

The Sociology of the Lived Experiences of Foodstagramming: Crafting Insta- glammed Eyecandies

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a sociological study of the lived experiences of foodstagramming, namely photographing food and sharing them on social media, for which I especially focus on Instagram. In 2016, Waitrose and many popular media reported a rise in foodstagramming in the UK. Despite the wide engagement foodstagramming has attracted, the topic received little attention from social researchers. Over the past four years, when social researchers did pay attention to the topic, it was predominantly to reduce foodstagramming into solely an instrumental practice for enacting existing social structures. Such analyses also reduced foodstagrammers into mere passive and selfish individuals who create and share food photos only because they can secure more privileged social positions. While acknowledging the importance of such arguments, they fail to capture the aesthetic elements that are involved in foodstagrammers' lived experiences. This thesis fills this gap.

I adopted an inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach in order to generate a nuanced and in-depth interpretation which captures the complexity and multidimensionality of foodstagramming. I recruited twenty-seven foodstagrammers living in the UK who produce and share foodstagrams with different purposes and styles. To generate insights into their lived experiences, I interviewed these participants and conducted online participant observations to understand 1. why they participate in foodstagramming, 2. how they create their foodstagrams and 3. why they create their foodstagrams in the ways that they do.

The findings suggest that far from being merely instrumental, foodstagramming is also an empowering, aesthetic and generative practice. It affords foodstagrammers the occasions and means to use the widely available everyday materials: food, photography and Instagram to express their aesthetic feelings and values that are related to these feelings. By doing this, foodstagrammers managed to use foodstagramming to exercise their agency and conduct their humble versions of world-making.

LIST OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
LIST OF CONTENTS	3
TABLE OF FIGURES	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	11
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	12
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	13
1.1 Studying the Lived Experiences of Foodstagramming Matters.....	13
1.2 Foodstagramming as a Photographic Practice	21
1.2.1 An Exploration of the Historical Development of Food Imaging	22
1.2.2 Implications for Understanding Foodstagramming	28
1.3 Sociological Importance of Studying Foodstagramming	29
1.4 Research Questions	35
1.5 Thesis Structure	37
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	40
2.1 Foodstagramming as Making Food Porn.....	40
2.1.1 Foodstagramming as Oversexualising Food.....	41
2.1.2 Foodstagramming as Grabbing Viewers’ Attention	42
2.1.3 Foodstagramming as Commodifying Food Experiences.....	43
2.2 The Social Implications of Foodstagramming.....	46
2.2.1 Flattening and Simplifying Food through Foodstagramming.....	47
2.2.2 Gaining Social Distinction through Foodstagramming	50

2.3 Foodstagramming as Conducting Labour Work.....	58
2.3.1 Foodstagramming as Free Labour	59
2.3.2 Foodstagramming as Creative Labour	62
2.4 Summary	68
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	70
3.1 Methodological Approach	70
3.2 Participants.....	73
3.2.1 Identification	73
3.2.2 Recruitment.....	75
3.2.3 Who the Participants Are	78
3.3 Data Collection and Methods.....	80
3.3.1 Methods and Rationales	80
3.3.2 In-depth Semi-structured Interviewing	84
3.3.3 Online Participant Observations	87
3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation	91
3.4.1 Data Preparation.....	91
3.4.2 Data Analysis	92
3.4.3 Presenting Findings and Generating Arguments	94
3.5 Ethical Considerations	96
3.6 Summary	100
CHAPTER 4 BEING AN ARTIST OF THE SELF THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING	102
4.1 Defining the Self through Archiving Ordinary Food Experiences	103

