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5 Kitchen Stories: Literary and Architectural Reflections on Modern Kitchens in Central Europe

SARAH MCGAUGHEY

In his unfinished novel *Amerika* or *The Man who Disappeared*, Franz Kafka describes the futility of accomplishing a task, as he so often does in his literary work. Here, though, failure occurs in an unusual place – an American kitchen:

[S]he [the cook] couldn't prepare the food, a thick soup was cooking in two gigantic pots, and however often the woman tested it with ladles and poured it down from high up, she couldn't get it right, it must be the fault of the inadequate fire, and so she sat down in front of the door, and raked about in the glowing coals with the poker. The smoke which filled the kitchen gave her a cough which at times was so violent that she would reach for a chair and for several minutes do nothing but cough. (*The Man* 187)¹

This kitchen is antiquated; the oven is still powered by a coal fire, not gas or electricity. Kafka introduces this kitchen scene by stressing the technical difficulties of cooking in an old kitchen, but by the passage's end it is the impact on the individuals in the room that is more striking. The woman's body is under attack; the smoke causes her painful, debilitating cough. This leads to a failure of both woman and kitchen to produce the needed food. As the text continues, an additional failure appears: the main character, Karl, and his fellow manservant, Robinson, are unable to fulfil their employer's wish for breakfast. The kitchen's aging design thus produces a longer chain of events that impacts the bodies and lives of many.

The extended impact of the work of and in a kitchen was a common topic of public discourse at the time of the many versions of Kafka's unfinished novel (1911, 1914, 1927). The length of time necessary and

the physical tolls taken to cook a meal in a traditional kitchen, such as the one described in the passage above, were viewed as a loss of energy and money, two particularly important resources for European nations wanting to re-establish their economies, infrastructures, and industries after the First World War. In *Amerika*, Kafka's American setting allows him to portray and criticize the myth of American progress and freedom. His main character, Karl, leaves the past (i.e., Europe and the scandal of a pregnant housemaid) and attempts to make a better future for himself in the land of opportunity. While Kafka presents the United States in all its stereotypical glory, he adds key moments of failure and absurdity. Among the critical representations of the United States is the failed work in the kitchen. This narrative of the American kitchen stands in stark contrast to the one typically constructed in social, cultural, design, and economic histories of the kitchen in the interwar period. These narratives stress the progressive spatial and technological changes in the kitchen and point to the emergence of scientific theories developed in the United States as the ideas that led to the forward-thinking designs developed in Weimar Germany. While such narratives concentrate on the United States and Germany as the locus of modernity in the kitchen, the daily use of kitchens and literary depictions of kitchens, such as the one described by Kafka, are not considered, despite their emphasis on many of the themes of discourse surrounding the work of women and the modern kitchen. In pursuit of understanding the narrative of modernity constructed around kitchen design in the interwar period, this chapter turns to the Central European context of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire to challenge the current limits of the scholarship on the modern kitchen and its national, aesthetic, and theoretical boundaries.

Kafka's American kitchen is an early example of literary references to kitchen discourse. The interwar years were a time of increasing change in kitchens and their representations throughout Europe and the United States. In the former Austro-Hungarian countries after the First World War, significant architectural innovations and discourses reveal a more complex and nuanced history of kitchens. These kitchens present evidence that requires us to revise the current concept of modernity presented in studies of the kitchen. What the broader Central European context of kitchens contributes to our understanding of the modern kitchen is not just the reiteration of characteristics with which the modern kitchen is usually described: its use of forms of mass production, its ties to certain national histories, its use of modern materials, and

its reconsideration of the size and use of the workspace. These Central European kitchens also reveal how the modern aesthetic imagination is created and deployed.

As the passage from Kafka illustrates, the kitchen was ready for modernization. It was the room of the house that at the time could benefit the most from the wider availability of gas, electricity, and new technologies. The household and the kitchen underwent sweeping transformations in the interwar period in Central Europe. The kitchen's construction and design were under scrutiny, and the need for its renovation and modernization was a major topic of journals, newspapers, and household manuals. As Susan Henderson explains in her contribution to the history of modern kitchens in *Architecture and Feminism*, women's groups, industrialists, and social democrats were calling for a new kitchen and home that would enable women to be more efficient housewives (221). The need to change the conditions of housework and the equipment and location of the kitchen within the home came into public and political focus as the work of women within the home and in the workplace shifted. Working-class women sought efficient forms of housing to reduce the time spent on household chores, as more worked outside the home. In addition, bourgeois women faced new demands on their time. With the increase in employment options for women, bourgeois households faced a shortage of domestic servants, and thus the development of new kitchens began to address issues that now crossed class lines. This change in the use of the home took place at the same time that architects and urban planners were confronted with the task of creating new forms of inexpensive housing to accommodate an ever-increasing urban working-class population in cities such as Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Stuttgart, and Breslau. In this context of social change, studies of the modern kitchen have focused heavily on avant-garde and ground-breaking kitchens of the 1920s, their technological innovations, their efficiency, their use of modern materials, and their implementation of scientific research.²

