

Reviewed by:

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*La cucina: Storia culturale di un luogo domestico [The kitchen: The cultural history of a domestic space]* By Imma Forino. Turin: Einaudi, 2019. Pp. 458.

TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE

**La cucina: Storia culturale di un luogo domestico [The kitchen: The cultural history of a domestic space]**

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In recent decades, the kitchen environment has become an important topic in studies of the social shaping of technology. Starting with the influential book by Ruth Schwartz Cowan on the significance of appliances in the domestic sphere (*More Work For Mother*, 1985), the subject has grown thanks to studies such as *Cold War Kitchen* (2009), with editors Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann identifying the kitchen as a key "mediation junction" between consumer and producer. Imma Forino's book is not directly linked to this line of studies, but is a broad historical reconstruction of the kitchen environment from an architectural as well as a social and cultural point of view.

The first part of the book is a lengthy review of the origins of the kitchen, from the first evidence of Mediterranean civilizations through the kitchens of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. In the Middle Ages there was a differentiation: on the one hand, the collective kitchens of the monasteries, or the rich and complex kitchens of forts and castles with cooks and a large set of specialized tools to produce rich and abundant food; on the other hand the dismal kitchens of the peasants, where the main equipment was a simple cauldron with a chain, placed on the fire.

Important changes occurred in Europe as early as the Renaissance and continued up to the Enlightenment, but the nineteenth century saw a radical transformation. In analyzing developments in Europe, the author focuses on Victorian England. Bourgeois houses began to employ more women as cooks, no longer just men as in the noble tradition: because of cultural choice and men were able to find work in the first industrial factories. At the same time, technology was emerging in the form of water, gas, and electricity connection networks, as well as proto-household appliances such as gas stoves (1863), electric stoves (1890), refrigerators (1860), vacuum cleaners (1860), washing machines (1869), and dishwashers (1886).

The United States played a crucial role in this evolution. Household appliances entered middle-class American homes before World War I. In parallel, the Domestic Economy was introduced in American schools after Merrill's Act of 1862, favoring flourishing journalistic and literary writings inspired by the principles of Taylorism (the scientific management of production systems) in the kitchen.

Throughout the Western world, the twentieth century witnessed a sharp reduction in the space reserved in houses for the kitchen. Competing proposals emerged. In Europe, the Bauhaus and Frankfurt Kitchen (1926–28) aimed to harmonize architectural space and social space, suggesting a functional room within the reach of less well-off families. In America, tech-

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The final part of Forino's study brings us back to modern times. The kitchen has become an open space, functionally integrated in the house, even a kitchen-living room. It is the space of informality and sociability, now also open to men and guests, often enriched with design furniture and semi-professional technological devices, including smart tech appliances. Standardized or exclusive, the kitchen remains at the heart of the modern home.

*La Cucina* is a very extensive interdisciplinary history of the kitchen's construction and uses. Although the book does not directly address the theoretical aspects of the history of technology nor specific topics such as infrastructural networks, its long-term gaze constitutes a very useful cultural background. The author makes a praiseworthy attempt at comparing Western countries, emphasizing the various historical approaches to the organization of interior spaces, rejecting the idea of a progressive standardization linked to the spread of an "American model" or an assumed linear development process. Forino's book is the result of complex and in-depth research and is useful for scholars examining the sphere of everyday life...

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