4.1.1 The Maintenance of a Foodie Role	103
4.1.2 The Enactment of a Baking-lover Role	110
4.1.3 Discussion	113
4.2 Reinventing the Self through Creating Food and Foodstagrams	114
4.2.1 The Crafting of a Creator Role	115
4.2.2 The Sculpting of a Food Photographer Role.....	120
4.2.3 Discussion	126
4.3 Negotiating the Self through Balancing Different Roles in Foodstagramming	127
4.3.1 The Juggle between a Foodography-lover Role and a Business-promoter Role	128
4.3.2 The Balance of a Creator Role and an Influencer Role	133
4.3.3 Discussion	139
4.4 Summary and Discussion.....	140
 CHAPTER 5 EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MATERIAL WORLD THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING.....	
5.1 Taking an Abstract and Disinterested Look at Food	144
5.1.1 Appreciating Food for Food's Sake	145
5.1.2 Using Food as a Sculptural Material.....	150
5.1.3 Discussion	156
5.2 Taking an Exploratory and Appreciative Look at Food	159
5.2.1 Deriving Affirmative Feelings via Observing Ordinary Food.....	159
5.2.2 Exploring Varied Feelings via Sensing Food	165
5.2.3 Discussion	172

5.3 Imaginative and Playful Look at Food.....	174
5.3.1 Reimagining Food by Playing with It.....	175
5.3.2 Creating Aesthetic Experiences via Everyday Surrealism.....	179
5.3.3 Discussion.....	183
5.4 Summary and Discussion.....	185
CHAPTER 6 LINKING THE SELF TO WIDER COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING	189
6.1 The Cultivation of Affective Interpersonal Relationships	190
6.1.1 Foodstagramming for Sharing Affirmative Aesthetic Feelings.....	191
6.1.2 Foodstagramming For Making Social Links with Others.....	196
6.1.3 Discussion.....	201
6.2 The Cultivation of an Inclusive Food Culture	204
6.2.1 Foodstagramming for Advocating Practical Culinary Education.....	205
6.2.2 Foodstagramming for Advocating Cultural Diversity	209
6.2.3 Discussion.....	214
6.3 The Cultivation of a Mutually Supportive Social World.....	215
6.3.1 Foodstagramming for Making Changes to Political Issues	216
6.3.2 Foodstagramming for Cultivating Social Solidarity	224
6.3.3 Discussion.....	232
6.4 Summary and Discussion.....	233
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION.....	236
7.1 Summary of the Previous Chapters.....	236
7.2 Research Questions	241

7.2.1 Question 1. Why do people create foodstagram and why do they share them on Instagram?	241
7.2.2 Question 2: How do people create their foodstagram? and 3. Why do people choose to create their foodstagram in the ways that they do?	242
7.3 General Arguments of the Research	246
7.3.1 Argument 1: The Irreducible Nature of Foodstagramming	246
7.3.2 Argument 2: Foodstagramming as an Empowering Practice	247
7.3.3 Argument 3: Foodstagramming as an Aesthetic Practice	248
7.3.4 Summative Argument: Foodstagramming as a Generative Practice	251
7.4 Contributions of the Research.....	253
7.4.1 A Nuanced and Comprehensive Understanding of Foodstagramming.....	253
7.4.2 A Move Towards Aesthetically Informed Sociology	255
7.5 Future Directions	259
APPENDICES	262
Appendix 1 Participant Information	262
Appendix 2 Interview Guide.....	265
Appendix 3 Reflections on My Experiences in the Food Photography and Styling Course	267
Appendix 4 Information Sheet.....	271
Appendix 5 Consent Form	274
Appendix 6 Image Reproduction Rights Form.....	277
BIBLIOGRAPHY	280