In *Architecture of Red Vienna*, her study of developments in urban housing, Eva Blau notes that Germany is the space most often studied with regard to innovations in domestic architecture and design (5–6). Such studies focus on the revolutionary examples of German settlement housing, such as Ernst May's *Neues Frankfurt* (New Frankfurt) and Bruno Taut's *Hufeisensiedlung* (Horseshoe Settlement), and have come to form a canon of modern housing in Central Europe. The exemplary modern kitchen in this context was the Frankfurt kitchen, now

represented in the major museums of Western European and American design: the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in London, and the Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK) in Vienna. Designed as a part of May's *Neues Frankfurt* by Margarete (Grete) Schütte-Lihotzky, the Frankfurt kitchen was a narrow, one-room workplace tailored for one person and separated from the home's other spaces by a sliding door. It was a space for the woman of the house to complete the task of feeding the family efficiently and comfortably. Ingredients were accessible at arm's length from the cook's stool; distances between cupboards, counter, and sink were short; the compact size and layout allowed for ease of cleaning. This kitchen's exemplary modernist characteristics, it has long been argued, stemmed from its designer's American and German sources.³ In developing her model kitchen, Schütte-Lihotzky combined the scientific management theory of Frederick Winslow Taylor (Taylorism) and the regulation theory of Henry Ford (Fordism) with the time-motion studies of the Reich Research Society for Economic Efficiency in Building and Housing (Reichsforschungsgesellschaft für Wirtschaftlichkeit im Bau- und Wohnungswesen [or RFG]) to create a physical environment that improved the housewife's efficiency. More recent studies of the Frankfurt kitchen stress that its modernity was due not just to Schütte-Lihotzky's inclusion of American ideas of scientific management and rationalism but also to her use of forms of mass production (Andernacht 198–99). This kitchen, as post-Second World War scholarship depicts, was unflinchingly modern from conception to production.

More recent criticism of the Frankfurt kitchen – its theory, history, and design – describes it as elite or anti-working class as well as anti-feminist. In “‘Housework Made Easy’: The Taylorized Housewife in Weimar Germany's Rationalized Economy,” Mary Nolan discusses the American influence on household design and contends that the parties involved in reform – in particular bourgeois women's groups, social democrats, and industrialists – had interests that did not correspond to working-class needs or women's independence (550–1). Nolan looks to social conditions and motives to criticize the modern design of the household and the kitchen; Henderson does so in the more general terms of modernist studies when she writes that “the private patriarchy represented by the family was gradually given over to a public patriarchy dominated by industry and government. [...] [T]he heroic nature of modernism depended on such comprehensivity, on a universal vision that overrode social and gender differences” (237). Here “heroic” is

read as “masculine” and the elimination of “difference” is seen not as a move towards equality but rather as an obstacle to it. With regard to domesticity, a feminist approach is laid out in more detail in Hilde Heynen’s introduction “Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions” in *Negotiating Domesticity*. Henderson, Heynen, and others have made strides in including the female and feminist perspectives in modernist studies on the kitchen and domesticity; that said, their works continue to perpetuate the divide between the avant-garde and the quotidian – a trend that persists in kitchen studies, despite the variety of interdisciplinary approaches to the topic.

