

Originally written as an audio essay, as part of *How to Do Things with Salad* at the Jerwood Visual Arts Project Space, 11 January – 30 April 2016.

How to Do Things with Salad

Row upon row of mayonnaise clotted heaps, cubed potatoes, carrots and garden peas, the stuff of school lunch legend, creamily cemented into great mounds, garnished with dull green olives and radish, stripes of red pepper and all manner of hard-boiled eggs, some greying at the yolk, in motifs that were probably intended to be elegant and floral, but are off-putting in their attempted symmetry. Carrots discs alternate with black olive rings, gherkin strips float amid a carrot half-moon sky, and, for variety, the concoction is stuffed into rolls of processed ham, each secured with a plastic toothpick. These are the results of an online image search for Romanian potato salad, photographs largely drawn from blogs and Pinterest.

My own recipe for Romanian potato salad was, I think, cooked by my great grandmother, written down by my grandmother, transcribed by my aunt, and scanned and emailed to me by my mother. A sparsely populated page, with nothing but basic typed text. No romantic spills or sticky finger prints. The illustration comes in oral form from my mother on the phone: ‘my grandmother used to make it for us – it has to be served in a wide, flat dish, decorated with furrowed lines carved with the back of a fork, and maybe a sprig or two of parsley.’ An email quickly follows the scanned copy: ‘Hmmm - not very clear recipe! The eggs should be finely chopped and the potatoes peeled and mashed, I guess. (Of course, they say the best mashed potato is made with the inside of baked potatoes.)’

Believed to have been compiled around 1390 by the master cooks in the household of King Richard the Second, the *Forme of Cury* – cury being the Middle English word for cookery – is one of the oldest-known instructive cookery manuscripts in the English language and contains around 200 recipes on a vellum scroll.

The book contains recipes for dishes for the servants’ quarters to the royal top table, and include mention of the elaborate sculptures that often adorned grand feasts, made from sugar, jelly or wax, but there seem to be no aspirational or instructional illustrations. Instructions in general are minimal and assume a great deal of knowledge, with many vegetable dishes omitted due to their simplicity. It does, however, contain the earliest salad recipe written in Britain, and the first ever mention of olive oil in the context of British food.

Translated from the Middle English:

Salat.

Take parsley, sage, garlic, chives, onions, leek, borage, mint, scallion, fennel and nasturtium, rue, rosemary, purslane, rinse and wash them clean, pick them, pluck them small with thine hand and mingle them well with raw oil lay on vinegar and salt and serve it forth.

Recipes and images of food proliferate today, in cookbooks, newspapers, a wide range of magazines, on websites, television programmes, oral histories, in unpublished notebooks, diaries, emails and social media, on leaflets, supermarket recipe cards, food packaging, and even printed on tea towels, aprons and tablecloths.

I have a growing collection of books about food, how to cook it, art that uses it or critiques it

A collection seems a grand term for a quantity of things bought due to compulsion, whim, need or desire.

A quantity that no longer fits on the shelves, but is now teetering in a desk-side stack on the floor, and another above it on some drawers – titles like *Experimental Eating*, *Neither Man nor Beast*, *The Table Comes First*, *Culinary Pleasures*, *Eat My Words*, *Consuming Passions*, and *Taste: The Story of Britain Through its Cooking* – interspersed with dietary supplements, ironically, because in all this thinking about food, I don't necessarily always eat that well.

The recipe is a form of writing that has been adopted and adapted within literature and visual art, and especially in performance art, where food has proved a rich source of material... because to make and serve food is to perform – to work with materials, tools, techniques and processes; to work with (or against) a set of behavioural norms; to present and show those actions and behaviours and offer them up for evaluation and appreciation. And it is here, in the showing, that food becomes theatrical... and spectacular. And often inedible.

A recipes' title asserts its identity, and a food photograph performs itself. In the realm of professional food styling, this performance reaches absurd heights of inedible spectacle. These days, we are expected to 'style' our everyday lunches. David Bez, author of 2014's top-selling *Salad Love: How to Create a Lunchtime Salad, Every Weekday, in 20 Minutes or Less*, posted an image of a 'salad beauty bag' to his Instagram last year. On the obligatory lightly shadowed white background, is a compartmentalised, crisp blue-and-white-striped bag, the kind used for make-up or toiletries. The left-hand section holds individually pocketed plastic clips, for securing bags and packets in order to keep the contents fresh. There are two cylindrical plastic stacks of pots, the kind my school friends and I all had as teenagers, containing shades of shimmery lip balm, in grades from caramel to puce. David Bez's beauty bag versions seem to contain neatly sectioned herbs and spices. The final residents of the left compartment are two petite spray bottles: one olive oil, I presume, and one surely vinegar of some

sort. Lurking beneath the oil, in the lower portion of the practical plastic-lined bag, its darkness suggests balsamic. Crossing to the right-hand side, a mustard-yellow-handled paring knife lies alongside a pair of scissors and a vegetable peeler. In an elasticated pocket on the outer edge is tucked some metal implement – a teaspoon, perhaps.

