Chapter 1
Cooking for Pleasure

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Introduction: Garfinkel’s Bastards Eat Tarte Tatin

Cooking is a mundane feature of everyday life, done by people around the world as a matter of necessity and, for some at least, as the business of pleasure. It seems surprising therefore that food, eating and cooking has, at least until relatively recently (the 1980s), been largely neglected by Sociology (Beardsworth 1997; Murcott 1983). In anthropological analyses food has long featured in ritual and supernatural features of consumption (Crowley 1980; Richards 1932) as well as in Levi-Strauss’ famous culinary triangle – the raw, the cooked and the rotten. For Levi-Strauss (1970) food practices in general, including cooking, represent a primary binary opposition in society between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ and also contribute to other oppositions such as ‘the raw and the cooked’ such that cooking represents a cultural transformation of the ‘raw’ and, thereby, defines culture. Where cooking and eating has featured in sociological analysis it is often as an instantiation of some wider social process, such as the ‘civilising process’ (Elias 1969), or class and social structure (Goody 1982) or patriarchy and the subjection of women (Charles and Kerr 1988; Murcott 1983). As Charles and Kerr suggest; ‘Food practices can be regarded as one of the ways in which important social relations and divisions are symbolized, reinforced and reproduced on a daily basis’. The ‘turn to consumption’ has, not surprisingly, surfaced some interest in food and more recently food (especially ‘fast food’) and eating has featured as part of an analysis of the ‘McDonaldization of society’ (Ritzer 2008) or as part of a discussion of societal obsessions with body shape (Coveney 2006; Short 2006).

This chapter, perhaps not surprisingly, approaches the topic differently, explicating the mundane work involved in making a meal and the enjoyment members who do cooking for pleasure find in the enterprise. It focuses specifically on the mundane competences involved in figuring out what to eat and the considerations that are brought to bear upon this most ordinary of daily concerns, including matters of domestic routine, lifestyle, diet, work-home-life balance, etc. We then examine the sourcing of food and the different orders of working knowledge implicated in finding foodstuffs and assembling ingredients. After this comes the core business of ‘alchemy’: the skilful use of heat, knives, pans, spices, herbs and seasoning; the subtle art of working with colour, texture, taste, smell and even sound, to transform base ingredients into edible delights. Finally we turn to
1 the pleasure of eating and the values that members bring to the table and exercise
2 in eating together in the course of ordinary everyday *degustation*.

3 The data used in this chapter relates to observations of a professional man in
4 his early 40s, preparing a three-course meal for friends. The man in question is an
5 enthusiastic amateur cook who cooks for pleasure for both his household and for
6 guests on a regular basis. The example provides us with a selection of interesting
7 vignettes, displaying manifest and taken for granted kitchen competence. In this
8 case cooking was being undertaken for the sheer pleasure of it rather than as a
9 necessary obligation, yet the example is replete with features that exhibit the
10 ordinary organization of household activities and the relationships of the people
11 who inhabit them, underscoring the ways in which these matters are not just
12 embedded within ordinary everyday life but are rather yet another canvas upon
13 which the working up of ordinary household considerations get played out.
14 The examples are organized around a regularly unfolding sequence that relates
15 to (and encompasses) the actual work of cooking:
16
17 1. Cooking and eating as a part of the weekly routine. A great deal of what
18 gets eaten, and how what is going to get eaten is arrived at, is bound up with
19 ordinary weekly activities and considerations such as ‘what shall we eat on
20 Sunday?’, ‘what shall we eat the rest of the week?’, ‘who’s going to be here
21 when?’, ‘who routinely eats what?’, ‘what needs to be got out of the
22 freezer?’, and so on.
23
24 2. Deciding what to eat right now, where broader considerations get honed down to specific matters of ‘what do people want to eat just now?’, ‘what’s actually to hand?’, or even things such as baking and making things for the sheer pleasure of it or just to pass the time and keep others in the house entertained.
25
26 3. Shopping to a purpose. This reflects the fact that, once decisions have been made about what to eat, somehow the decision has to be provisioned by physically bringing the things required together. Much of this inevitably implicates shopping and that itself often implicates the making of a list, though shopping can also be about a more general purpose provisioning for the week with just what to eat right now being framed by what was purchased in the weekly shop.
27
28 4. Preparing things for cooking. Once ingredients have been sourced in one way or another and brought to the kitchen they usually need preparing in various ways. The work here can also be about creating the right ambience for cooking to take place. Inevitably the work of preparation often turns out to be interleaved with the work of actually cooking a dish, but in most cases preparation of some kind is a necessary preliminary to the actual heating and assembling of food. Considerations that feature in cooking such as the look of things, their consistency, and their smell, can also play an important part here.
5. Cooking the things prepared. This refers to the actual working upon of prepared foodstuffs in the company of heat such that things are bound together or transformed in some fashion so that they are ready for the actual business of eating.

6. Serving the food. Once food has been cooked, and prior to eating, it needs to be physically moved from the places where it has been cooked and apportioned in various ways so that all the parties to the eating can actually go about the eating of it.

7. Eating the food. Once food is on plates and people are gathered around the table or wherever to eat it, the business of consuming it can occur.

The first three and the last three features of the above sequence have some interchangeability according to circumstance. Reasoning about what to eat and shopping, for instance, can happen at the same time. Preparation and consumption can be commingled with some kinds of dishes, such that all of the four latter components can be going on more or less simultaneously. What does break down separately is the presence of a decision-making process, with the associated work of provisioning those decisions, and the subsequent assembly and consumption of food that brings those decisions to fruition. The organization of the data here is purely bound up with recognizing the specific sequences that were observed on this particular occasion of production.