Thus in broad terms, scholarship on the modern kitchen moves between an embrace of modern design, on the one hand, and a rejection of that embrace, on the other. The emergence of global perspectives in modernism and modernist studies suggests, however, that this is a false dichotomy. In “Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World,” Andreas Huyssen discusses the need to revisit scholarly distinctions between high and low in order to more adequately address contemporary understandings of modernity, modernisms, and globalization. For Huyssen, the realignment of high and low, and the study of their relationship to each other, requires us to view the works of classical literary modernism on a horizontal spectrum with popular cultural forms and everyday life. This revaluing of the aesthetic domain of literature, he argues compellingly, provides further insight into the heterogeneity of global forms of modernism and cultural exchange (197). Huyssen ties his work closely to that of Arjun Appadurai, who in *Modernity at Large* explores the global dimensions of modernity and modernism further and, in so doing, stresses the role of practice and the work of the imagination. In the post-electronic world, imagination is “a collective, social act” and is no longer limited to the “space of art, myth, and ritual” (Appadurai 5). For Appadurai, globalized modernity is characterized by the ability of individuals to deploy their imaginations as they go about their everyday lives (5). Imagination is no longer simply a form of escape; it is a form of action (7). Appadurai’s theory of imagination in globalized modernity can be merged with Huyssen’s call for modernist studies to argue for a new understanding of textual forms as forms of imagination. Literature is thereby not reduced to a product of an author and thus representative of individual imagination. Instead, in an audience’s act of reading, such texts become a part of the collective act of imagination. Reading constitutes not just a form of escape, although in some cases it may function in that way, but also

a means by which readers can expose themselves to a variety of visions and representations of their daily lives. This then informs a collective imagination of the everyday. As a part of daily experience, the kitchen already constitutes a space in which one can begin to understand how daily practice and imagination are developed in modernity; that said, an approach that includes texts of all sorts also expands the aesthetic scope of kitchen studies.

To argue that an examination of the everyday kitchen in the literary and architectural context of countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire revises our modernist understanding of kitchens is to assume that simply recasting high modernism as part of the everyday imagination is enough to transform the discipline. This, however, neglects migration and globalization in modernity. Huyssen notes two potential pitfalls when expanding modernist studies that apply to this study in particular: first, limiting attention to a single region can lead to an emphasis on the local and thus to the assumption that culture is shaped in communities; and second, although attention to Central European contexts expands the horizon of kitchen studies beyond its current American and German boundaries, it continues to neglect global contexts and remains a monolingual endeavour (199). Indeed, this study does not challenge the traditional monolingualism of modernist studies in Central Europe; however, the authors whose work will be discussed have been chosen from a large geographical area, are well-travelled, and write about contexts beyond the regional. In addition, Viennese and Central European literary and built kitchens address aspects of economics and politics at the heart of global modernist studies of colonialism and empire-building. So to include such literature and architecture in our view of the modern narrative of the kitchen is to challenge the nation-state-based scholarship that currently shapes our understanding.

Certainly, the Frankfurt kitchen was an international concept, although in their studies many scholars neglect to mention, or severely understate, the (inter)national origins of the designer, the collaborative work that went into the design, and the broader context of experiments in kitchen design. The Viennese-born Schütte-Lihotzky was trained in proximity to much architectural experimentation, in particular with respect to the kitchen and its place in the home. In her autobiography *Why I Became an Architect*, begun in the 1980s and published in 2004, she herself admitted: "It is completely misleading to suggest that one person in the 1920s thought up the 'idea' of the live-in kitchen, which was then followed by everyone else. The form of a dwelling is never

achieved through a single individual" (Schütte-Lihotzky). In the case of Schütte-Lihotzky, her environment was Viennese architectural circles, and at the time, articles about experimental kitchens in journals, newspapers, and magazines were readily available in that city. Even before the First World War, Vienna had an apartment building with one communal kitchen meant to house single, working women. Journals such as *Neues Frauenleben* (New Women's Life), published for working women by the Allgemeinen Österreichischen Frauenverein (General Austrian Women's Association), reported on experiments outside the capital, such as those in Hungary, where families formed kitchen co-ops (*Küchengenossenschaften*) in a number of towns (Nagyvárad, Kaposvár, Temesvár). Many articles like these were available to Schütte-Lihotzky, which suggests that her design was informed by changes in kitchens taking place across Central Europe.

As a young architect in the 1920s, Schütte-Lihotzky, who had no experience running a household and who did not cook, began to read American scientific research while she was working with Adolf Loos on Viennese *Gemeindebauten* (social housing projects). The interwar *Gemeindebauten* offer examples of floor plans and innovative uses of small spaces shaped by a variety of architects expressing a multitude of theories on the use of a home. Some of their designs had separate rooms for kitchens; others combined living and cooking spaces. Unlike the Frankfurt kitchen, which was a single-person design and part of the single-family unit in *Neues Frankfurt*, some *Gemeindebauten* included communal facilities such as pre-schools, laundries, and public gathering places (Blau 1–6). One group of prominent Viennese architects also involved in the *Gemeindebauten* created floor plans that were not based on abstract theories of efficiency but rather were made to fit the lives of their inhabitants. In his work on this generation of architects, who included Oskar Strnad, Josef Frank, and Oskar Wlach, Christopher Long quotes the Berlin architect Hugo Häring, who described Viennese domestic architecture as one dominated by "Wohnlichkeit," or livability ("Wiener Wohnkultur" 45).⁴ The body's movement through daily life was central to Frank's experimental layouts (Long, "Villa Beer" 481). In turn, this wider view of the role of the home and the place of the kitchen within the family and the larger communal unit informed a broader context of architects working to create housing with a variety of floor plans and different forms of kitchens in the *Gemeindebauten*. These kitchens took advantage of modern developments, such as plumbing and electricity, but – in contrast to the Frankfurt kitchen – chose to

