract, she explains how she has been affected by the consequent loss of space and hence of a dishwasher as well.

Even a small dishwasher takes up quite a lot of space, there's just not enough space.... [in her previous house, she could] put dirty things into the dishwasher. It's just I liked I just liked that sort of it's calmness for me, tidiness equals calmness and you can't do it the same in a small kitchen

Caroline's kitchen-related problems would be resolved at a stroke if only she had a bigger house. Though sometimes unrealistic, wish lists of material arrangements were typically well articulated. Should the missing ingredients ever materialise, respondents had no doubt about how they would be used.

The depth of current discontent related to respondents' perception of the present as a permanent or temporary state of affairs. The promise of future improvement makes it easier to cope with the limitations of the present and on this basis that Sandra put up with all manner of defects. As she explains, 'I didn't think I was going to be here this long to be honest'. Likewise, Carol spent years with what she viewed as a defective kitchen before finally getting round to renewing it.

they've all [kitchen units] got a bit worn so I started from scratch.
Interviewer: but that was some years after moving in, how did you manage in the mean time?
It was a bit hard but I managed, you just put up don't you

Again there were different ways of approaching the need to cope. For some, it seemed like hardship. For others, making-do was part of a positively valued way of life. Instead of succumbing to fashion, the following respondents are proud of their ability to maintain standards and achieve desired results with seemingly inadequate resources and materials. In the following extract, Heather reports on recent changes in her home. Instead of upgrading the kitchen, this family has installed a range of appliances in the garage.

The kitchen per se hasn't been affected. However, because it's so damn small, we essentially utilised part of the garage as part of the kitchen.
Interviewer: so what's in the garage then?
some units, fridge, freezer and an oven.

Cooking in the garage is awkward but it is a solution that allows Heather to prepare and produce the sorts of meals she wants. This is a rather unusual situation, but respondents from all house types described what is best characterised as a continual negotiation between 'need' and thrift, illustrated here by Lesley's approach to her kitchen worktop.

the worktop is now very aged and showing its age and could do with changing. I'm no so poor that I can't afford to do that, but if it's not broke why fix it?

In most of the cases considered above the gap between possession and performance constitutes a kind of 'itch' or source of restless unease. For whatever reason, something is not quite right. These personal experiences relate to more general trends in convention and expectation. Caroline is, for example, missing a dishwasher because she had become used to having one around. That the lack of a kitchen table constitutes a source of dissatisfaction tells us something about changing ideas of what kitchens are for. Although living in the present, Jane and others like her are constrained by kitchen arrangements that embody past understandings of home and family life. Disequilibria of this kind were common, but especially so for respondents struggling to fit a contemporary way of life into the unforgivingly inflexible form of a Victorian terrace house.

b) Possession and performance in balance

In this section we consider the responses of people who had all the material possessions they wanted and who used these in reproducing practices in accordance with their own ideals and aspirations. New arrangements would probably be required at some point in the future but for the time being, possession and performance were perfectly aligned.

The relation between possession and performance is not simply determined by affluence yet those living in larger semi-detached houses were on the whole more likely to describe arrangements that were temporarily in balance. This was sometimes because they could alter their material environment and so keep pace with changing needs and expectations. Robert describes just such a process of active adaptation.

we took the pantry out ..to get more stuff in, cabinets and things like that.

*Interviewer: Why did you get rid of the hatch?
because we couldn't put any cabinets on that kitchen wall. Before we didn't have as much stuff*

John and Alison also had complete confidence in their ability to realise and materialise new ways of life. In their words, they had more money than they knew what to do with and were therefore able to acquire and replace domestic appliances without hesitation. Now their children have grown up, they plan to move to a slightly smaller house. There is no question that they will be able to so, and no doubt that they will arrange this new home to suit their new requirements. These people acquire and dispose of material artifacts as their routines and practices evolve. In this way they keep possession and performance in balance even when circumstances change.

For others, equilibrium was the outcome of stability rather than constant adaptation. This is how Joan describes her cupboards:

I've always wanted enough storage space, which I think we've got

And how Margaret represents her breakfast kitchen.