The caption to this Instagrammed image reads as follows:

Salad beauty bag. Any salad can become pretty with it. #glutenfree #vegetarian #happydesksalad #deskunch #desk #notsaddeskunch #instalunch #feelgood #healthy #healthyfood #saladpride #saladlove #healthychoices #realfood #wholefood #eatyourgreens #organic #plantbased #plantbaseddiet #healthyisawayoflife #fooddelivery #eastlondon #davidandjoy #smartfood #lunchbox #bestsaladever #box #beautybag #makeover

Don't forget that food styling originated in advertising and with the home economists who worked in test kitchens, developing recipes to promote certain products. Working for the likes of Kraft Foods, Campbell's and Cuisinart, they strove for images of garnished perfection. But at least they were paid to do it.

Images of food drive desire, to have the food, or the magazine or book it adorns, the standmixer that was used to make it, the bowl it sits in, the lifestyle it sells.

When San Francisco-based food blogger Heidi Swanson didn't want to monetise her site (*101Cookbooks*) by selling advertising space, so she made her own products and sold them through the site. She makes great food and photographs it beautifully in her beautiful home. She is a taste maker. And you can buy a piece of her life.

The candle salad, or candlestick or candlelight salad, is an obscene-looking creation with base layer of lettuce leaf, upon which is placed a pineapple ring into which is inserted half a banana. In most recipes, it's topped off with a dribble of mayonnaise – or sometimes whipped or sour cream – apparently to resemble melting candle wax, and then a maraschino cherry flame. Popular in North America from around the 1920s to the 1960s, the recipe was most likely a result of – or designed to actively promote – the young pineapple trade from Hawaii. James Drummond Dole began canning pineapple there in 1903 and shipping it widely – by 1921 it was the largest crop on the Hawaiian islands.

Variously promoted as a Christmas crowd-pleaser and an easy recipe for the housewife out to impress, it even appeared in the spiral-bound *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys and Girls* in 1957, which sets out each element, step-by-step with cartoon illustrations and the tag line 'it's better than a real candle, because

you can eat it'. Elsewhere, the book includes instructions for carving radishes into roses.

Candle Salad

Place crisp lettuce leaf on plate.

For candle base, use 1 slice pineapple.

The candle is half banana, set upright in center of pineapple slice.

The flame is 1 maraschino cherry, fastened on top of banana with a toothpick.

In 'Square Meals' by Jane and Michael Stern (published in 1984), it is introduced as follows: 'The most notorious of all the affectations of feminine dining, repudiated by sophisticated cooks as tasteless and spurious, Candlelight Salad is a paradigm of *cunning* cuisine.'

Candlelight Salad

1 slice canned pineapple

1 thick, short banana

Mayonnaise

Shred of coconut and pimiento bit

Lettuce for garnish

Set pineapple on individual salad plate. Cut off top of banana so it will stand in the hole in the center of the pineapple slice. Dribble a tad of mayonnaise atop the banana candle to simulate wax. Insert coconut and pimiento in mayonnaise at top to simulate wick and fire.

The ease with which these finished dishes appear, is an illusion. There's a wonderful photograph of Julia Child on the set of *The French Chef* in 1963, a show that marks the dawning of the celebrity chef phenomenon. As she leans over the countertop, talking to camera, there are five assistants seated on the floor at her ankles, one of whom raises a dish upwards, towards Julia Child's outstretched reach. The assistant in question is a rotund man, with an eyebrow raised to match the dish, in an expression of doubt regarding his profession.

Food stylists create feasts only fit for the eyes, with standard tools of the trade including tweezers, cotton buds, toothpicks, tape measures, Lego pieces to raise things up, syringes for perfectly oozing sauces, spritzer bottles to keep things glistening, lacquer and spray-on sheens, not to mention flattering lighting and angles. These dishes are built for the camera.