consider the space of a house in ways that did not always result in a kitchen separated from the rest of the home.

In an arena marked by such building contexts and newspaper coverage of them, Central European readers found plenty of material for reimagining the cultures of their homes and communities, as did authors of that period. Imaginative conceptions of kitchens appeared in many literary genres of the time. As has been discussed above, studies too often neglect forms of high modernism or position themselves as critiques of such forms by focusing on popular and underrepresented cultural forms. In this regard, some recent works about German-language literature after the cultural turn are beginning to reimagine and redefine the relationship between literature and popular media. For example, in *Mediating Modernity*, Stephanie Harris makes a compelling argument for the importance and utility of reading modernist literature in the context of new media (1–20). Harris’s work places literature – including canonical modern novels such as John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* and Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* – on a level playing field with other cultural forms and the everyday in the context of media, a shift analogous to this study’s focus on literary examples of kitchens in their architectural design context and cultural history.

While audio-visual media forms such as radio and film, as well as newspapers, have become productive sources for cultural studies, the breadth of German-language literature of the interwar period remains relatively unexplored, especially with regard to its contribution to and reflection of discourses on architecture. Works such as Sabine Hake’s *Topographies of Class* and Janet Ward’s *Weimar Surfaces* explore the role of urban planning and architecture on the literature of the Weimar Republic and note the influence of architecture on the visual culture of the period, but literature of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular, is not often linked to architectural history and discourse. In the introduction to their edited volume *Interwar Vienna*, Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman note this and suggest that it is due to the focus on the pre–Great War period in Vienna (3) and the dominance of Weimar Berlin (5). According to this view, the major roadblock to integrating Austrian architecture and literature into the current understandings of the interwar period is the dominance of Germany; the focus on Vienna, whether before or after the First World War, creates another significant geographical barrier, for it does not include Central Europe. This is especially the case for studies of the kitchen, yet there are plenty of texts that refer to the Central European kitchen of those

times, including feuilletons, Expressionist novels, and popular bestsellers, all of which present a view of the literary kitchen that can lead to an understanding of the imaginative ideas circulating at the time.

Written at the height of his Expressionist period and often ignored even in literary studies, Ernst Weiß's *Tiere in Ketten* (Animals in Chains, 1918, revised 1922) tells the story of the prostitute Olga. After years in the grip of her pimp Michalek, Olga is thrown out of her bordello, Haus Nr. 37, and returns home. There, she meets a lawyer, begins a career as a moneylender, and becomes a wealthy, well-respected woman. At first, Olga's success seems permanent. But after a while, she again becomes consumed by her desire for Michalek. Not knowing the reason for the change in her behaviour and mood, the lawyer suggests a trip to a spa. Olga, however, decides to stop in the small town where she had been a prostitute in order to visit Michalek. The visit proves devastating for her mental and physical health. She spirals into sickness, characterized by hallucinatory experiences and animalistic responses to her environment, especially to metals and colours. As Olga's condition worsens, Weiß's prose becomes more frenetic and the images of her world are sliced with strikingly colourful experiences. Food and physical responses dominate Weiß's depiction of her descent; she is slowly becoming the animal into which her figure transforms in Weiß's next novel, *Nahar*.