I'd always fancied a big breakfast kitchen. This does not fulfil it to that degree but it is decent and people do congregate there when I'm cooking. The idea of a breakfast kitchen where you might even have a settee as well as a big farmhouse table and chairs in.. so very much the social centre as well as the cooking centre. Those two things for me go hand in hand. That is a part of my core family value really

Sometimes possessions and performances just happened to match. More often, it was the result of deliberate forward planning. In 1984, Harriet and Geoff set out to design a future-proof kitchen. They took every possible precaution to ensure that this long-term investment would be durable yet flexible enough to meet their needs for years to come.

we had a completely new kitchen [in 1984].. We got some professional people in to get the best out of the space that is in there. It's a German, imported [kitchen] quite expensive, but it still serves its purpose.

when we had the kitchen designed we tried to look ahead into the future into what you'd expect to find in a kitchen of that standard and that involves obviously you would have needed a microwave, we have an oven in there and dishwasher... We were quite ahead of the game.

Interviewer have you got any ideas about changing it now?

well we haven't thought because structurally it is such a good kitchen, and the units are really, really good

Whether through foresight, a relatively stable lifestyle or an ability to re-configure in response to changing needs, the respondents referred to above managed to minimise or stave off moments of mismatch between what they aspire to, what they

have, and what they do. As others acknowledged, all forms of 'balance' are precarious. Joanne, who is planning a family, mentally reconstructs her home in anticipation of that event. When she has a baby she will:

definitely have a table in the kitchen - I wouldn't necessarily have a dining room I'd probably have this as a playroom, or possibly our lounge is quite big, possibly a lounge diner.

Meanwhile, Jackie wonders about how to fix things so that the family can eat together, not now but in the future.

we just eat off trays in front of the telly, which is fine and has suited us for the lifestyle we've got but when the children are older I'd like us to all sit down for a family meal of an evening'

For this to happen, Jackie will need a table. But a table alone is not enough. As discussed in the next section, her family will also have to adjust to a new routine.

c) *Deficient performance*

The third scenario is one in which people have all the hardware they need but find that possession and performance are still out of synch. Such situations are familiar. Sheds, garages and kitchen cupboards are full of objects acquired by people who intended to become campers, cyclists or home bread-makers but who have not got round to putting these ambitions into practice. Respondents talked about how they arranged fittings and furniture in order to foster particular forms of family life. Mick and Barbara re-organised the kitchen and moved the television with the aim of changing patterns of social interaction. The result is not quite what they hoped.

we've completely revamped it, put a brand new kitchen in, we've extended partly into the garage to make it bigger, ..we've put patio doors in and just basically updated it and made it more modern and comfortable. ...well, there's a TV in there [kitchen]. We haven't got a TV in here, in the sitting room, so we don't...[we wanted to] have a nice room without a TV. And of course we never use it [the sitting room] because the TV's not here.

Rather than spending time in the 'nice' sitting room, everyone gathers round the television in the kitchen. Having planned their home improvements around a different model this couple is disappointed. Somehow they have failed to live up to their own ideals. In thinking about what their new kitchen should be like, Tom and Rhona negotiate warily between contrasting pictures of domestic order. Were they really going to be tucking into bowls of hearty home made soup, or should they plan for muddy shoes and dripping laundry? Around which image should they organise their home?

when we were doing up the drawings we had a lot of discussion over whether to have the utility room separate or knock it in to one enormous big kitchen. I wanted the utility room and my husband wanted the bigger kitchen ... he kind of had these sort of ideas ...home made bread and hearty soups and things you know things like that, but I said it was better - I'd prefer to have something a bit more functional for washing, I wanted somewhere to leave things to dry, dirty shoes, wet coats things like that.

In these two cases, kitchen design represents a template for action shaped by future-oriented images of family life. Discontent sets in when these images are not realised

in practice. Similar disjunctions arise when individuals fail to meet their own standards or those that others (including non-human others) expect of them. A number of respondents talked about the challenge of keeping their possessions under control. As they explain, there is something of a tension between accumulating 'stuff' and keeping it tidy or at least out of sight.

