

The images of kitchens in transition are more potent than the finished/sanitized/fictionalized imagery used by manufacturers to promote the purchase of new products because they are clearly rooted in everyday life. Yes, the photographs may have been staged to a certain extent, but they are still images of spaces in situ and are recognizable as such. And as such, they have an authenticity that the mediated images of magazine articles and advertisements often lacked. The design reformers in extension programs such as the one at Cornell University understood this. Modernity, for them, became more than just a product. They also understood it to be the activity necessitated by efforts to transform the environment and attitudes about who could and should be empowered to affect that change. The images in Cornell's collection are important because they raise the possibility that modern life did not have to be lived within the confines of the stereotypes that were frequently promoted by mass media. These actual kitchens were sites of reuse and home-making in its most literal sense; yet they are held up as exemplars of modern living. They are between the actual and the imagined or the staged and the real. The imperfections of the environments they present are understood as assets and symbols of mediation and by association, empowerment. One can thereby infer that in the end, the process of remodelling may have resulted in changing the interiors and the inhabitants together.

How is this historical study relevant to our contemporary consideration of the interior as a state of becoming? The photographs of these kitchens capture the notion of space in transition—clearly these rooms were once in an unimproved state, yet the potential of their further refinement is not masked. In their implied candidness, they evoke notions of authenticity as nearly every photograph expresses the essence of habitation, as though the homemaker has merely stepped away from the scene for a moment. Susan Sontag once noted that 'one of the perennial successes of photography has been its strategy of turning living beings into things, things into living beings.'¹² As documentary evidence of design ingenuity and the value of modern convenience and aesthetics, the animated quality of much of the imagery in this unusual photographic repository raises questions about the ability of the sanitized imagery that dominates design media today to represent the dynamic ability of interior spaces in a state of becoming to promote new models for designing and living.

¹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 98.