We've learned the culture of plating up from television shows and styled photographs, and now we're left trying to replicate a piece of cheese on toast that took 40 minutes to make and photograph, but that nobody in their right mind would ever eat.

Peg Bracken's *I Hate to Cook Book* was published in 1960, catering to a new readership of working women. A hot-cheeked, tight-

lipped chef glowers out from its cover, and the salad section is headed up with a line-drawn illustration of a vegetable woman, contentedly lying on her cauliflower body in a wooden bowl, resting on her asparagus elbows, her celery stalk legs kicked up at the back, with leaf feet twisted girlishly. An artichoke torso, radish nose and frill-edged lettuce leaf hair complete the picture, with a garlic bulb balanced on the head for a final touch. This is a relaxed salad, it seems – more wallowing mermaid than kitchen maid.

Her introduction to the sections reveals a general dislike for vegetables, and states: “In order to make most vegetables fit to eat, you must cover up the basic taste of the vitamins with calories.”

Posh Salad

6 servings

*½ head cauliflower
½ large mild onion
⅓ cup sliced stuffed olives
½ cup oil-vinegar dressing
2 to 3 ounces Roquefort cheese
black pepper
small head of lettuce*

Separate those little cauliflowerlets and slice them thin. Slice the onion now, separate the slices into rings, and add them to the cauliflower slices along with the sliced olives. Now marinate it all in the dressing, with a good sprinkling of pepper, for anywhere from half an hour to overnight.

When you serve the salad, cut or tear the lettuce into small chunks, put it in a bowl, pour the marinated mix over it, and crumble the Roquefort on top.

The question of ugly food is a political one. If ‘good’ has come to mean photogenic, then whole cuisines based on curries, stews and soups are cast aside from the acceptable mainstream. All that brown, sloppy, nutritious, delicious, economical food. Not to mention those mountains of wonky or blemished fruits and vegetables. Too ugly. Not fit for sale.

The anonymous Chef Jacques La Merde is worth a look on Instagram, for bro food parody par excellence, with 89.7k followers to his mere 105 perfectly pitched posts. ‘Small portions | tweezered everything’ his strapline reads, in reference to every food stylist’s favoured tool.

He creates striking dishes in the New Nordic or molecular gastronomy vein, meticulous mimics of plates from René Redzepi’s 2-Michelin starred Noma, which are, in fact, made from an array of junk foods such as Doritos, Cheetos, Miracle Whip, Haribo, Campbell’s soup and frankfurters.

A recent post reads:

#TBT BROS!!!! REMEMBER THAT TIME I NOMA-FIED A LARGISH SLAB OF VELVEETA CHEEZE W/ TINY LEAFS, SOME BITS OF ALLIUM, FROZEN PEAS AND BEEF JERKY?!!!! I CAN STILL TASTE THAT LATE SUMMER SOIGNÉ ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE BROS!!!! YASSSS 🍷🍷🍷 #soigné #velveeta #tweezers #waybackplayback #solidgold #wildchefs #foraged #theartofplating #gourmet #chefsofig #negativespace #nomafy #uppernextlevel #ishouldrlygetbacktowork

Now it seems that food must not only *be* beautiful, it must be beautifully photographed. When America's goddess of domestic presentation Martha Stewart posted a badly lit photograph of an iceberg wedge with Russian dressing to Twitter a couple of years ago, it was met with a freakshow response. Now food must be cooked up in Photoshop. According to the Huffington Post, with that one photo, Martha Stewart 'ruined iceberg lettuce forever'.

I never met my paternal grandmother, but I've heard stories of her disregard for cooking, or for the domestic in general, and, in fact, for being inside at all, and would always much rather have been out tending to her garden. My father says: 'Salad was a cos lettuce leaf on your plate. Oh, and sometimes she put a spring onion on top.' Her roses no doubt received all her vegetal tenderness.

In 1974, famed cookery writer Elizabeth David bought a second-hand copy of *Ulster Fare*, a book published in 1945 by the Belfast Women's Institute Club. Renowned for her caustic annotations, next to a recipe for Italian Salad on page 50, she wrote: 'Sounds just about the most revolting dish ever devised.'

Italian Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 pint cold cooked macaroni
*½ pint cooked or tinned peas**
½ pint grated raw carrot
French dressing to moisten
2 heaped tablespoons minced onion
½ pint cooked or minced string beans

DIRECTIONS

Mix the chopped macaroni and vegetables; moisten with French dressing, flavouring with garlic if liked. Serve on a dish lined with lettuce leaves. Decorate with mayonnaise and minced pimento or chives.