Rachel: *I've got far too much kitchen equipment I keep throwing it out and throwing it out, I mean if I part with my kitchen bowl I am parting with half my life, ..but the only thing is now that a lot of them [objects] are getting a bit more difficult to reach.*

Sarah: *I'm a messy, cluttery person so I have to try and cover up my faults as much as I can*

Fiona: *I've got to be ruthless now and throw the bulk of it away.. I'm going to halve the number of pans that I need, I'm really going to be ruthless.. I don't need three fruit bowls.*

These extracts point to an aesthetic of order. For these people (but not for everyone), a nice kitchen is not cluttered nor does it have 'stuff' stuck all over the doors. As mentioned above, expectations and aspirations vary widely: there is no shared image of family life or of an ideal kitchen. Even so, concepts of rational organisation provide a common point of reference and one that is particularly important in structuring ideas about what domestic technologies are for and how they should be used. Sarah, for one, finds it difficult to shop and cook in ways that her freezer (or at least her mother's interpretation of her freezer) requires.

It was...it was already there, and we hardly ever used it...ice cubes...seriously...I suppose I've never really got in to...this is why I'm trying to now, because my mum says 'you've got this lovely freezer, and you could freeze lots of food and its really going to save you lots of time, and you don't have to go to the shops every day after work and, you can just take something out of the freezer, why don't you make life easier for yourself'.

she can't understand that we've got this freezer, this big freezer and it's empty...I mean it isn't now, because she's changing us, she's making us like Simon will now buy ice cream just to put something in the freezer so when mum comes round she can't give us a hard time.

Domestic appliances are not inherently demanding but they can become so if defined as machines with which to increase efficiency. Six-burner industrial scale hobs need not induce guilt but again they are likely to do so if associated expectations of exotic entertaining fail to materialise. Again we conclude that restlessness has to do with the *relation* between possession and performance and with the framing of both in terms of more or less precisely specified visions of how things should be.

To summarise, those who have yet to match image with performance strive to achieve a state of affairs that lies just beyond their reach. Somehow the kitchen and the family life it contains have yet to live up to the promises and expectations of the showroom, the traditional farmhouse or whatever the point of reference might be. This generates what seems to be endemic dissatisfaction. Paradoxically, the restlessness of those who lack requisite possessions appears more bounded. Often limited by pragmatism and realism, the sense that things are missing is frequently tempered by a positive interpretation of the value of making do.

Possession and performance: implications and conclusions

Respondents often described all three formulations but there was some pattern to their experience. Those living in terrace and town houses were more likely to report missing possessions than those in semi-detached homes who were, in turn, more likely to describe deficiencies of performance. As might be expected, experiences also related to the life course with younger people being more likely to talk about temporary arrangements and holding patterns than older more 'balanced' members of the sample. In addition, critical moments like moving into a new house, having a child, having children who leave home, etc. had a bearing on interpretations of what family life should be like and what was needed to accomplish it.