A) Deciding what to Eat

Discussions about what to eat generally take place within the context of the household routine, being shaped not only by what people fancy eating but also by what is currently available within the house. Here the decision is a more spontaneous affair (Example 1). Where options are relatively open, as they are in this case, negotiations between the parties have the character of ‘specific vagueness’ (Crabtree et al. 1997) about them, with an iterative process of narrowing down until some specific kind of choice is made. Here it moves from things not to even be considered (e.g. marrow), to matters such as meat/not-meat, Indian/Chinese/French, until specific dishes are arrived at, i.e. pumpkin soup, chicken curry and tarte tatin.

Example 1: Deciding what to eat.

A: Any – any preferences yourself? Let’s have some candidate dishes. Things we might cook.

P: Is there stuff you detest? So eliminate them completely from the picture.

M: Well I’m not too keen on marrow.

A: Well you’re alright coz it’s not marrow season.

M: I bloody hate marrow.

A: I don’t mi- At this point in time anything’s up for grabs. If you want Chinese we can do Chinese. If you want Indian we can do Indian.
M: I prefer Indian.
A: You prefer Indian?
M: How are you on Indians?
P: Oh I like Indian.
A: So errr: So hows about we do er- some curried pumpkin soup.
M: Yeah! Sounds good.
A: Which is a nice starter and goes well with a curry. … we could have chicken curry

A: What about pudding? (heading back into living room)
P: I don’t really like puddings (laughing).
A: Ahh no. They’re too sweet aren’t they? They’re vile actually
M: Don’t you do /( )
P: /I quite like-
M: Tarte tatin
A: I do. I can do tarte tatin. I do a fantastic tarte tatin if you want it. Tarte tatin and a
curry?
M: Sounds alright to me.
P: Yeah.

B) Shopping to Purpose

The meal calls for things that have to be actively sourced from outside of the home. That means there will have to be a shopping expedition, involving some measure of forward planning, constituted around the work of assembling a shopping list. In Example 2 we see the ways in which this kind of work unfolds. One feature is about projection: knowing what the dish to be cooked will call for. This can involve consultation of recipes, but it can also be grounded in ordinary recollection of what it takes to make a dish. Another feature is verification: checking whether you have the required ingredients, in enough quantity, and whether they are ‘good enough’. This can itself lead to another feature, the ongoing revisability of a proposed menu as its production is thought about in greater detail. Thus we see A move here from having apples in the tarte tatin to pears, and deciding to buy onions as this will be less unpleasant than digging onions in the rain. These elaborations also move into thinking about the surrounding work of preparation and other meal accompaniments, such that A is moved to not only consider whether beer is needed but to also then ensure it goes in the fridge. Indeed, assembly of the meal and its surrounding paraphernalia has already begun by this stage with the bringing in of the pumpkin from outside, and is further realized by A getting a tub of tag (curry base sauce) out of the freezer. Notice also how the work of preparing a list here is informed through and through by ‘how we routinely do shopping lists around here’. So we see A tear a sheet off the pad on the notice board where some things needing purchasing have already been recorded. A then uses this as a place for adding things. All of this itself attests to another common part of the planning
Example 2: Making a shopping list

A getting tub of tag from the freezer and putting on side by cooker: We’ll want some chicken. I’ll nip down to the butchers and see if he’s open, and if he’s not I’ll nip up to the next village, and grab something.

P: Okay

A: Er, we’ll grab some chicken breasts and er I’ll nip up to the allotment and grab a couple of things, some onions. What else do we need?

M: Pear tarte tatin?

P: Ooh yeah.

A: We can do that can’t we?

…

A: Tearing sheet from pad on noticeboard and holding it up: That’s what I’ve already got on there this week.

Figure 1.1 Getting the shopping list

A takes the list to a chopping board on side and rests on it with pen poised: Er: right, I want some chicken breasts don’t I? (writes under previous items on list) I want some er (pen poised for a moment) Some chicken breasts. Puff pastry (writes beneath other items on list) Erm.

A: How am I doing for sugar (walks over towards shelves on other side of kitchen) (peers in jar and in packet). Got some more there, great.

…

A writes on list under prior items

A: Yeah, so let me check that then, have we got everything we need?
A: I might actually buy some bloody onions to save me going and fucking about on a dirty horrible day and getting stuff from the allotment.

Adds onions to the list

A: (Looking around kitchen) Er, I think that’s it isn’t it?

A: (Thinking through items out loud and holding out fingers as he does so) Chicken.

Er, so I’ve got the squash there.

…

A: (Tapping pen on side as thinking) Erm, alcohol. We’ve got some beers about if we’re having a drink (looks over to fridge), or some wine. We might want to put some beers in the fridge.

A getting pack of beer from top of fridge and putting into fridge. A goes back to side and picks up list and looks at it.

A: I think that’s it

Production of a shopping list implicates the actual activity of shopping (not presented here). Many topics fall out of the work of shopping that move beyond just the sourcing of food, particularly the provided-for legibility of shopping environments (expectable and accountably appropriate places for the placement of baskets, vegetables, chilled cabinets, checkouts, and so on). This includes the ways in which shoppers come to know their local shops and appropriate trajectories through them, the practiced competence of selection and the relationship between that and a projected recipe.

C) Preparing Things for Cooking

Creating the right kind of ambience Something that particularly plays into the pleasure of cooking is the way in which those about to undertake cooking will devote attention to making the environment and its complements ‘right’ for the doing of that kind of work. A’s cooking for friends displays a number of these kinds of considerations, including: putting drink into the fridge in anticipation of it being wanted once food preparation is under way; making sure his friends have drinks whilst he is preparing the food; and setting some music going.

Example 3: Serving drinks and setting the music going

A: (Going into kitchen and moving things around on side) Right. Right right right. Soup! Drink even.

Turns round and walks over towards fridge.

A: Tea or beer or (shrugging shoulders).

M: Beer will do me.

A: Beer?

A goes to fridge and gets out bottle from top shelf and hands it to M.

…
Music starts playing. A pushes on left hand volume reduce button under iPod, clicking repeatedly until volume is fairly low but still audible.

A: Right, soup.