As a working prostitute, Olga spent no time in kitchens. In Haus Nr. 37, Michalek had controlled access to food, which was distributed by the cook, an old woman: "'Where is my dinner?' 'What dinner? There is nothing here, Miss, please, I know nothing.' 'Did master not say anything?' The cook did not answer. 'Nothing?...' 'The master always has the keys,' the cook said" (Weiß 60).⁵ Although she has not yet left the bordello, her access to food is cut off; her desires and needs have been rejected by Michalek since her attack on fellow prostitute Mizzi. Sugar, in particular, is regulated, for the prostitutes would be unable to control their desire for a substance that would ruin their teeth and thereby affect their value as sexual products (40). Thus, Michalek regulates the bodies of his prostitutes not just by selling their services but also by controlling their food. Olga, like the other prostitutes, is allowed to eat as long as she does what Michalek deems profitable. As an independent and wealthy woman in her later years, Olga still does not spend time in kitchens, but her access to food, especially rich food, takes on an obsessive quality as she succumbs to her sexual desires (Weiß 106). In contrast to the rancid, tough food she had to beg from the cook in Haus

Nr. 37, Olga now experiences food sensually: “Dazzled, she looked down into the kitchen. Fine flesh-coloured dough was being rolled onto white porcelain tables, sugar crushed in mortars, a great big fish, still twitching wildly, sawed into pieces” (109–10).⁶ The passage describes Olga’s view of the kitchen as she stands on the street; the bright white of the kitchen is dotted with the flesh colour of dough. The use of the word *fleisch* (flesh) elicits religious connotations of the weakness of flesh and stresses the animalistic descriptions of her desire and insanity. In her delusion, Olga’s vision of unlimited culinary riches is marked by the violence of twitching, crushing, and sawing.

The association of violence and power with the modernist kitchen intensifies in the depiction of Olga’s growing insanity. The intensity of colour pairs later in the passage with the kitchen’s gleaming metal objects: “Machines for electric power, beating silently back and forth, with nickel-plated pistons, glistened bright in clean tiled rooms, wall to wall with the kitchen of the great hotels” (109).⁷ The reader is drawn to the phallic, nickel-plated pistons; the kitchen is a violent space of masculine physical force. This scene reflects the violence of her sexual desire, a desire that culminates in her murder of a fellow prostitute, Mizzi. Here, the modern kitchen’s aesthetics and power reflect and underscore the main female character’s unbridled violence and sexuality. The electricity and metal create a kitchen that threatens violence instead of contributing to food production.

The violence of the mechanical, industrial service kitchen and its psychological impact on the woman appeared in an Expressionist novel published almost ten years before the Frankfurt kitchen was put on display at the 1927 Frankfurt exhibit “Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau” (The New Apartment and Its Interior Accessories). In this exhibit, the domestic kitchen was placed next to the Mitropa railway kitchen; the association with a service kitchen was intended not to associate women and the kitchen with power, but rather to illustrate how the Frankfurt kitchen utilized efficient developments in service and industry. In this case, the service kitchen was in motion and associated the housewife’s domestic kitchen with travel and speed. With its emphasis on progress and rationality, this presentation of the kitchen eliminated images of violence.

In 1930, three years after the Frankfurt kitchen exhibit, the metal surfaces of the modern kitchen appeared in a feuilleton in a different relationship to transportation, with references to international influences and cultures. In “Der Koch in der Küche” (The Cook in the Kitchen),

Joseph Roth describes the “white, silver, matte metal” of the hotel kitchen (65).⁸ Then, in the underworld of a hotel kitchen, Roth surrounds the cook with three additional elements besides metal: ceramic, water, and glass: “This kitchen could look just like the machine room of a modern ghost ship. The cook could be the captain. The cooks sailors. The assistants cabin boys” (66).⁹ Captain, sailors, and cabin boys work in Roth’s hotel kitchen, which resembles a ghost ship. Both this kitchen and the hotel kitchen in *Tiere in Ketten* are dynamic spaces of gleaming metal and machine-like processes. This comparison underscores the association between the kitchen’s elements and the modern forms of transportation presented in Stuttgart and, when paired with Weiß’s *Tiere in Ketten*, reveals the ways in which literary sources evoke a variety of imaginative associations with the kitchen.