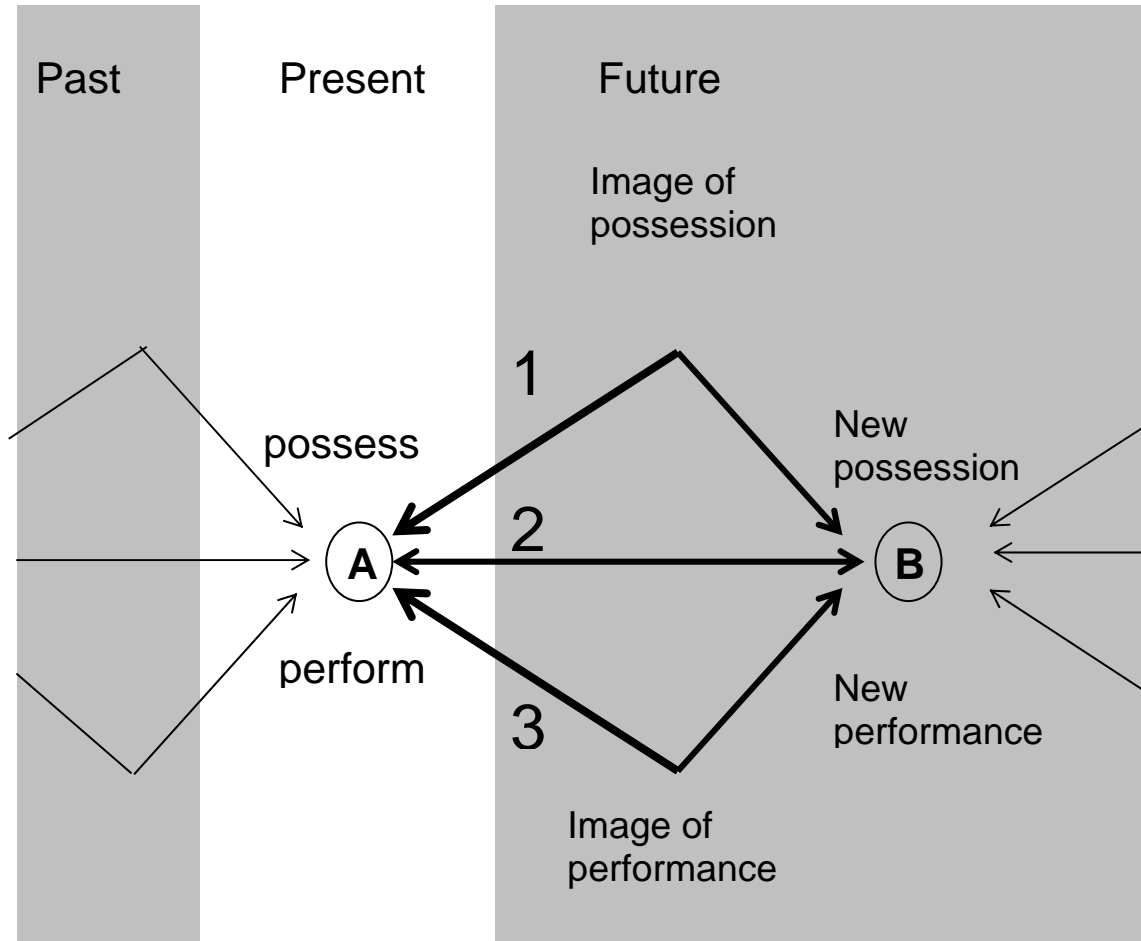
There is more that could be said about the formulations of possession and performance described above, but for the present we highlight three general conclusions. The first concerns the co-constitutive relation between objects (possessions) and practice (both as performance and as entity). Certain kinds of possession demand and give shape to certain kinds of performance. This works at the level of individual appliances and for the kitchen as a whole. We found people consuming in certain ways in order to induce new practices, for instance, designing kitchens in order to foster habits to which they aspire. More abstractly, product developments and design innovations have implications for what people expect and for how they conceptualise what is normal and necessary.

On the other hand, appliances and kitchens are not so tightly scripted that the behaviours inscribed in them are sure to work out in practice. Failure to live up to material possessions and the imagined futures associated with them is itself an important source of restlessness. Identical possessions are incorporated into significantly different repertoires of performance each associated with significantly different visions of family life. A second but somewhat related point is that some such images can be realised and performances accomplished with apparently inappropriate or inadequate tools and materials. While most sought to close the gap between possession and performance, a number were proud of making do and doing without. For them, thrift, ingenuity and skill were positive cultural values.

Campbell writes about the significance of imaginative pleasures for consumers and advertisers alike. He identifies a cycle of 'day-dreaming, longing, desire for the new, consumption, disillusionment and renewed desire which is entirely inner-directed and does not depend on processes of imitation and emulation' (1992: 61). Our interviews confirm the latter point and underline the extent to which present practices are structured by images of the future. However respondents were not abstractly dreaming about consumer goods they might one day own. They were imagining quite specific practices realisation of which required the effective *combination* of possession and performance.

The rather complicated figure below draws these points together and summarises what we have learned from our analysis of kitchen renewal.

Figure 1. Possession, performance and modes of restlessness



A present practice
B future practice

- 1** new or not yet acquired possessions required for imagined performance
- 2** possession and performance in balance, now and for the immediate future
- 3** new or not yet realised performance

Some explanation is in order.