Assembly of what’s needed Once matters of ambience and its like have been dealt with cooking involves a significant amount of assembly. A range of things have to be brought together, both ingredients themselves and the apparatus for working upon them in order to transform them into a meal. In Example 4 we see how this business of assembly is an ongoing process that runs throughout the stages of initial preparation and of cooking. In this case everything is brought together in phases according to need: first of all for the preparation of the rice, then the chicken, the pepper, and the chillis. In each case there is a surrounding set of accoutrements and practices that are brought to bear, with the larger set of overall ingredients being assembled itself to one side of the chopping board. At the same time, because the rice is already under way as other things are being worked upon, there is a regular stepping out of these activities to monitor the progress of the rice.

Example 4: Getting the curry going
A goes to cupboard and gets out wide pan and puts it on the hob.
A: So we want one of them, and we want some rice don’t we.
Goes to same cupboard and gets out a saucepan and puts that next to the other pan on the hob.
Puts jar on chopping board, then turns round and walks over towards the shelves, gets knife out of block and then sharpener from rack and sharpens the knife.
Puts knife down next to chopping board and hangs sharpener back up on wall.
Rinses chicken breasts under tap then brings them over to chopping board, lays them down, and turns them to and fro inspecting them. Uses knife to trim off fat from one breast. Puts fat over to left of board and starts to cut the breast into strips.

Figure 1.2 Cutting up the chicken
Lays strips of chicken side by side and cuts across them, making smaller pieces. Prepares other breast in a similar fashion. Goes to sink and washes his hands. Takes towel off back of chair and dries his hands. Goes to drawer to right of cooker and gets out roll of plastic bags and tears one off. Pulls mouth of bag open then puts in chicken breast remaining in sink. Washes his hands again and flips bag over a few times and ties it up. Comes over to the table. A: Can I just get you to pop that in the freezer? M? Top shelf? M: Yeah. A hands him bag of chicken. M takes to freezer and starts to open door then pauses. M: In here? A: Top. Top shelf. M opens door wider. A: That’s it, yeah. M puts chicken into freezer and closes door. A: Cheers A goes back to chopping board and continues to cut chicken into smaller pieces, mounding cut segments up at back of board. When A finishes cutting chicken he shifts it all into single mound in centre of board. Then goes and puts knife in sink. Puts trimmings into bin, rearranging binbag in bin as he does so. Then washes hands at sink. After this he rinses the knife, squirting some washing up liquid on it and rubbing it with sponge. Puts knife on draining board and continues to wash other items in sink... Goes and dries hands on towel on chair. A: Right. What am I doing next? (Takes sip of drink) Get the rice on actually. Opens up bottom of oven and gets out saucepan. Takes rice pan to tap and runs water into the pan. A brings back pan and puts it on hob.

Figure 1.3  Putting the pan on the hob
Shifts position of other pan and slides the rice pan to the back.

Turns on heat under rice pan.

Gets pinch of salt from tub on side and adds it to the rice.

A: (to M) Sorry M. On the top bit, there’s a block of creamed coconut in it.

M opens fridge gets out block of creamed coconut and passes it to A.

A: Cheers M.

…

A: (Pausing mid-stride across the kitchen and turning towards the fridge) Ah! Chillis!

(points to fridge).

A: (Pointing to fridge still) In there in the salad box there’s some chillis.

M: (Opening door to fridge and reaching down to bottom) In the salad box in here?

A: Yeah.

M pulls open the salad box and rummages around, looking for the chillis. M finds them and hands A the pack of chillis.

A goes to the cupboard under the chopping board and gets out a sieve. He puts the sieve down next to the chopping board.

A: Preparation is everything, ain’t it? Y’know. That’s what we’re about here. And anticipation as well, or y’know. The rice is cooking, I need to drain it in a bit, and- It’s getting everything to hand isn’t it? The order of things.

Observe in the above example how much of the work is about getting things to hand, before you even get into the actual business of cooking. Notice too how A makes free use of M’s proximity to the fridge to draw upon his labour. Cooking, in one way or another, is often a collaborative enterprise. Another thing visible in the above data is that, as well as starting off with a logical arrangement of ingredients and artifacts when the cooking first begins, people work to maintain a coherent and orderly arrangement of things throughout the preparation and cooking process. The whole way through the cooking process A preserves a continual orderliness of objects upon his chopping board. Notice too how the placement of things on the shelves, pans in the cupboards, knives in the chopping block, the bin by the door, and so on display the extent to which the crafting of an orderly arrangement of prerequisites for cooking is underpinned by a broader presumptive understanding that members have about the organization of their home and the ways in which that should routinely maintained. The preservation of this kind of order in homes is ultimately a moral order, with any kind of breach being subject to account.

Using recipes The use of recipes is not an overt part of all cooking activities. However, here recipes were an integral part of how the cooking was accomplished. In Example 5 we see A using a recipe as an important part of ensuring precision and providing for ongoing verification as the cooking progresses. We see in the practiced use of the recipe book how it is positioned to enable the articulation of both measurement and verification through episodic constellations of activity.
During preparation A reads a coherent segment, such as that pertaining to the measurement of butter, then engages in the work of actually measuring those things, then uses the book as a point of reference to verify what he has done, and then he moves on. During cooking A used the book as a description of both how to enact the process and of what it was he might be looking for as the food underwent transformation. Notice also here how certain aspects of local reasoning can become critical to the way a recipe is worked, for instance the use of a fan-assisted oven and its effects and cooking with a thick-bottomed pan.

Example 5: Referring to a recipe

A goes into living room. Goes to bookshelf and lifts down Rick Stein recipe book, carries it through to the kitchen and places it on the kitchen table, then leafs through trying to find the recipe. Finds it.

A: There we go.

Presses book down firmly at open pages and smoothes along the centre binding.

M: Ooh.

A: That look like what we’re after? Pushes book towards M who looks more closely at the photo page.

M: It is.

A: So I’m going to need to do some weighing on this.