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 abc: My foodstagram examples (2014)	18
Figure 2 ab: Foodstagram examples selected by Tandoh (2016) for her opinion article about foodstagramming - sourced from the Instagram feeds of two food bloggers: @healthyeating_jo (a) and @thesugarhit (b).....	20
Figure 3 a: Still life with a turkey pie - Pieter Claesz (1627); b: Still life with quince, cabbage, melon and cucumber - Juan Sánchez Cotán (c.1602); c: Rudolf II of Habsburg as Vertumnus - Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1590)	22
Figure 4 a: Still life with apples - Paul Cézanne (1895-98); b: Still life with water jug – Paul Cézanne (c.1892-3).....	23
Figure 5 a: Still life with fruit - Roger Fenton (1860); b: Pepper No. 30 - Edward Weston (1930); c: Frozen foods with string beans - Irving Penn (1977); d: Still life, New York - Wolfgang Tillmans (2001).....	24
Figure 6 a: Lemonade and fruit salad (McCall's) - Nickolas Muray (1946); b: Photo from the book: My Little French Kitchen (Khoo, 2013) - David Loftus (2013); c: Photo from the book: 5 Ingredients – Quick & Easy Food (Oliver, 2017) – David Loftus (2017).....	27
Figure 7 ab: Recruiting leaflet	75
Figure 8 ab: The Instagram account of the project	77
Figure 9 abc: Screenshots of @superbritishgirl's Feed - © @superbritishgirl.....	105
Figure 10 ab: Festive crumpets consumed, cde: Festive cheeses discovered in shops - © @superbritishgirl	108
Figure 11 ab: Phoebe's foodstagramms - © Phoebe^.....	111
Figure 12 ab: Nancy's foodstagramms showing the dining ambience at her home – Nancy^.....	117
Figure 13 ab: Nancy's foodstagramms showing the plating of dishes and table arrangements	118
Figure 14 ab: Foodstagramms posted on @jimboiuk's feed during 2016-2017(a) and 2019(b) - ©@jimboiuk	122
Figure 15 ab: Foodstagramms posted on @jimboiuk's feed at early 2021(a) and late 2021(b) - ©@jimboiuk	124
Figure 16 abc: Screenshots of @sharoncosgrovephotography's feed in 2015 (a), 2017(b) and 2021(c) - ©@sharoncosgrovephotography	130
Figure 17 ab: Screenshots of @yasgoesto's feed - ©@yasgoesto.....	134

Figure 18 abc: Personal projects from AARON - © AARON GRAUBART (@aarongraubart).....	146
Figure 19 abc: Selected posts of THE ODD COUPLE - © SANDY SUFFIELD.....	152
Figure 20 abc: The creative process of WOBBLED; def: Selected posts of WOBBLED - © SANDY SUFFIELD.....	155
Figure 21 ab: The same ice-cream brioche posted on @matt_inwood's client's Feed (@norma_ldn, 2021) and his own Feed - © @matt_inwood.....	162
Figure 22 ab: @matt_inwood's foodstagram depicting mundane food objects and scenes- © @matt_inwood.....	163
Figure 23 abc: Foodstagram styled and photographed by LUCY-RUTH - © LUCY-RUTH HATHAWAY (@itslucyruth).....	170
Figure 24 abc: Foodstagram from @mylegoman2 - © @mylegoman2.....	176
Figure 25 abc: 2021 "MOSTLY FOODIE DAYS" calendar made by @mylegoman2 - © @mylegoman2.....	179
Figure 26 abc: Foodstagram from Helga - © Helga Stentzel (@helga.stentzel).....	181
Figure 27 abcd: Stories collection about Brad Pet - © Helga Stentzel (@helga.stentzel).....	182
Figure 28 ab: Typical foodstagram from @gizem.kumbaraci's feed - © @gizem.kumbaraci	192
Figure 29 ab: Film-like foodstagram constructed by @gizem.kumbaraci - © @gizem.kumbaraci	194
Figure 30 a: @rbnichol's photo of her food board; b: @rbnichol's Instagram feed at an early stage - © @rbnichol.....	197
Figure 31 abc: @rbnichol's foodstagram collection in autumn 2017, summer 2019 and spring 2021.....	199
Figure 32 abcd: A typical foodstagram post from @jackycooksherbooks - © @jackycooksherbooks	207
Figure 33 ab: Individual foodstagram of @foodjunkie_uk; c: Feed of @foodjunkie_uk - © @foodjunkie_uk	211
Figure 34 abc: A personal and political foodstagram post from @matt_inwood - © @matt_inwood.....	218
Figure 35 ab: @matt_inwood's ration challenges in 2020 and 2021; c: Food @matt_inwood normally eats and photographs - © @matt_inwood	222

