

Kitchen and Other Tables to Think With:
The Case of *To the Lighthouse*, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife
and Her Lover* and *In the Mood for Love*

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Abstract

This article studies comparatively references to tables in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* and two films, Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love*. Greenaway announces from the title a concern with a cook, which the film duly elaborates by setting its action mostly in a restaurant and its kitchen; tables as the central part of the set visualise power configurations. In Wong's film about failed love, the kitchen and/or tables as part of the décor reinforce mainstream notions of middle-class domesticity. Woolf challenges middle-class views of gender in two episodes from Part I – Mrs Ramsay's dinner party and the dialogue between Lily Briscoe and Andrew Ramsay about the object of his father's philosophy books – by defamiliarising respectively the dining- and kitchen tables. The latter scene, which repurposes the *idea* of the kitchen table as an analogon for philosophy's construal of the nature of reality, opens up an epistemic avenue: thinking *with* the kitchen table. My general frame for analysis is Edmund Husserl's concept of orientation, sustained by Bertrand Russell's propositions about unobserved objects and unoccupied perspectives. However, I twist these conceptual tools intersectionally to unravel the social grounds of philosophical and artistic positions that obfuscate gendered contributions to knowledge, sustenance and general well-being.

Keywords: *To the Lighthouse* (Virginia Woolf), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-Wai), kitchen table, dinner table, intersectionality theory, philosophy, orientation (Edmund Husserl), unobserved objects (Bertrand Russell), unoccupied perspective (Bertrand Russell)