A goes to cupboard beneath chopping board and gets out scales, puts the scales onto the chopping board. A peers at recipe book.

A: So we want seventy-five grammes of (heading back over to scales) softened butter.

Moves butter onto chopping board and opens out wrapping. Gets knife from back of board and cuts off a portion of butter. Struggles to lift it off the paper.

A: Erk, come here you beast.

Places knife underneath to prise it up. Lifts block up and places it on the scales.

A: What does it say about the temperature M?

M stands over recipe book and looks at the recipe.

M: Ermmm Preheat the oven to one hundred and ninety.

A: (Still peeling a pear) One ninety. So this fan oven (pauses peeling and adjusts knob on oven) you’ve got to knock twenty off of it. … He turns the knob to position. Coz they cook hotter.

Studies recipe for a while, drying hands.
A: (Reading out) Place the tarte tatin dish in the frying pan over a medium heat and cook for twenty to twenty-five minutes (drops towel onto back of chair and heads to cooker) shaking- twenty to twenty-five minutes, shaking it gently.

Goes to hob and turns on heat under frying pan.

A: So we’ll give it a good whack of heat. Get the pan hot; coz it’s a thick bottomed pan. It takes a bit of heat to get it going.

Measuring things out and reasoning about quantities An important counterpart of the use of recipes, already visible in the above, is the measurement of ingredients. Indeed, cooking is replete with both tight and approximate judgments regarding the quantities of different things, and physical measurement is a part of this larger body of reasoning. Measurement provides a solution to the ongoing cook’s problem of ‘how much’.

In Example 6, A, in practiced fashion, demonstrates the ordinary work that goes on to makes scales usable for effective measurement. The problem one has when measuring loose ingredients is that the bowl or the scales pan has a weight of its own that has to be taken into account. What A demonstrates here is that for accomplished practitioners, this is a taken-for-granted aspect of making use of the scales. We can also see in example 6 the work of repair undertaken to make sure the quantities specified by a recipe are respected, using a spoon to return sugar to the bag. This shows the practical realization of the adaptability of recipes to need. Here we see something else as well: the re-articulation of certain instructions in locally meaningful ways, such that certain measurements can be deemed close enough.

Figure 1.4 Checking the recipe
Example 6: Measuring the sugar for a tarte tatin

A rinses sponge under tap and takes over to wipe scales. Puts sponge on draining board then gets towel from the chair and brings it over and dries the scales. Puts towel back on chair. Pauses for a moment then picks up small bowl from the draining board. Inverts it and peers into it.

A: That’s dry. Takes it over to the scales and puts it on them and resets the scales to read zero.

A: (Walking over to look at recipe) Sugar. One seventy-five of sugar.

... A: (Pouring more sugar into bowl) One thirty-two (carries on pouring) One seventy-seven, one seventy-eight Puts bag of sugar down on board. Goes to look at recipe.

A: One seventy-five, we’ll take a bit out of there. Lifts some sugar out of bowl with a teaspoon.

Tips it back into the bag.

A: (Looking at readout on scales) That’s it isn’t it? Oh, that’ll do.

Picks up bowl and shakes it, then tips it over the butter in the pan.

A: I think it was saying one seventy-three there wasn’t it?

P: Yeah, one seventy-three.

A: So we’re a touch under on butter and a touch under on sugar. That’ll do (puts bowl over to side) It won’t matter.

Shaping and cutting food to size A great deal of the work being related here involves the ‘working’ of food in terms of making the food the right size or shape to solve considerations of texture and consistency, or other concerns bound up with how the food will behave and cook in the pot etc, or how it will feel in the mouth. All of these matters impact on work undertaken to shape and cut food in...
appropriate ways. For A there is a great deal of knife work involved in all of the
dishes he prepares. Example 7 shows just how much knowing manipulation of
both the knife and the food itself can be involved in the apparently simple matter
of peeling and cutting some pears.

Example 7: Cutting up pears
A goes to table and takes two pears out of bowl.
A: (Walking over to chopping board) We’ll try these for starters and see how many
more we need …
Cuts along the length of the pear, peeling off a strip of skin, working his way around
the pear …

Figure 1.6 Peeling the pears

Finishes removing the skin from the first pear and puts it down behind the other pear
at the back of the chopping board. Then he picks up the other pear and peels it in
exactly the same way. Note how he holds the pear in his left hand, and uses that hand
to twist it round each time one strip is finished, whilst holding the knife flat to the skin
and drawing it along the pear just beneath the skin with his thumb pressed firmly
against the end of the pear, drawing the knife closer and closer to his thumb each time
until the skin falls …
Comes back to the chopping board and takes larger knife out of the knife block.
Positions a pear so that it is facing him with the stalk end to the rear and rests the
knife along the length of it.
Presses the knife lightly into the flesh of the pear, then, still holding the knife into the flesh with his right hand he taps firmly on the knife with his left hand and it falls in half. Pushes the two halves slightly to the right and gets the other pear and does the same. Puts the large knife to the rear of the chopping board and picks up the small knife he used previously to peel them. Picks up one of the halves and puts it in his left hand and begins to cut out the core, using the small knife in his right hand. This involves drawing the knife down the length of the pear from the stalk end with the tip inserted into the flesh at an angle under the stalk, following the outline of the core around the bulb of the part with seeds. As he reaches the end he turns the pear round with his left hand and goes back towards the stalk along the other side of the core and stem.
A: Get rid of that stringy bit that runs right up it.

Gets to the end then works his way back along the same side, pushing the knife in a little deeper.

A: It’s not good eating.

Assembling a dish – the interleaving of preparation and cooking The data shows that there is no neat process where all the food is first prepared and then all the food is cooked, but rather an interleaving of these two activities, with cooking starting after just some preparation has been undertaken and then preparation continuing whilst a first part of a dish is being cooked, preparation and cooking working side by side. In Example 8, we see that, whilst A is putatively engaged in a solo cooking endeavour, it is utterly unremarkable for him to call on others in the kitchen to assist him. M, who is sat beside the fridge, is co-opted to help and needs quite precise instruction as to where to place things or to find things because he has no local knowledge about the routine and ordinary ways in which A’s household organize their fridge.