Figure 36 ab: Bread Ruth made to be sold to her local community and sent as gifts to key workers - © Ruth's Little Kitchen	227
Figure 37 ab: Screenshots of recorded live Cook Together sessions from Ruth - © Ruth's Little Kitchen.....	229
Figure 38 abc: Food photos I created during the first-day practical session	267
Figure 39 a: Adding water to activate the dry ice; b: Steam started to come out; c: The final product.....	269

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as Bibliography.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Studying the Lived Experiences of Foodstagramming Matters

Four years ago, while I was preparing for my PhD degree application, I decided to make “foodstagramming” the research subject due to its extensive social engagement and impact. Foodstagramming¹ is often used by popular media to describe the emergent trend of people taking pictures of food and posting them on social media (such as Steinmann, 2016; Hall, 2016; Atanasova, 2016), mostly on Instagram. It is a phenomenon that has attracted wide participation on a global scale. A 2014 analysis of Instagram photo content reported that “food” is one of the mostly-engaged topics (sitting next to the categories of “selfies” and “friends”) on the platform (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014). Indeed, as Hernandez, an Instagram employee claimed, starting from “the early days of Instagram, food was one of the original popular interest areas on the platform”, and such popularity kept growing (Demarest, 2020). A search on Instagram for the hashtag: #food could generate around 800,000 photos in 2013 (Cookbook, 2013), while in 2018, the number surged to nearly 250 million (Infogr8, 2018). The exponential growth continued even till today, as by the time I wrote this section in 2023, the number had surpassed 500 million. This is not to mention the multitude of foodstagrams included in numerous other popular Instagram hashtags, like #foodporn (over 300 million posts), #foodie (around 241 million posts), #foodphotography (nearly 110 million posts), and #foodstagram (almost 120 million posts), letting alone the foodstagrams without any hashtags.

The continued escalation and abundance of food photos on Instagram can indicate the widespread social impact that foodstagramming managed to garner globally. Unsurprisingly, within the UK, foodstagramming also engendered extended attention and engagement. Around 2016, it was reported that more than 130,000 food pictures were shared on Instagram daily (Smithers, 2016). Indeed, Waitrose stated in its 2016 *Food and Drink Report* that “one in five Britons – that’s an impressive nine million adults – has posted a photograph of their food on social media or sent a snap to a friend” (Waitrose, 2016, p.4). A study from Zizzi (reported in Hosie, 2017) discovered that the average time 18-35-year-olds would spend browsing food images on Instagram yearly can be aggregated into five days, and around a third of this population stated that they tend to avoid visiting restaurants with weak Instagram presence. The survey from Waitrose (2016, p.4) revealed that while younger people are the keenest participants in foodstagramming, people in all age groups seem to “have caught on to the trend

¹ In this research, I refer to the food photos being shared as “foodstagrams”, the image authors as “foodstagrammers”, and the action of produce and share photos as “foodstagram”.

of sharing their food pictures”. Many people also stated that they would “take greater care over” both how they prepare and present food at home if they intend to photograph and share it (ibid). Many articles from UK media outlets (Tandoh, 2016; Lee, 2017; Hosie, 2017) also reported that foodstagramming had created influential changes in how people cook and eat, as well as how restaurants design their dishes, venues and dining experiences. All such findings tended to suggest that foodstagramming has become an inseparable component of many people’s everyday lives.

If we look into the development of photography and social media, we can find that the popularity of foodstagramming is not coincidental. The emergence of foodstagramming closely aligns with the expansion of food culture, as well as the rise and boom of mobile photography and Instagram. Food has always been a frequently featured topic on UK television and lifestyle magazines (Gwynn, 2015, pp.161-163). In the 1990s, with culinary shows like *Masterchef*, *The Naked Chef* (Jamie Oliver) and *How to Eat* (Nigella Lawson) filling the schedules of UK television, as well as cookery books entering the national bestseller lists, food started to occupy a central position in popular culture (Gwynn, 2015, pp.162-165). The intense interest in food has not faded, as in the *Bestsellers in Books* list from Amazon UK, we can always find at least two cookery books taking up the top ten positions from 2015 to 2023 (results for different years can be found in Amazon, 2015). Also, celebrity chefs and emergent food influencers managed to secure millions of followers on Instagram by 2023, such as @jamieoliver (9.5 million), @nigellalawson (2.9 million), @deliciouslyella (2.3 million) and @love_food (6.2 million). In the meantime, people nowadays not only consume food media, but also produce varied food media content, such as food blogs, food programmes on YouTube, live videos of mukbang (eating while broadcasting) (de Solier, 2018) and foodstagrams on Instagram as mentioned above.