*When reprinted in a Guardian newspaper article about Elizabeth David's cookbook collection, tinned peas was misprinted as 'tinned pears'.

The following correction was printed in the Guardian's Corrections and Clarifications column, Tuesday 7 July 2009:

A misprint meant that anybody essaying the macaroni salad recipe at the end of the piece below would have had even more grounds than the late Elizabeth David to detest this dish. As a reader wrote: "Try 'peas' instead of 'pears'. Better?"

Of her famous Fluxus performance called *Make a Salad* – the script for which is simply 'make a salad' – Alison Knowles has spoken of her intention for someone to see the piece and 'take a certain power to the act' of making a salad in their own home. Similarly to Chef Jacques La Merde, she draws attention to an everyday act, takes it out of the kitchen, amplifies it, pokes it around to find out what's what. In his introduction to the 2009 edition of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, Neil Badmington draws out the influence of Barthes's kind of paying of attention: "Whenever a critic cultivates what Marc Augé calls 'an ethnology of the near', whenever the dominant values that dwell in the artefacts of a culture are blanched by analysis, whenever 'what-goes-without-saying' in a society is suddenly said with sharpened style, whenever innocence is shown to incubate ideology, whenever what Barthes called 'the disease of thinking in essences' is diagnosed, the legacy of *Mythologies* is likely to be at work and at play."

The moulded, jellied, congealed, or so-called 'Perfection' salad is the ultimate in over-dressed salad. By the end of 19th century, the domestic science and home economics movement took hold in the US – tossed salads were deemed messy, disorganised and unrefined. Orderly presentations were impressive markers of a new middle class, and the moulded salad was the pinnacle of salad control. Ingredients such as shredded cabbage, white or red, and sliced, stuffed olives hang suspended within a jelly mould, in forms from basic loaves and upturned bowls, to fish reclining on lettuce beds with googly-olive eyes, garnished rings, and multi-tiered and turreted castles. More ornate renditions feature immaculate rows of carrot discs, regimented cauliflower tufts, and asparagus soldiers standing guard.

While jellies and aspics were by no means culinary innovations of the 20th century, it was the Knox Gelatine Company's introduction of powdered gelatine in the 1880s that made this shimmering, sliceable salad possible without the need for the smelly and labour-intensive boiling up of calves' feet.

The Perfection Salad was the 3rd-prize-winning recipe in a competition held by Knox in 1905, and was submitted by Mrs John E Cooke of New Castle, Pennsylvania – it went on to feature in *Knox Gelatine: Dainty Dishes for Dainty People* (published in 1931).

Perfection Salad

1 envelope Knox Sparkling Gelatine

½ cup cold water

*½ cup mild vinegar
2 tablespoonfuls lemon juice
2 cups boiling water
½ cup sugar
1 teaspoonful salt
1 cup cabbage, finely shredded
2 cups celery, cut in small pieces
2 pimentos, cut in small pieces*

Soak gelatine in cold water five minutes. Add vinegar, lemon juice, boiling water, sugar, and salt. Strain, and when mixture begins to stiffen, add remaining ingredients. Turn into mold, first dipped in cold water, and chill. Remove to bed of lettuce or endive. Garnish with mayonnaise dressing, or cut in cubes, and serve in cases made of red or green peppers, or turn into molds lined with canned pimentos.

How to Do Things with Salad

A salad might be defined as: ‘a cold dish of various mixtures of raw or cooked vegetables, usually seasoned with oil, vinegar, or other dressing and sometimes accompanied by meat, fish or other ingredients.’

An early 17th-century English salad dish called salmagundi referred to a hodgepodge or mix of disparate ingredients, including cooked meats, seafood, vegetables, fruit, leaves, nuts and flowers, dressed with oil, vinegar and spices. Hannah Glasse, English cookery writer and author of *The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy*, first published in 1747, after penning three salmagundi recipes, wrote straightforwardly that “you may always make salamongundy of such things as you have, according to your fancy”.

So the salad recipe is not usually one of strict commands and precise measurements, but more of guidelines, suggestions, ideas, or even ‘provocations’.

The Berkeley, California restaurant Chez Panisse was co-founded in 1971 by influential restaurateur, author and food activist Alice Waters, was at the vanguard of the local, organic, seasonal food movement. The arts and crafts architecture of the restaurant and the mantra of back-to-basics good food come together botanical illustrations by graphic artist David Lance Goines. In 1970, Waters and Goines published *Thirty Recipes Suitable for Framing*, a folio consisting of 30 lithographs in a paper cover – pages of roots, fronds, blossom and curlicues. These are recipes not so much to inspire or instigate action, but rather as abstracted, ideal forms, to be hung on the wall and admired. As right – or right on – as local and organic may be, it is a luxurious choice.