The circle marked ('A') represents current practice. It stands for what goes on in each respondent's kitchen today. As indicated, ('A') is where possession and performance intersect.

The shaded area to the left reminds us that current practice ('A') is organised by existing possessions (kitchens, washing machines, etc.) and by prior performance (forms of know-how, traditions, skills etc.).

('B') represents future practice - it is the conjunction of future possession and future performance. ('B') is what people imagine themselves doing. There are three routes by which persons might move from ('A') to ('B').

Route 1 in which achieving ('B'), or realising the future image demands the acquisition of new possessions (This engenders possession-type restlessness)

Route 2 in which ('B') will simply transpire. In this case, ('A') and ('B') are pretty much the same.

Route 3 In which achieving ('B') does not require the acquisition of any more possessions (appliances, kitchens etc.) but does involve making different use of what already exists, and it does involve doing things differently.

Future images both of possession and performance bear down on current practice. In addition, and as indicated by the arrows moving off to the right of ('B'), cycles of restlessness repeat. Like ('A'), ('B') is shaped both by the past and by anticipations and expectations of the future.

In emphasising the relation between having and doing this scheme provides an implicit critique of those whose analyses of consumer culture focus on the symbolic surfaces of taste. In the cases considered here, acquisition is not only about the signification of difference or the pursuit of the new. Consumption is also organised by past, present and future practice. The model outlined above goes a step further by suggesting that there are other ways in which possession and performance intersect. Consumer goods are implicated in the construction of performance such that there is an immediate, but also a longer-term connection between 'doing' and the appropriation of *specific* possessions or artifacts or of kitchen spaces as a whole.

This sequence of ideas allows us to bridge between theories of consumption and arguments developed within science and technology studies. It does so by putting concepts of practice centre stage. Theories of practice are predominantly concerned with the ways in which relatively stable forms of order are sustained and reproduced (Giddens 1984, Pred 1981, Bhaskar 1979.). The scheme outlined above suggests that this need not be the case. By underlining the future orientation of present practice, and its anchoring in the past, we provide a way of thinking about novelty and renewal that can accommodate the temporality as well as the mutual construction of having and doing.

By implication, kitchen transformation has to do with the ways in which future images of performance are materialised today. New appliances, new designs and new layouts are required because they allow or engender desired forms of performance. But what of the substance, what are the sources of restlessness and what images of

the future drive and animate kitchen renewal? Some are generated by changes and challenges that arise as people move through their family careers. Others relate to seemingly generic trends, for example in food-provisioning (hence the need for the freezer), in concepts of family life (hence re-defining the kitchen as living room), and in the development of new sociotechnical configurations. The expectation that kitchen units should match and that appliances should conform to a single stylistic order is, for example, of some consequence for the concept of replacement. Commercial interests are relevant and many actors have a stake in developing and promoting what end up being generic trends. Yet the processes through which such trends are made real remain varied, contested and localised.

Developing this point, Silverstone (1993) explores the idea that households have dominant orientations 'to either past, present or future' and that this makes a difference to what they acquire and to how consumer goods are, and are not, appropriated. He suggests that such orientations define a significant component of their culture' or what Silverstone calls their 'moral economy' (1993: 295). A family's moral economy 'defines a basis for its own sense of integrity, distinctiveness and ability to manage in a world of public goods, meanings and values' (1993: 286). While each household has its own moral economy, certain aspects are shared with others. As Silverstone explains, 'the availability and nature of economic and social capital provide a powerful matrix for understanding differences between households and their capacity to forge a culture of their own'. For Silverstone, as for us, this is significant not because this maps on to higher and lower levels of cultural capital, but because of what such positioning means for how households 'work with and transform commodities' (1993: 287) and for how possession and performance interact.

By looking at kitchen renewal in these terms we have sought to develop a scheme that moves between theories of consumption, technology and practice in a way that acknowledge the future orientation of present practice, and that appreciates the variety and also the structuring of the moral economic orders of domestic life.

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Already, we can see that . So although appliances might become increasingly standardised, kitchens and kitchen-related practices are unlikely to converge. This is partly because the experiences and expectations of people at different stages in the life course and in different social and cultural situations are so important for the details of possession and performance both now and in the future.