Example 8: Helping out with things from the fridge

A picks up block of pastry and looks at it. Squeezes it with his fingers, then gets a plate from the draining board. Takes both plate and block of pastry over to M.

A: Can you pop that into the fridge for a few minutes? It’s just a bit (tossing the pastry up and catching it and putting it on the plate) soft.

M takes the plate from him and puts it in the fridge.

M: Okay ...

M: Ohhh. Cornish clotted cream?

A: that’s the one.

Keeping things clean and tidy – preserving the moral order and facilitating re-use Something that goes right to the heart of a whole swathe of ordinary assumptions people make about the organization of their households and appropriate ways of maintaining that organization, is the attention paid during cooking to matters of tidiness and cleanliness. Throughout the cooking process A engaged in cleaning tasks that were bound up with the ongoing facilitation of the cooking. Primarily this focused on things like the cleaning of knives, which he did after use and in an appropriate lull in other activities, before returning the knives quite purposefully to the knife block which rendered them available for re-use. This makes evident sense when the cooking is still in progress as it avoids the need to suddenly uncover the need for a knife and having to clean it then and there and put everything else on hold. However, it also demonstrates a more fundamental assumption: that, even though they could be left unwashed, utensils are cleaned between the preparation of different things rather than having the residues of one thing mixed with another. This was visible in A’s attentiveness to cleaning the...
chopping board as well. Notice also how the very constitution of kitchen spaces provides for these kinds of things, from relatively static arrangements such as the proximity of sinks and draining boards to areas where cooking takes place, to more household elective matters that are nonetheless remarkably static once the election has taken place, such as the positioning of rubbish bins, knife blocks, utensil pots and drawers, and even where towels get hung. What this demonstrates is the extent to which there is a topological organization to these matters.

D) Cooking the Things Prepared

Using the senses

At this point we move on to considering one of principal alchemies of cooking: the transformation of prepared ingredients into an actual dish to be eaten by means of applying heat. One of the most important parts of how cooking is managed as an activity by those who undertake it is through the application of various senses in a mundane fashion in order to inform various judgments about what should be done with the food, what stage of transformation food may have reached, what that might imply for what happens next, and whether food has reached the point where it is ready for consumption. Example 9 demonstrates how the various senses provide for the accountable characteristics of a tarte tatin and what would make it ‘right’ or otherwise.

Example 9: Discussing what makes a dish right

A: And the actual cooking of something, you’re talking about colour, and taste, bite, smell, and all those things. Trying to nail those down.

M: It applies to specific dishes. Tarte tatin has a specific – well it has taste and smell but there’s also something to do with the bite. The crunch and the softness of the pear, but it’s not so soft that it’s disappeared. There’s still a hardness there.

A: It’s a fruit ain’t it?

M: Yeah. The colour of the sauce and the taste of the sauce, but also the pastry.

A: Different parts of the pastry tasting, crunching –

M: What’s the word for that? Not to do with taste but with like the feel of it in your mouth?

P: What would make it wrong for a tarte tatin? What would offend you?

A: Soggy fucking pastry.

Using the tongue – monitoring flavour

In Example 10 it is the tongue that is brought to bear. A is tasting the curry to assess the adequacy of its flavour. This is not about monitoring readiness, it is about making a judgement about a balance of tastes.
Example 10: Using the sense of taste

A turns heat down under pan and moves it over to right. Opens bag of coriander. Gets out a pinch and throws it into pan ...

Stirs in the coriander, moving the pan back over the heat.

Grabs teaspoon from chopping board and dips it into the pan.

Lifts the teaspoon to his mouth and tastes.

Dips it in again and does the same.

Puts teaspoon down on chopping board and stirs the pan.

Picks spoon up again and dips it in as stirring and lifts it up to taste.

Stirs the pan some more.

Tastes it again.

Dips and tastes again.

Puts teaspoon back on chopping board and carries on stirring.

Grabs a pinch of salt from jar behind board and sprinkles it into the pan.

Stirs it again.

Reduces the heat a little and carries on stirring.

A: The best thing we can do with this is leave it.

Using the nose – monitoring progress and readiness  One of the prime arbiters of cooking-in-action is the nose. Cooks use the nose in a variety of ways to make all kinds of judgments. In example 11 the nose is pressed into service as a basis for monitoring what stage has been reached and monitoring whether the next stage can be commenced. Here A uses his nose in order to assess what ingredients are beginning to become pronounced, understanding that this carries implications regarding how different ingredients are responding to heat and beginning to mingle. He uses this also as a means of drawing M into such assessments (or at least into affirming his own) and this in turn becomes the grounds of a fairly
extended piece of talk about smells and tastes and what they indicate about the
things one is cooking.

Example 11: Sniffing the pears

A sniffs at pan on hob.
A: (To P) Get your nose in that.
P sniffs pan, then M has a sniff.
M: You can smell the sugar can’t you.
A: And you’re starting to smell the fruit.
A has another sniff.

Figure 1.10 Sniffing the pears

A: Can you smell the pear in there? Coming through now?
M comes over and has another sniff.
M: Yes. There’s butter – The smell of butter is quite strong.
A: Yes.
M: But there’s –
A: It’s starting to come through. The sweetness is there and then the fruit is just
percolating through in it. And that just becomes stronger and stronger as you go. So
here’s a thing, with S. Y’know, one of the first things she often says is – er when she
comes in the door is. That smells good.
M: It smells nice, yeah. That’s the first – well, before you even see anything you get
the smell.
A: Yeah, yeah. And that frames things in a sense as well. It’s not just ‘that smells good’
but ‘that smells good, what we having?’, y’know, ‘is it ready?’, y’know?