In Roth’s piece, the images of electricity and of the transportation industry together create an aesthetic of motion in the modern kitchen, and as they do so, they draw attention to the kitchen’s capacity to include a variety of peoples and cultures. Of the hotel’s head chef, Roth writes: “Of the four peoples, who populated this state: the Czechs, the Germans, the Slovaks, and the Jews, the cook unified all of the positive traditional characteristics” (67).¹⁰ Roth is referring here to the chef, but he could just as easily be referring to the different cultures from which his staff come and to the culinary influences circulating in his kitchen. Indeed, his hotel kitchen is international; it includes “Russian snowfields” (“russische[] Schneefelder”) and “turbans” (“Turbane[],” 65, 66). We encounter a similar mix of national identities in the Prague restaurant in Kurt Tucholsky’s 1929 “Küche in der Hochsaison” (Kitchen in High Season): “It is a very small kitchen; stove, cooks’ heads and waiters’ cheeks glow. Calls, yells, angry commands – German and Czech, all of it mixes together.”¹¹ Tucholsky, like Roth and Weiß, places motion at the centre of the kitchen, emphasizing its changing and modernizing forms, but he also imagines the kitchen as a non-national place open to multiple cultural influences. In the literary kitchen, nationalities and languages mix to create a dynamic space of creativity and power. Even when it is small – like the restaurant in Tucholsky’s short story – it is not a closed-off, isolated working space like the one so often described as the Frankfurt kitchen. Instead, this description aligns well with the readers’ experience of journals and magazines describing communal kitchens throughout the former Austro-Hungarian Empire as they imagine the sounds and chatter of the languages spoken there.

The industrial kitchen as presented in these three texts contributes to the themes of internationalism, technology, and efficiency; at the same time, these texts present the aesthetics of the modern kitchen as threatening. They also draw attention to the relationship between the kitchen and health. However, these works do not address any specific changes in the domestic kitchen, although modern kitchens, such as the Frankfurt kitchen, were designed largely for domestic use. But the impact of the home kitchen on the daily working lives of women is addressed, for example, in Jakob Wassermann's bestselling novel *Laudin und die Seinen* (Wedlock, 1925). Unlike Weiß and Kafka, Wassermann was not an experimental author, and unlike Roth and Tucholsky, his target audience was not readers of feuilletons – that is, his goal was not to provide cultural insights or to illustrate social realities. Instead, as Esther Schneider-Handschin has noted, he focused on attracting a large bourgeois readership by following traditional narrative forms (86). Moreover, in her depiction of his literary production, Schneider-Handschin quotes Wassermann himself. Here, he emphasizes that his novels are about the times in which his readers live: “In conclusion it is expected from the novel to be a ‘status image of the time,’ a history of its soul, the internal and external development, the conditions of its existence, the setting of its concepts, the interdependency of the fates of its characters who are typified in a heightened manner or refined to the symbolic” (87).¹²

The question here is not whether Wassermann's novels achieved his goal of helping the reader understand his or her own condition. The point here is that he depicted and drew attention to his contemporaries' real lives. Thus his work does much to help us understand women's relationships to the kitchen; in particular, early in *Laudin und die Seinen*, the main female character, Pia Laudin, is described in her domestic sphere. In this way, her character development is linked closely to the structure and tasks of the housewife.

In *Laudin und die Seinen*, the kitchen and its place in the household have psychological implications rather than physical and sexual ones, such as those Olga experiences in *Tiere in Ketten*. Sitting in the kitchen performing the weekly task of organizing repairs and service for the house, Pia is under attack:

All these things – fences, water pipes, washing machines, stoves, coal, milk cans, kitchen tiles, sofa coverings – besieged her. And each thing had its special claim upon her. [...] People were generally of the opinion that

man needs things. But this opinion seemed utterly foolish and perverse; in reality, the matter stood quite differently. It is the things which shamelessly and impudently stand in need of man, and demand and misuse his strength and his time, as seems fitting to them. (*Laudin* 52)¹³

In Pia's world, objects become her masters, demand her attention, and determine the order of her daily tasks. This passage highlights the structure of a housewife's life and addresses the question of whether her role leaves her the time and energy to host guests and to be a mother. The same passage places the housewife in a larger context of technological progress and consumption. With regard to this latter context, *how* society expects a household to be run determines not just the daily tasks of the woman who manages that household but also her identity. Importantly, this extended existential moment, in which the narrator questions whether Pia is a person or is herself a thing, is associated with a bourgeois household and a marriage in crisis (*Laudin* 53; *Wedlock* 57). It participates in both a public discussion on the role of the woman in the home and the discussion surrounding design decisions, specifically those about the kitchen's layout and appliances.