The rise of foodstagramming in recent years can be seen as a reflection of people’s enduring fascination with food culture. Additionally, this surge correlates with the widespread adoption of mobile photography and Instagram in people’s everyday lives. Around the early 2000s, cameraphones started to take off in Asia (Daisuke and Ito, 2003). In 2007, the worldwide shipment of cameraphones reached 700 million units, which later was estimated to surpass 1.3 billion in 2012 (Hand, 2012, p.3). Leveraging the affordability of cameraphones, Instagram: a mobile application providing users with an easy way to produce, manipulate and share their photos with an extended audience was launched in 2010 (Blystone, 2022). Since its launch, Instagram quickly became one of the fastest-growing applications ever at the time, as

it generated over 100,000 users in less than a week, and quickly hit 1 million sign-ups within two months (Yurieff, 2019). The active monthly users for Instagram reached 500 million in 2016 (Kemlo, 2016), for which the number in 2023 has exceeded 2 billion (Newberry, 2023).

Such rise and boom of mobile photography and Instagram have brought many changes to how photography is related to both individuals' everyday lives and social relations. While traditional cameras were mostly reserved for "noteworthy moments bracketed off from the mundane", the portability of mobile cameras and the sharability of the digital images instead allow people to "capture the more fleeting and unexpected moments... in everyday" in a "more immediate, ad hoc and ongoing" manner (Daisuke and Ito, 2003). With the proliferation of visual technologies, digital photography also became thoroughly enmeshed in the everyday, serving as the "accompaniments to communication and connection practices in daily life" (Hand, 2012, p.11). Meanwhile, the rise of cameraphones shifted digital imaging "from a professional or specialized process to a routine and unavoidable aspect of everyday life. Also, such a rise transformed amateur photography from a small local community-based practice into "potentially global in scope" (Hand, 2012, p.3). The networked affordance of Instagram further intensified such an effect, as according to Manovich (2017a), Instagram has expanded the reach of amateur photography, as people without professional photographic training can easily share their photos about everyday subjects such as food, selfies and parties to an extended audience using their phones via Instagram.

After relating the phenomenon with the expansion of food culture, as well as the rise and boom of mobile photography and Instagram, it appeared clear to me that the development of foodstagramming was deeply embedded in the cultural, technological and social contexts. As Bright (2017, p.21) suggests, "despite how food has been photographed in art and commerce, it is how it has been photographed in vernacular imaging" now using cameraphones via social media that has elevated the importance of food as a subject matter. It is also because of photo-sharing social media like Instagram, photography was made "part of the dining experience itself" (ibid), or a new form of ritual (Ibrahim, 2015a). On a personal dimension, it could be the common feeling of "FOMO (fear of missing out)", suggested by Bright (2017, p.21), and the need to "authenticate and diarise" one's everyday experiences, argued by Ibrahim (2015a, p.1), that are common to social media users, which made foodstagramming a highly popular and encouraged practice. On a social dimension, as argued by both Bright (2017, p.21) and Ibrahim (2015a, p.1), it could also be the universal appeal of food, which made foodstagramming an encouraged practice for connecting people. As foodstagramming is

deeply embedded into the very fabric of individual and social lives, the study of foodstagramming can allow us to better understand our contemporary social world.