Using the eyes – monitoring progress and readiness

Of course judgments about progress and readiness do not turn solely upon the use of people’s noses and tongues, vision plays an important part as well. In Example 12 we see A continually
assessing the progress and ultimate readiness of the pears he is cooking in a caramel sauce on the basis of colour. He has an understanding of what colour he is looking for because he has an idea of just what shade of brown a caramel sauce should be. Indeed, in this case he is looking not for the ultimate shade of brown but the right in-between shade to allow for it to finish off as the tarte tatin is cooked in the oven. This is a subtle judgment that rides in good part on prior experience but it is the central focus of A’s assessments of the food and its readiness.

Example 12: Watching the pears

A: (gesturing to pan) Now basically what you’re doing there is to – because all together it gets cooked for about forty-five minutes – you’re just making a caramel sauce. You’re just doing fruit in a caramel sauce with a lump of pastry on top, soaking it all up, y’know? It ain’t complicated.

Leans over pan and studies it.

Leans further in and sniffs.

A: Once the fruit starts to go it smells divine.

Looks at recipe book

A: (Reading out) Forty-five minutes shaking gently now and then till butter and sugar have amalgamated with the apple juice to become a rich toffee sauce and the apples are just tender. Okay.

Turns back towards cooker.

A shifts the position of the pan on the hob again and shakes it a little.

Bends down and peers at it closely.

A shaking pan then turning heat down a little.

A: Let’s turn the heat up again (…) to get a bit more (…) It’s starting to need a little bit more colour.
Using the ears – monitoring progress and controlling through heat  

In fact, the monitoring of the progress of cooking exercises all of the senses to varying degrees. Thus we also find that hearing can become a feature of certain judgments. In Example 13 A brings attention to a potential problem with how the dish is cooking, namely that it is ‘going too fast’, it is ‘too busy’. This typically refers to the bubbling sounds that come from a pot, though for some dishes it could be judgments about sizzling, hissing, and so on.

Example 13: the sound of food

A stirring contents of saucepan with a wooden spoon.

A: Can you hear that? (.) it’s going too fast.

Stirs contents of pan again.

A: Too busy.

Turns down heat under pan. Stirs contents of pan around again. Leaves wooden spoon in pan …

Stirring pan with spoon.

A: That’s a nicer sound now.

Using the ears and the eyes together – monitoring progress and controlling through heat  

Of course, it is rarely just one sense in isolation that is brought to bear upon specific in-the-course-of-cooking reasoning. Example 14 demonstrates this point. Here A reasons about both the pace of bubbling and the turning of the sauce to a caramel colour to make judgments about heat.

Example 14: Working with the bubbling of food

A Shakes the pan to and fro slightly on the hob and changes the angle, twisting the handle to the right

Shakes it some more then moves the pears in the pan with his fingers.

A: The trick with this in a lot of respects is … It’s not to be too gentle with it. Coz you see how it’s going now (pointing into pan with little finger).
A: You see all that bubbling, and you’re thinking, like, When you first do it, and you think like. M: It’s going to burn. A: Yeah. You think it’s going too fast. So you turn it down. And when you’ve turned it down it never goes that rich caramel colour.

Using the hands – monitoring progress and readiness
So taste, smell, sight, and hearing can be implicated in various ways in the assessment of how food is cooking and what kinds of other actions might need to take place. However, it does not stop here: the sense of touch is also applied in numerous different and subtle fashions. Thus we see in Example 15 how A actually prods at the pears to see if they feel ‘soft’, judging where they have got to in the cooking process and whether the heat might need to be changed.

Example 15: Assessing consistency in cooking
A prods pears gently in the pan with his fingers.
A gets a knife from the draining board and brings it over to the cooker.
He wipes the blade between two fingers then prods one of the pears a few times with it.
Then he prods another one. And then another.
A: I’m just seeing if they’re softening a touch.
Works his way around the other pears in the pan, prodding them in the same way.
A: They are softening. I think they’ll be nice in bit. (Carries on prodding) That’ll do.

Example 16: Checking the rice
A comes over to hob, picks up spoon from edge of pan, and stirs the rice. Lifts some out of the water and inspects it. Picks a few grains up from the tip of the spoon and eats them.
Taps spoon on side of pan. Goes to put on edge of pan, then changes his mind and stirs it again and picks some up and tastes it again.

Figure 1.13  Prodding for consistency
Figure 1.14  Checking the rice

*Pauses a moment, then picks up a few more grains and tries those. Drops rest back in pan, taps spoon, and rests it down again.*

A: Nearly ready that.

Using time as a feature of judgment  Timing proves to be especially critical in cooking, with cooks constantly concerned with, and monitoring, just how long different things have been cooking. In Example 17A elaborates on some important aspects of this, that timings in cooking are a contingently used resource rather than something to be taken as an absolute. Times implicate points of assessment and reasoning at best, but the other arbiters are also brought to bear upon any decisions rather than ‘it’s had ten minutes, it must be done’.

Example 17: Thinking about time

M: Well cooking is about timing.

A: It is, isn’t it?

M: A production line. That’s what I do. I don’t cook, I assemble things.

A: Well there is that about it.

P: There definitely is.

A: Assembly is a feature of working it isn’t it? It’s like ‘are me onions soft enough now to do the next bit?’ There’s a set of skills you use and judgements to bring it to the appropriate – You couldn’t use a clock to do it. You couldn’t say after thirty seconds that – ‘Y’know? There’s a perception of the right time that trades on colour and all the rest of it.

A: *(Turning heat down under pan)* I think we might just crank it down a touch with that now.

A: It’s getting happy and excited en’t it?

M: Mmm. It’s bubbling away.

A: *(Shaking pan)* What time did we put it on? About five minutes ago?

