

1

It might be cliché to begin an essay with the question: who, or what, is “beautiful”. While philosophers, writers, and artists still debate this ancient question, it seems that the food industry, and perhaps the fashion industry too, might have the answer to this question – to cut it short:

Fresh is beautiful!

2

For decades, modern society has moved further away from “nature”. As our habitats become more and more engineered, the existing gaps between contemporary lifestyle and the more “natural” or old way that societies used to live is constantly increasing. Given that fact, our desire to stay in contact with nature is still very much alive.

We do all kinds of things to maintain contact with nature; we grow houseplants to remind ourselves of the seasonal structure of nature, or adopt and care for house pets to maintain relationships with animals.

In this reality, the notion of real freshness moves further and further away from us. In terms of global economy, for example, produce might travel thousands of miles, switch many hands and cross oceans before we see it on our local supermarket shelves. The produce may have been frozen for weeks, stored in dark shipping containers, loaded only to be unloaded over and over again. In fact, most of the “fresh” produce we see on supermarket display shelves lacks any fresh substance. These fruits and vegetables are often genetically modified; built in a lab, removed from their original and natural state of being. While food engineers have certainly improved the physical qualities of produce, and perhaps provided it with longer shelf life, they simultaneously drain produce of its nutrients, leaving it completely tasteless and therefore without real substance, without character. With this in mind, the value of produce lies within its physical appearance. While visual documentation of food has become increasingly dominant in popular culture, it is clear that appearance takes precedence over taste.

3

Western advertising agencies found a way for us to forget all of that and solved the “freshness” problem – the Don Drapers of today who sit on the 35th floor of air-conditioned offices in mega metropolitan areas understand what many Flemish still-life painters like Jan Van Huysum already knew in the 18th century - all they needed in order to create the illusion of freshness were a few drops of water.

While this formula of freshness = wetness was widely used and was common in all kinds of print and video commercials in the 1980's (the slightly wet tomato and lettuce leaf perfectly landing atop of a hamburger only to be perfectly sliced in half) it is only in recent years that we witness

freshness can be achieved with just a few drops of water. In misting, the drops briefly rest on the object or run down its outer layer: never infiltrating it, causing no danger of decay, and having no possibility of penetrating its skin. The misting process holds two very different visual strategies that support each other. First is the mist itself, which emerges in the form of a cloud of tiny water droplets, and creates a visual barrier between the viewer and the object. Then, after the mist has faded, not only can we see the object clearly but we can actually see ourselves reflected inside the drops of water, as every droplet functions as a tiny, microscopic mirror. This is the first time the produce and the self become one entity – the second time is when we eat it.

Residents and tourists in California, Nevada, and other hot climates have grown used to an increasing amount of private and public places wherein misting systems seem to be a natural part of the landscape, keeping customers happy and cool. Not only is the flesh of our produce now being misted, but our very own bodies have become a part of the misting aesthetics. I would argue that it is more than likely that a consumer who purchased a misted carrot in the morning is the same upper/middle class person that sits outside on a hot summer night in a misted coffee shop garden – misted and beautiful inside out.

5

Widely celebrated artist and filmmaker Adam Curtis suggested in a 2016 interview in *The Guardian*, that if anyone is interested in knowing the goings on in today's world, they shouldn't look for answers in documentary movies or in the news. Instead, he suggested that they watch that week's episode of South Park. Similar to Curtis, I would like to argue that if one is interested in speculating what the future might look like, one shouldn't read academic essays or cutting edge art magazines, rather one should just flip through the latest issue of *Vogue*. In May 2019, high fashion seemed to welcome the fresh image with open arms. Kim Kardashian West, one of the most influential figures in present-day pop culture, appeared on the cover of the magazine's issue. Photographed from the waist up, she appears wearing nothing but a mesh tank top, a minimalist chain, and water droplets adorn her body. She's dripping; every single drop that slides down her neck, arms, face, and chest is apparent. The feature article itself included additional looks representing fetishistic freshness. In one photo, Kardashian is photographed on a staircase wearing a one piece bathing suit, in another, she wears a beautiful, simple looking dress as she stands in her personal shower. Another image shows Kardashian with semi wet hair in her kitchen, surrounded left and right by her kids. Right behind them is a TV screen revealing yet another world-famous wet creature – Spongebob.

A week after the above mentioned issue was published, we witnessed the direct continuation, and perhaps the most sophisticated version thus far, of the misted/fresh aesthetic at none other than the renowned Met Gala. Once a year, the fashion world and its followers monitor and cover this event, considered to be one of the most innovative and important in the field. Kardashian arrived at this event in a dress that can easily be described as a misted dress. The inspiration behind her Met Gala look? Sophia Loren in *Boy on a Dolphin* wearing a wet, see-through dress on a ship. While wearing Thierry Mugler's fresh dress, whenever approached about the origin of the dress and her look, K.K constantly repeated Mugler's words: "California girl stepping out of the ocean." One might think that K.K is just a new form of the same idea – she is the new misted fruit. The crystals on her dress represent drops of water, and moisturizing hair product makes her hair look as if she just stepped out of the shower. Even the fact that the Pacific Ocean is way too cold to swim in most of the time doesn't seem to affect the illusion (it's no wonder this illusion was born not far from the Hollywood Hills). Yes, we know we are deep in the world of (misted) images, not necessarily the "real" world, and while it's pretty much the case, K.K also carries a different, much more radical proposal. The idea of coolness will soon transcend from the ideological to the physical, the wealthy will have a fresh dress, a fresh look, and a clean façade. They will be kept fresh as long as they wear freshness, they will become the ultimate dream – to be constantly and forever fresh, beautiful, and clean looking – floating above the rest of the dry people.

At the end of the day, K.K, other "fresh" people, and the supermarket manager all share the same goal and dream. While the manager is interested in his produce and the "fresh" people are interested in their own bodies, they are all interested in extending shelf lives, just a little bit.

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