Avocado and Beet Salad with Citrus Vinaigrette from The Chez Panisse Cafe Cookbook (1999)

In our temperate climate of Northern California, someone is growing beets all year round, and not just red ones. Golden beets, striped Chioggia beets, rosy pink beets, and ivory beets, lightly pickled, add sparkle to antipasti, grilled fish dishes, or salads like this one.

Yield: Serves 6

Ingredients

6 medium red or golden beets

Salt and pepper

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Extra virgin olive oil

1 large shallot, diced fine

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon orange juice

1 tablespoon chopped chervil

¼ teaspoon chopped lemon zest

¼ teaspoon chopped orange zest

2 firm, ripe avocados

Chervil sprigs

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Trim and wash the beets. Put them in a baking dish, add a splash of water, and cover tightly. Roast the beets in the oven for about 45 minutes, until they are cooked through.

When the beets are cooked, allow them to cool uncovered. Peel and cut them into wedges. Put them in a bowl, season generously with salt and pepper, add the red wine vinegar and 1 tablespoon of olive oil, and toss gently.

Put the shallot in a bowl and add the white wine vinegar, lemon juice, orange juice, and a pinch of salt. Let macerate for 15 minutes. Whisk in ¾ cup olive oil and stir in the chopped chervil, lemon zest, and orange zest. Taste for seasoning.

Cut the avocados in half lengthwise and remove the pits. Leaving the skin intact, cut the avocados lengthwise into ¼-inch slices. Scoop out the slices with a large spoon and arrange them on a platter or individual dishes. Season with salt and pepper. Arrange the beets over the avocado slices and drizzle with the vinaigrette. Garnish with a few chervil sprigs.

Variation: Blood orange, grapefruit, Meyer lemon, and kumquat go well with the roasted beets and citrus dressing—with or without the avocados—as do watercress and Belgian endive.

Surely it must be possible to make a salad from the photograph alone – with each ingredient apparent, the image becomes the thing to be followed and imitated. The image is the recipe. The

international user-friendly language of technology is increasingly graphic and non-verbal, with icons from bluebirds to envelopes and dustbins. While a graphic novel cookbook might be the latest thing (see Brooklyn's *Dirt Candy Cookbook*), illustrative hands showing how to shape a rose from a tomato skin, or how to plait an eight-strand plaited loaf, are nothing new. Beyond verbal language, these images – and video tutorials even more so – get closer to how so many actually learn to cook – by watching. The technology is yet to capture the smell, touch and taste.

While a salad can be open and honest, revealing its ingredients to all who care to inspect, it is the dressing, appropriately named, that provides an element of deceit – disguising, coating, glazing, and presenting in a visually unidentifiable form.

Salad is a food of plenty, not necessity, nor fuel for hard graft. At the 2005 Good Housekeeping awards, Filippo Berio olive oil was voted “the one ingredient I can't live without”. Salad is decorative and gendered, a classic ‘diet’ food, a food of privilege, a pastime and style choice.

Mina Pächter was a Czechoslovakian Jew, who wrote her cookbook with friends while imprisoned in the Second World War Terezin concentration camp, where she was starving and malnourished, and eventually died. We can only imagine what she went through just to get the paper and thread together for her makeshift booklet. These evocative recipes – for cakes, strudels, goulash, plum dumplings – need no photograph to spark the imagination – their aesthetic is of grey desperation – and they served to assert identity, and to escape in memory and hope. Far beyond inspiration for what to cook for dinner, they speak of an aspiration for a life, not a lifestyle.

Her recipes have been transcribed and translated from the original German.

Asparagus Salad

Boil ½ kilogram asparagus points in salted water with 1 sugar cube. Put on the platter where [they] will be served. The tips must [be placed] in a circle with the points looking out [towards the edge] of the platter. Now pour a thick mayonnaise over [them]. [Garnish] with hard boiled eggs and lettuce leaves and put in the icebox until serving.

My grandpa used to make these salads when I was little that I loved – served with thick slices of grainy bread pasted with butter, and probably some cheese and cold ham – I rejected the pork pies with their waxy pastry and repulsive jelly interior – he'd make green salads, with incredibly thinly sliced cucumber, most of which would sink to the bottom and become saturated, doused and drunken on vinegar.