M: More seven minutes really.
1. A Shakes pan some more.
2. A: It ain’t been on ten minutes has it?
4. A: Right. Timing again. Well what – It doesn’t matter if it’s to the nth …
5. M: Yeah, one way is to do it by time, the other is to do it by colour.
6. A: I would always work off colour. I think time –
7. In Example 18 A uses the judgment that the pears for the tarte tatin have been
8. cooking for ‘about ten minutes’ as grounds for changing the heat under the pan,
9. using the account that it is at about this point in time that it will otherwise start to
10. ‘blow itself over the edge of the pan’.

Example 18: Changing the heat

A Shaking and shifting position of pan on hob.

A: So that’s about ten minutes that’s had in’t it? (Goes to turn heat down).

A: It’s going to get too excited and start to blow itself over the edge of the pan in’t it?

Filling in the pauses in-between

One of the aspects of cooking many dishes that

cooks prove to make use of in a variety of ways is that dishes often do not require

continual attention. Thus, it falls out that cooks will find themselves with idle

time between moments of working with the food in some way. However, there

are accountable matters to attend to here and this is one of the things that will

keep a cook’s eyes on the clock. One’s principal responsibility when cooking is to

maintain the due progress of the work in hand. Other activities therefore have to be

easily accommodated within the spaces between or trouble may ensue since cooks

are called to account for not paying proper attention and letting things burn or get ruined. In the course of our observations we saw A use a number of different things

to fill in these spaces in cooking. On every occasion, his friends being present at

the time, these were taken to be opportunities for interaction and most particularly

for occasioned conversation. They also afforded him time to do washing-up and

drying of items that might be needed subsequently. He also took these spaces as

opportunities for drinking the wine he had poured himself at the start. Indeed,

pouring of drinks to imbibe whilst cooking is, in part, an anticipation of exactly

these kinds of opportunities coming along.

E) Serving the Food

Once the cooking is all done a cook’s work is not yet finished.

There is the small matter of getting the food out of pots and pans etc and to the

table and under people’s noses, ready to eat. This can involve varying degrees of

ritual, but it is always a part of the work. In Example 19 we see A working on the

serving of the tarte tatin. Notice here the added complication of having to invert

the contents of the pan onto a plate prior to serving because the whole thing is

effectively cooked ‘upside down’. This involves further knife work, but also some
dexterity with plates, their positioning, and the rapid inversion of the pan and plate to avoid spillage. This is made harder by the fact that the pan is only recently out of the oven so it requires handling with oven gloves. Hence A’s comment: ‘this is where it can all go wrong’. However, there’s something else going on here as well. This is a dish being prepared for friends, and the recipients of the dish are accountable for how they respond to the food put in front of them. A plays to this point here by introducing an element of showmanship about it all. Notice how he first of all takes a peek once it’s been turned over. And notice how he then holds it out for all to see with a flourish. And note, in turn, how once it comes to the table this prompts the implicated second part of all this work of presentation when M says ‘It looks fantastic’.

Example 19: Working the serving of food

A holding top of pastry in pan in place and cutting around edges with knife.

A: You can feel a bit of resistance, like something’s really caramelized quite nicely.

M: Mmm.

A: Whether it has we’re going to find out ...

A: Right, the next – oh shit, that’s what I was going to do innit?

A grabs plate from drainer and puts it next to chopping board.

M: Weren’t you going to turn it over?

A: Yes.

A grabs oven gloves from chair.

A: This is where it can all go wrong.

Picks pan up with oven gloves and holds plate against side of pan. Inverts plate on top of the pan. Holds the plate down with his left hand. Then he inverts whole lot and gives it a downward/upward shake.

A: And …

He holds the plate with pan resting upside down on top of it towards the table.

A: Is it all just going to drop off?

A puts the oven gloves down but picks them up again and grabs the handle, still holding the plate up with his left hand. He lifts the pan a bit and peers underneath.
A: Do we have a tarte tatin?

He lifts the pan right off and holds the tarte out towards M and P to show them it on the plate.

Figure 1.16 Success – the tarte tatin

M: It looks fantastic.

The shared work of serving

Serving food is a collaborative activity. There are numerous features of comportment and bodily orientation relating to the passing of plates and cutlery between people, and in Example 20 we see how this collaborative work can sometimes become more explicit with certain parties being called upon to directly assist with the serving. In this case A is unwilling to risk a balanced portion of tarte tatin, dripping sauce, being carried any distance across
the table so he enlists the help of M, who is asked to hold plates in close position to the plate he is lifting portions from.

**Example 20: Helping out with serving**

A cuts a slice then goes to lift with the blade of the knife. It doesn’t lift. He cuts the edges of the slice again. Then he goes to lift onto a plate.

A: M, can you pick your plate up?

M holds the plate over the larger plate and A lifts the slice onto it.

*After this he scrapes the bits left on the bottom of the plate up and with the knife and puts them on top of the slice.*

A: We’ll dish some of this caramel sauce out in a minute.

*A cuts the tarte to make another third.*

A: P? Oh M, can you do the honours again?

P passes M his plate and M holds it up as before.

*Figure 1.17 Helping out with serving*

**Expressions of enthusiasm** As we noted above, the presentation of a dish usually implicates some kind of positive response from its recipients. This is especially the case with guests. Indeed, the kinds of responses expected and delivered mark out, in part, people as guests rather than inhabitants or family members etc. For a guest to take food without comment is potentially accountable as being ‘rude’. What we see in Example 21 is the way in which guests demonstrate this understanding even in the absence of any overt presentation of the food. This example precedes A’s inversion of the tarte but even now, and before A has done anything much other than get it out of the oven and put it on a trivet to cool, M still offers up the remark ‘it looks great’.
Example 21: Responding to a well-turned-out dish

A: (standing up from table) And with that gentlemen (wiping hands on towel) that can come out (grabs oven gloves from back of chair and pulls them on). Bends down and opens lower oven door. Reaches into oven, turns handle of pan slightly with oven glove then grabs the handle and lifts it out.

Lifts it up towards top of oven.

M: Oooh!