As demonstrated in the aforementioned references (with dates before 2018), media and business organizations have displayed significant interest in foodstagramming. They constantly engaged with foodstagramming to pin down the cultural, social and business impact the practice has brought to our social world. However, foodstagramming received little scholarly attention before 2018. As Lupton (2018, p.66) points out, despite the close relation digital technologies have with contemporary food and eating practices, “very little scholarship” has been dedicated to understanding such a relation. Indeed, often perceived as “aspirational food porn”, “a term coined to poke fun at the glamorization and proliferation of photographs of food on social media” (Bright, 2017, p.21) (chapter 2 will provide more details on this term), foodstagramming could be seen as a “glossy topic” (Beer, 2013, p.300). “Glossy topics” is a term Beer uses to describe the topics that are often deemed to have less research worth, especially during social downturns, because although the topics can attract wide public interest, they are largely perceived as “a frivolous and insignificant part of everyday cultural life” (ibid).

Whereas, as a frivolous topic, foodstagramming might seem decorative, but it is of “acute social importance” (Beer and Penfold-Mounce, 2010, p.364). As I established before, foodstagramming forms an important part of many people’s everyday lives, and as Beer (2013, p.302) justifies, such close daily engagements can shape people’s “world-views”, which is “too important to be left alone” (Beer, 2013, p.302) for researchers. Also, foodstagramming can serve as “a focal point” to “rejuvenate the humanities and social sciences” when being questioned for their public worth (Beer and Penfold-Mounce, 2010, p.363), as we can use foodstagramming, which is a topic with public appeal as “a pathway to communicate with a wider audience” (Beer, 2013, p.304). Being a personal photographic practice, borrowing Hand’s (2012) justification, the ordinary nature of foodstagramming is “precisely what should concern sociologists and others when trying to understand social, cultural and technical change” (p.3). As he explains, the study of digital personal photography allows researchers to pay attention to digitization, as well as its relation to image-making practices and technological devices, which are all key aspects for us to understand “the dynamics of digital media and society” (p.4). Similarly, being an important part of individuals’ ordinary experiences and the construction of social relations, foodstagramming can also offer an invaluable lens for sociologists to understand our contemporary social world, especially concerning aspects related to the **popularity of food topics, prevalence of social media** and the **ubiquity of**

photography. Therefore, due to the **topicality** and **sociological importance** of foodstagramming, and driven by the determination to **fill the gap** in this research field, I decided to make foodstagramming on Instagram in the UK the focused topic for my proposed research.

After establishing the sociological need of studying foodstagramming, I will now delve into the rationale behind my decision to centre the study on the lived experiences of foodstagramming. When developing the project, one day I was invited to an academic symposium for academic researchers from humanities and social scientific disciplines. During the event, one researcher presented a talk about clean eating and related influencers on Instagram which is mediated by foodstagramming. The speaker portrayed foodstagramming as a device to reinscribe social inequalities in such a movement. Possibly due to such a pre-set tone, the discussion followed also focused on criticising foodstagramming. The audience generally considered the practice as negative to the extent that it was rendered as something almost morally problematic. For example, one researcher mentioned her repugnance and confusion about people taking pictures of food when they dine in restaurants. She said food should be something for us to eat but not a tool for just showing off ourselves or seeking attention. Therefore, she considered foodstagramming (especially in restaurants) as offensive and the foodstagrammers as “pathological”.



Figure 1 abc: My foodstagram examples (2014)

I was captivated by such reactions, so I started to reflect on my own foodstagramming practice. I had started taking pictures of food and sharing them on Instagram for a few years before attending the symposium. I have always liked using my phone to photograph interesting and enjoyable moments in my life. Also, I enjoy cooking, eating and discovering different types of food in my everyday life, so food is a subject that I have always perceived as worthy of being photographed. I started posting food photos as soon as I had an Instagram account. As Figure 1 exemplifies, the foodstagramms that I shared tended to feature 1. food items that I considered as interesting in my travels (1a), 2. dishes and desserts that I made at home (1b), or 3. meals that I had in different food outlets (1c). I have always kept my Instagram a private

personal account for which I only allow a limited number of people whom I am close to in person (family and friends) to get access to the content. Also, I never considered extending the reach of my content. I did not post very often (once every few months on average), but every time I did post, I could always generate positive feelings from receiving notifications of people “liking” and commenting on my foodstagrams. These were not strong feelings, but they could cheer me up.