The disguising dressing is, in fact, where 'salad' gets its name – originating in 'sale' or 'salt'. So salad is by name and nature a gussied up and deceptive thing, the ultimate in cosmetic enhancement, highly visual, photogenic, sometimes more garnish than dish, and occasionally even seen replacing a bunch of flowers as the centrepiece of a table.

'Just exquisite! And also, divinely edible' says Nigella Lawson, as she adds the finishing flourishes to her watercress and ravishing roast radish pinkly piled platter, amid fairy light warmth and slow saxophone glamour.

No matter how much work goes into a meal, its success is fleeting. Similarly, cycles of influence loop and flow amongst professional chefs, home cooks, advertising agencies, editorial photographers, Instagrammers and Facebookers both amateur and pro, not to mention the adoption of myriad other aesthetics, from art, film, fashion, and so on. Nostalgic Hipstamatic filters that draw on 90s fashion, Polaroids and lo-fi grainy film, are mimicked in turn by professional retouchers.

A recipe is a wispy thing that evades ownership just as much as style, and raises impossible questions of intellectual copyright. Is the dish served to you in a restaurant your own to photograph and share, just as much as if you'd followed the recipe to make it? Is the dish that results from following an authored recipe a replica? Or more like a cover song – a new variation?

The current trend for moody slate and chiaroscuro speaks of food photography's heritage in the still life. This comparison suggests that these images go beyond a superficial tableau of seasonal produce. These images are not static – like still lifes, they are markers of time, of life and death. A photograph of a delicious dish marks the instant of seeing it, but simultaneously makes its present absence and future potential presence palpable. It's a destabilising thing, that drives wants and desires and draws a division between having and not having.

The influential white-on-white-on-white of Donna Hay is a look adopted and made famous in the US by Martha Stewart, the self-employed suburban divorcee who so successfully blended independent woman and traditional hostess.

Leaving behind the time-consuming garnishes of the 1980s when all was controlled and carved, coiffed and fixed in place, here was a clean, bright clarity. 'Natural' light. No pretence (apparently) – with the likes of salt-of-the-earth Jamie with his dawn market scooter runs, the naked chef with nothing to hide – and down-to-earth Delia, then Nigella Bites, a mother and career woman, doing and having it all.

A stack of deconstructed apple, sliced millimetres thin by some unmentioned sharp-blade gadget, teeters immaculately atop celery strips, all strewn – the hard-earned, carefree, natural look –

with walnuts, chopped, not too finely, and a scattering of watercress, the complexion's best friend.

In many ways it harks back to pre-1950s, when the ultimate hostess was to require no help and to appear to have made no effort at all. These images are meticulously composed to appear casual and unconstructed. There are no dirty dishes here. And if there are, they're carefully posed to evoke the party the night before, the food so delicious it didn't hang around long. Mess that speaks of laughter, not labour.

Nothing can hide in this bright, white light – a force of good reason against the dark enemies of convenience and processed, additives and Big food. In fact, it's more angelic bleach than warts-and-all exposure, a blue-white glare of icy amphetamine perfection in an age of superfood science and wholefoods health luxury.

Near the towering apple dish, a small glass bowl which, against its white saucer, the white tablecloth, and the entire table's white halo glow, only gives away the fact that it contains anything at all by a few telling bubbles on its think, white surface. No longer presented clad in glistening glaze, this salad appears perfect, and undressed.

Waldorf Salad

*4 Granny Smith (green) apples, thinly sliced
1 stalk celery, thinly sliced
1 cup (100g) walnuts, chopped
2 cups watercress sprigs*

*blue cheese dressing
¼ cup (75g) whole-egg mayonnaise
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons water
sea salt and cracked black pepper
100g soft blue cheese, chopped*

To make the blue cheese dressing, place the mayonnaise, lemon juice, water, salt, pepper and blue cheese in the bowl of a food processor and process until smooth. Arrange the apple, celery, walnuts and watercress on serving plates and spoon over the dressing to serve. Serves 4.

The broadcast of these images is wider than ever, but the act is nothing new – the appearance of food has long been judged, ever since *some* of us stopped having to worry about whether we had enough of it, or even whether it tasted good.

The competitive race for affirmative likes and shares is just as fast-paced as the critiques that follow each new trend, with beautiful food brags chased up by #struggleplates, and just as the avocado became the food most posted to social media, we have #POHTPOF – pictures of hipsters taking pictures of food.