P: Mmmmmm!

A: Now we’re going to let it cool.

Places pan on top of hob. Studies it as he reaches down to shut the oven door.

A: You see tha’ – We could have given that a bit more welly, you know, when it were on here (pointing to top of hob) Turns oven off.

A: It’s nice (gesturing to tarte in pan) It is nice and brown but it could have – we could have given it a bit more. And now –

M: It looks great.

Figure 1.18 Getting the tarte from the oven

F) Eating the Food

Expressions of enthusiasm – expressions of gratitude

We now move to the final part of the business: the eating. In Example 22 we see an extension of the points we have just been making regarding how guests understand part of the business of being a guest is to offer compliments regarding the food as it is being served. What happens now is a series of expressions of pleasure and gratitude during the actual course of eating the food. Again, this is routine practice for being a guest and a potentially exceptional practice for being an inhabitant. It is not that inhabitants do not use such expressions, but they are not something they are expected to do all of the time. Indeed, it would become odd in itself if a member of the household...
offered up expressions of delight at every morsel of food they were given (rather in the fashion of Garfinkel’s infamous children as lodgers). Thus such expressions get used by inhabitants as a way of recognizing particular cases of merit and effort, such as special family meals.

Example 22: Eating

A: So you could – That caramel sauce, well that caramel recipe I’ve got here, you could make less of it – you make a third less of it and make a drier, tighter – tighter – so it’d cling more to your fruit if you know what I mean, it’d be more toffee if you will. But, it’s so fucking good that why would you bother?

A: Right, go on P. Get eating.

M: Yum, yum. Mm, pastry’s nice.

At the same time, along with the kinds of comments one gets from guests, cooks are able to engage in various kinds of post-cooking assessments regarding what might or might not have worked with a meal. We saw A saying earlier about the tarte tatin ‘It is nice and brown but it could have – we could have given it a bit more’. This is a potential criticism. Self-criticism like this is unproblematic. However, for a guest to make this kind of comment would be a very different matter, with very different consequences.

Conclusion: Cooking and Family Life

What our data suggest is the way in which the production of food is possessed of various accountable characteristics that form a part of how the constellation of relationships within a household get managed and maintained. What this discussion needs to be set against is just who might be able to actually call these different features to account and in what circumstances, regardless of whether they are connoisseurs of such desserts. What we have seen in the examples is that there is already a dividing line between guests and hosts on this score, not to mention between cooks and recipients. But it goes further than this. Different children (e.g. those known to be ‘fussy’ or not) have different rights of expression and calling to account with regard to their parents. Partners and spouses may have further rights, but even then rights of criticism vary. So what we have here is the eating of food being a vital domain for the constitution of household relations. Small wonder then that so much emphasis can come to be put upon certain family meals such as Sunday dinners.

In this conclusion we want to move on from the production (and obviously consumption) of pumpkin soup, chicken curry and tarte tatin to consider the interleaving of cooking and family life. A strong aspect of how cooking is a feature of the broader social organization of the home is the way in which provisioning for cooking informs the rest of the household routine, yet how, at the same
time, this provisioning is informed by the ways in which the rest of the routine is accomplished. So, in Example 23 below, A and his guests are discussing the relationship of cooking to their family routines, including matters such as the occasioning of shopping, cleaning, tidying, and even the timing of other activities. The logic of provisioning is interleaved with the organization of other activities. Different kinds of cooking and eating patterns get constituted around other ways in which household life is organized throughout the week, such that Friday night could be ‘pizza night’, or Sunday lunch treated as something special.

Example 23: Reasoning about the cooking routine

A: … The routine is being with your family. Occasionally extends to having guests and doing special events. Things like that, but that’s all wrapped up again in part of daily life and relationships …

A: Yeah, Sunday’s for me are often, and particularly at this time of year, cooking days. And it’s wonderful, like Sunday morning’s she’ll get a bit of a lie-in and I’ll get up and start cooking stuff, make a few dishes. Sunday’s also a special thing, not in a religious way, but it’s like, we’ll have a nice meal because I’ve got more time. So we always say: ‘what are we having for Sunday tea?’.

Reasoning about cooking is informed through and through by the constitution of the different relationships between various members of the household. So it can fall down to having to manage a variety of different tastes and preferences with, significantly, those preferences having a right to be voiced and the person doing the cooking being held accountable to their recognition. In Examples 24 and 25 it can be seen that aspects of familial relationships can also be found at the dinner table with cooking and eating being just another opportunity for such considerations to get occasioned.

Example 24: Bringing family relations to the table

A: Yeah, It’s recognizing that it’s not just some technical skill being exercised on a bit of food or with some pans and stuff, it’s really integral to family life, yeah …

M: Family life, yeah …

A: It’s woven into a whole set of familial concerns.

P: And it’s accountable to those concerns, not just to itself.

Example 25: Bringing the family together

A: It gears into a whole bunch of things that are really important, and if you didn’t do it – If I didn’t cook, and S didn’t cook, I don’t know what our lives would look like if you know what I mean. Things really turn upon it. This is our meal. We sit down, and we’re doin’ nowt in some respects, but we sit down to eat and we have a conversation. We’re cooking – while we do it we’re not just talking about it we’re talking about us and our everyday lives, y’know. And it goes all the way through it. … So for us dinner is – It’s not just food, it’s an opportunity to be together. Talk about the shit in our lives.
The good things in our lives. Project, plan, all the rest of it, y’know? Yeah. So it’s a very, very precious thing.

In these final examples, we have arrived at the point of summing up the importance of what we have been saying. Here A discussed how significant the meals he has with his wife are in terms of the preservation of their relationship and the forum it provides for them to ‘work’ their relationship through a variety of interactions about what has been happening with their lives, what things they plan to do, and so on. This is the very stuff of family life that provides for its ongoing realization and, without it, it is just a bunch of people living together without commitment or responsibility, offering up politenesses about food because that is the limit of their ordinary rights.