Regarding the perception of foodstagramming being offensive in restaurants, even as a foodstagrammer myself, the process of photographing each dish in restaurants often was infused with the awkwardness of wanting to make the foodstagrams appear as aesthetic as I can while fearing to embarrass or disrupt others. Thus, it was understandable to me that there might be non-foodstagrammers being distasteful about foodstagramming situated within a dining context. What puzzled me the most was that most audience members considered foodstagramming as morally problematic (considering the use of the word: “pathological”). Their justification was that food was treated merely as a tool for the foodstagrammers to show off themselves and seek more attention in exchange for gaining more socio-economic benefits. Such a reading came after a talk about clean eating for which an influencer has gained benefits and privileges via the foodstagrams she shared on Instagram. Thus, for academic researchers, it is important to cast a critical view to deconstruct what such aggregated benefits and privileges mean to the influencer and other people. Indeed, as the talk itself exemplified, such a view allowed us to pay attention to the unequal social relations behind one type of foodstagramming practice. However, influencers are a special type of foodstagrammers and the food photos they share centre on one specific type of content. There are also various other types of foodstagrammers and food photos.

Using my foodstagramming practice as an example raised an important question: was I using the food I produced and consumed as a tool to show off myself and seek attention? As a social researcher, relating to the theory on social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), I was aware that the food items I posted via the foodstagrams can be interpreted as props which can perform especially the cultural capital I had in food and photography (even though I had no intention to do so while I produced and shared these photos). By always keeping a private account, I had never intended to seek more attention. Whereas I still generated positive feelings with the moderate amount of attention my foodstagrams managed to attract from my small audience. Also, these feelings were indeed one of the motivations which kept me enthusiastic about sharing more of such content. However,

even though I could not completely dismiss the “showing off” and “attention-seeking” factors, I did not consider that my foodstagramming practice should be reduced to simply a vanity project, even though at that time I could not explain exactly what the other motivations were. As a researcher who was curious about the social implication of foodstagramming, I started to ponder what the various reasons are which motivate not only me but also other foodstagrammers to produce and share food photos on their Instagram.

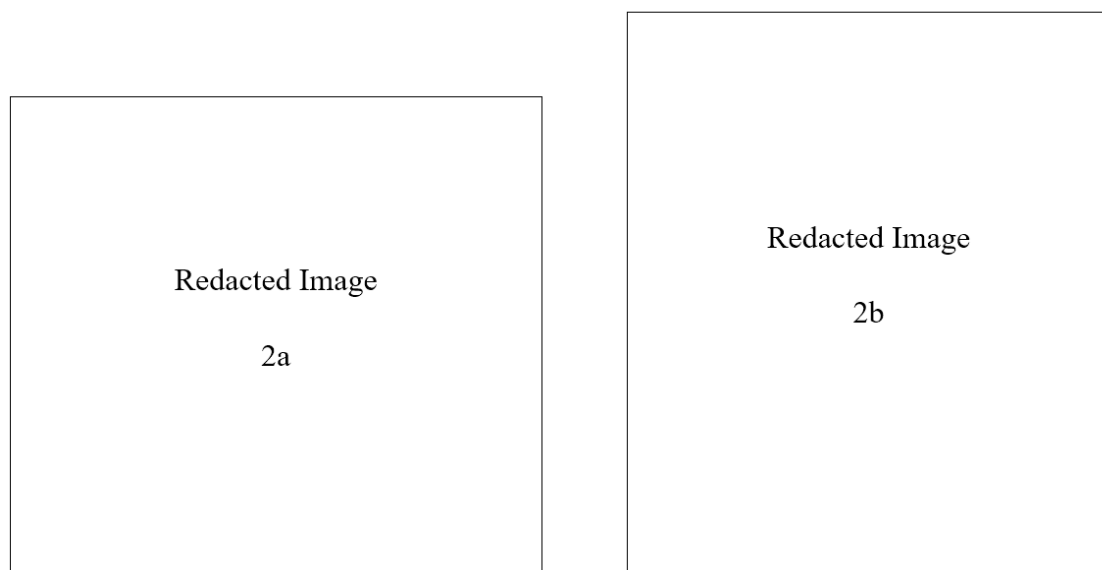


Figure 2 ab: Foodstagram examples selected by Tandoh (2016) for her opinion article about foodstagramming - sourced from the Instagram feeds of two food bloggers: @healthyeating_jo (a) and @thesugarhit (b)