Wassermann's depiction of Pia reminds us that women's groups and journals of the time called for a restructuring of the housewife's daily tasks in order to improve efficiency and to allow more time for family and other social activities. In this context, Pia is the typical housewife, and the narrative shows that her exhaustion is caused by household objects that prevent her from enjoying the socially important tasks expected of a bourgeois woman. At the same time, the existential questions posed in the passage just quoted challenge the very idea held by many modern architects and designers that a properly designed kitchen or home can transform housewives' work. Manuals and journals of the time presented rules on how to reduce work time – for example, by limiting knick-knacks and ornaments in the home (which needed to be dusted or cleaned), by changing the kitchen's layout, and by purchasing new appliances such as electric irons and gas stoves to simplify tasks. In Pia's case, however, such changes in the objects of her life would have had little effect, for "Pia was the slave of things" (*Wedlock* 53).¹⁴ Her tiredness would not be solved with a Frankfurt kitchen or new decor; the objects that created so much work for her were sofas and water pipes, walls and tiles, and thus elements of both old and new kitchens. Even new technologies, such as the washing machine, would have required more work for Pia. Thus her story undermines the

modernist view that it was possible for architecture to change the shape of life and improve living conditions.

The stories of Pia and Olga underscore that literature can contribute to a vertical study of histories of media such as architecture by highlighting for readers that there are alternatives to the dominant discourse in the field. In the case of Olga, the kitchen's emotional and physical dimensions come to light in depictions of violence and power in association with the kitchen's electric power and gleaming metal; in Pia's case, larger questions about social structures appear in the context of a woman's kitchen. Literary sources also reveal vestiges of past discourses, events, and traditions and in so doing temper enthusiasm over modern design and technological developments.¹⁵ Such a view of literature's role allows the reader to revisit both existential questions and daily experiences and to place these in new contexts. In that, it points to an additional way in which literature has imaginative potential in modernism. In the case of kitchen studies, this imaginative engagement with literature reveals fissures in the history of the modern kitchen that run along emotional, aesthetic, physical, and geographical lines. It also calls into question simplistic assumptions about the success or failure of the modern kitchen.

Most of the scholarship on the Frankfurt kitchen has emphasized that it succeeded in changing both the shape of the kitchen and the work performed there (Kuhn, Henderson). As evidence of the success of the design, scholars refer to the number built (over 10,000) and the post-Second World War acceptance of having a kitchen separate from living spaces (Heßler). But on closer examination, the first claim is tempered dramatically when one realizes that all 10,000 Frankfurt kitchens were produced for homes in May's Frankfurt settlements. Its popularity thus remained tied to the local. And while studies of the Frankfurt kitchen imply that it ushered in the idea of the separate kitchen, in fact that idea may well have originated in Sweden (Heßler 179).

Pia's story suggests that women themselves do not reap the benefits of these changes to their kitchens. With his depiction of technology's inability to improve Pia's condition, Wassermann's novel points to the possibility of resistance. Martina Heßler pursues this possibility in her article "The Frankfurt Kitchen," arguing that the Frankfurt kitchen failed to change housewives' work patterns. That is, the change in the physical design and a pedagogical program that taught women how to use the new kitchen failed to convince women and families to use the kitchen as intended. Heßler views these failures as evidence

of “resistant users” and places them within the kitchen’s history (164). Furthermore, she contends, the patterns created by these resistant users “thwarted” the designers’ and architects’ attempts to promote a modern lifestyle (178). She presents evidence that users modified their Frankfurt kitchens in a variety of ways, pointing to residents who moved their dining table into the cramped kitchen space or who simply refused to use the kitchen entirely (176). But Heßler concedes that these interventions were unable to contest the eventual changes in household patterns. In other words, they remained *moments* of resistance. Heßler’s study suggests that the Frankfurt kitchen belongs within a larger body of modernist studies in which the everyday is a source of resistance – a resistance that suggests that the dominance of high art is thereby either reduced or rejected altogether.

Instead of suggesting, as Heßler does, that these acts create resistance to the modernized Frankfurt kitchen, I contend that when seen in a broader architectural and literary context, they are further evidence of imaginative modes of engaging with the changes taking place in the kitchen. Certainly, radical transformations of physical conditions, like the Frankfurt kitchen, and the accompanying didactic literature and training, were direct attempts to impose new conditions on the lives of housewives, but this was also a part of the larger process of reimagining the conditions in which housewives lived and worked. Austrian kitchens, such as those of the Viennese *Gemeindebauten* and the literary kitchens of the authors presented here, offer a variety of opportunities to explore varied ways in which the individual engages the imagination with regard to everyday contexts. Such kitchens expose how the focus on the Frankfurt kitchen has limited our understanding of the variety of ways in which the kitchen became a space that was negotiated and renegotiated across Central Europe in many aesthetic forms. In such a context, the kitchen in Central European literature offers insights into how new ideas meet old ideas in the development of users’ imaginations. When combined with literature as a creative production and as a space of imagination for readers and authors alike, this new view of the kitchen in Central Europe challenges the assumed singularity of the Frankfurt kitchen as *the* representative of modernity. Instead of one moment of modernity defined as the culmination of American scientific and rationalized discourse, this broadened perspective reveals how such discourses met with resistance, alternative experimentations, and imaginative responses in everyday life, literature, and architecture. This is the modernity of the modern kitchen.

