

Cooking Under Control:

A Commentary on Social Harmony and Technological Optimisation

Exploring how technology's attempt to optimise social cooking undermines human warmth, rhythm, and connection.

Context

Cooking is a deeply social and emotional practice. It is one tied to **care, identity, and cooperation**.

However, emerging “smart” technologies increasingly frame it as a process to be optimised for efficiency and harmony.

Research Question:

How might design critique the growing systematisation of social cooking and expose the tension between human messiness and technological control?

Across literature, technology's role in cooking should focus on connection, learning, and play, yet in practice, it often enforces order, efficiency, and surveillance.

Insight 1: Cooking is emotional and intimate.

“It’s a labour of love. You’re showing people that you care about them.”

Cooking is **intuitive, messy, and personal** and **should not be systematised**. Our design responded to this through the use of exaggerated technological control to **critique the loss of warmth and humanity**.

Insight 2: Social cooking is bonding, not performance.

“A large part of how I make friends and form bonds with other people is through cooking.”

Social cooking is about **collaboration and shared discovery**, not efficiency. Our design responded to this through the use of alerts that parody tech's attempts to **enforce social harmony**.

Insight 3: Conflict is natural.

“They would not wash it for two days which drove me insane. It was just too much”

Friction and frustration are part of social cooking. Our design responded to this by trying to remove imperfection which led to the system becoming oppressive. It mirrored how real-world optimisation often kills spontaneity and people skills.

Insight 4: Cleanliness creates tension and identity.

“I like to clean as I go.” & “They would just throw stuff in the sink and it would literally create a mountain.”

Cleanliness signals respect and comfort, but standards differ. Our design responded to this through the use of visual/auditory alerts for “messiness” which was a parody on domestic surveillance.

Insight 5: Everyone has a rhythm.

“I never follow recipes... I just get a vibe.”

Personal tempo and intuition make cooking human. Our design responded to this through the use of exaggerated tempo alerts to critique enforced cooperation.