NOTES

- 1 “[D]as Essen wollte nicht fertig werden, in zwei riesigen Töpfen wurde eine dicke Suppe gekocht, und wie oft die Frau sie mit Schöpflöffeln untersuchte und aus der Höhe herabfließen ließ, die Suppe wollte nicht gelingen, es mußte wohl das schlechte Feuer daran schuld sein, und so setzte sie sich vor der Herdtüre fast auf den Boden und arbeitete mit dem Schürhaken in der glühenden Kohle herum. Der Rauch, von dem die Küche erfüllt war, reizte sie zu einem Husten, der sich manchmal so verstärkte, daß sie nach einem Stuhl griff und minutelang nichts anderes tat als hustete” (*Amerika* 243).
- 2 For an overview of the reception of the Frankfurt kitchen see Kuhn 150 ff.
- 3 See, for example, the original review of the exhibit showcasing the Frankfurt kitchen and a later work on the United States in its design history (Meyer; Bullock).
- 4 An article that stands out in its search for alternatives to the Frankfurt kitchen and the canon of design in modern architecture but still focused within the German national context is Jerram.
- 5 All translations into English by S.M. unless otherwise indicated. “‘Wo ist mein Abendessen?’ ‘Was für ein Abendessen? Hier ist nichts, bitte Fräulein, ich weiß nichts.’ ‘Hat der Herr nichts gesagt?’ Die Köchin antwortete nicht. ‘Nichts? ...’ ‘Der Herr hat ja immer die Schlüssel,’ sagte die Köchin.”
- 6 “Geblendet sah sie in die Küche hinab. Feiner fleischfarbener Teig wurde auf weißen Porzellantischen in Walzen gerollt, Zucker in Mörsern zerstoßen, ein riesengroßer Fisch, noch wild zuckend zersägt.”
- 7 “Maschinen für elektrische Kraft, lautlos hin und her schlagend, mit vernickelten Kolben, glitzerten hell in sauber gekachelten Räumen, Wand an Wand mit den Küchen der großen Hotels [...].”
- 8 “weiße[s], silbrige[s], matte[s] Metall.”
- 9 “So wie diese Küche könnte der Maschinenraum eines modernen Gespensterschiffes aussehen. Der Koch könnte der Kapitän sein. Die Köche Matrosen. Die Gehilfen Schiffsjungen.”
- 10 “Von den vier Völkern, die diesen Staat bewohnen: den Tschechen, den Deutschen, den Slowaken und den Judenvereint er alle positiven traditionellen Eigenschaften.”
- 11 “Es ist eine ganz kleine Küche; Herd, Köchinnen-Kopf und Kellner-Backen glühen. Rufe, Schreie, zornige Befehle – deutsch und tschechisch, das geht alles durcheinander.”
- 12 “Schließlich werde vom Roman ‘das Zustandsbild der Zeit,’ ihre seelische Geschichte, die innere und äußere Entwicklung, die Existenzbedingungen,

- die Ideensetzungen, die Schicksalsverflechtungen ihrer ins Typische gesteigerten oder zum Symbolischen geläuterten Charaktere,' erwartet [...] (87)" Schneider-Handschin quotes Wassermann's *Selbstbetrachtungen*, 162.
- 13 "Alle diese Dinge, Zäune, Wasserrohre, Waschmaschinen, Ofen, Kohlenladungen, Milchkannen, beschädigte Küchenfliesen und neue Sofaüberzüge belagerten sie, und jedes hatte sein besonderes Anliegen an sie. [...] Die Leute waren im allgemeinen der Ansicht, daß der Mensch die Dinge nötig habe. Diese Ansicht war entschieden töricht und verkehrt; in Wirklichkeit verhielt es sich so, daß die Dinge in unverschämter, aufdringlicher und schamloser Weise den Menschen nötig hatten und forderten seine Kraft [...]" (*Wedlock* 56).
- 14 "Pia war von den Dingen beherrscht" (*Laudin* 56).
- 15 For more on literature, memory, and its relationship to history see, for instance Fuchs, Cosgrove, and Grote.

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