After such a reflection, I revisited the literature about foodstagramming. The second reading made me realise that the interpretations of the practice in many opinion news articles and academic studies (Tandoh, 2016; Mull, 2017; Rousseau, 2013; McDonnell, 2016) are mostly imbued with criticisms that are similar to what I encountered at the symposium. Similarly, these analyses often also centre on how foodstagramming is enacted by a special group of people, such as young female food bloggers (Mull, 2017) with rather privileged socio-economic backgrounds (Tandoh, 2016). The authors’ arguments largely echoed the social theory about “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1994) and “social distinction” (Bourdieu, 1984) for which foodstagramming was criticised as a self-benefiting practice for people to show off their social wellness and/or gain resources for achieving higher social status. The sophisticated visual appearances of both the looks of food and the photos (see Figure 2 for examples) were also often interpreted as tools of “status performance” (Mull, 2017).

While the above arguments are important for us to understand the social relations behind foodstagramming, a few questions still need to be raised: Can we reduce foodstagramming simply as a practice for all types of foodstagrammers to gain self-oriented benefits? Also, if we refer to the lived experiences of foodstagrammers themselves (as I did with mine), will we find different motivations that support their enthusiasm about making and sharing food photos? Motivated by the eagerness of addressing these unanswered questions, I then decided to focus my research on **the lived experiences of foodstagramming** in order to understand the practice from foodstagrammers' own perspectives.

1.2 Foodstagramming as a Photographic Practice

How do I approach foodstagramming in this research? In the above-mentioned literature, foodstagramming is often understood as a topic that is about food, social media and their relations with people's everyday life (Ibrahim, 2015a; McDonnell, 2016). Due to such a tendency, photography is presumed to serve the role of documenting food experiences with the image-making practice itself often being silent. When its role becomes salient, it is mostly only when there appears to be a discrepancy between the food photographically portrayed and the reality. Also, such a discrepancy is often interpreted as being negative for which the food photos are regarded as devices to distort reality, such as demonstrated in McDonnell's (2016) analysis of food porn (a type of foodstagrams that often portray unattainably attractive food and food scenes).

Foodstagramming is first and foremost **a photographic image-making practice**. Food and Instagram are indeed two important components. However, foodstagramming cannot be reduced to either food or Instagram, just as the making of images cannot be reduced to the content portrayed or how it is engaged with. From my experiences of studying food imaging from previous art history courses, documentaries such as *Apples, Pears and Paint* (McArdle, 2014) and books such as *Feast for the Eyes* (Bright, 2017), *Visual Feast* (Klanten and Kouznetsova, 2017) and *A Feast For the Eyes* (Riley, 1997), I learned that food photos and paintings were never just direct documents or reflections of what people cook and eat. Even when depicting home-based meals, as in Wansink, Mukund and Weislogel's (2016) quantitative analysis of 140 such paintings, the most common and frequently eaten foods were least frequently depicted. Also in visual art history, the discrepancy between the food scenes portrayed in food images and the reality is not always interpreted as merely negative, because food is not always regarded solely as nourishment for people to eat but also as materials with other important properties.

1.2.1 An Exploration of the Historical Development of Food Imaging

From the documentary Apples, Pears and Paint (McArdle, 2014), I learned that food has never been treated merely as something for us to eat in art history. In early food still-life paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries, food was often represented as aesthetically interesting visual forms and symbols of aspiration, prosperity and worldly pleasure. The food images were also regarded as not only simple documents but also aesthetically interesting visual pleasure and rhetorical representations of encoded messages. Also, in modernist avant-garde movements that started in the 19th century, food was used by many artists as a medium to explore new ways of visual representation and a tool to challenge the canons set by authorities such as the art academy. Using the knowledge acquired from the documentary and the reflection generated, I revisited some still-life paintings that I had come across in art history books and art galleries and then conducted close reading exercises.

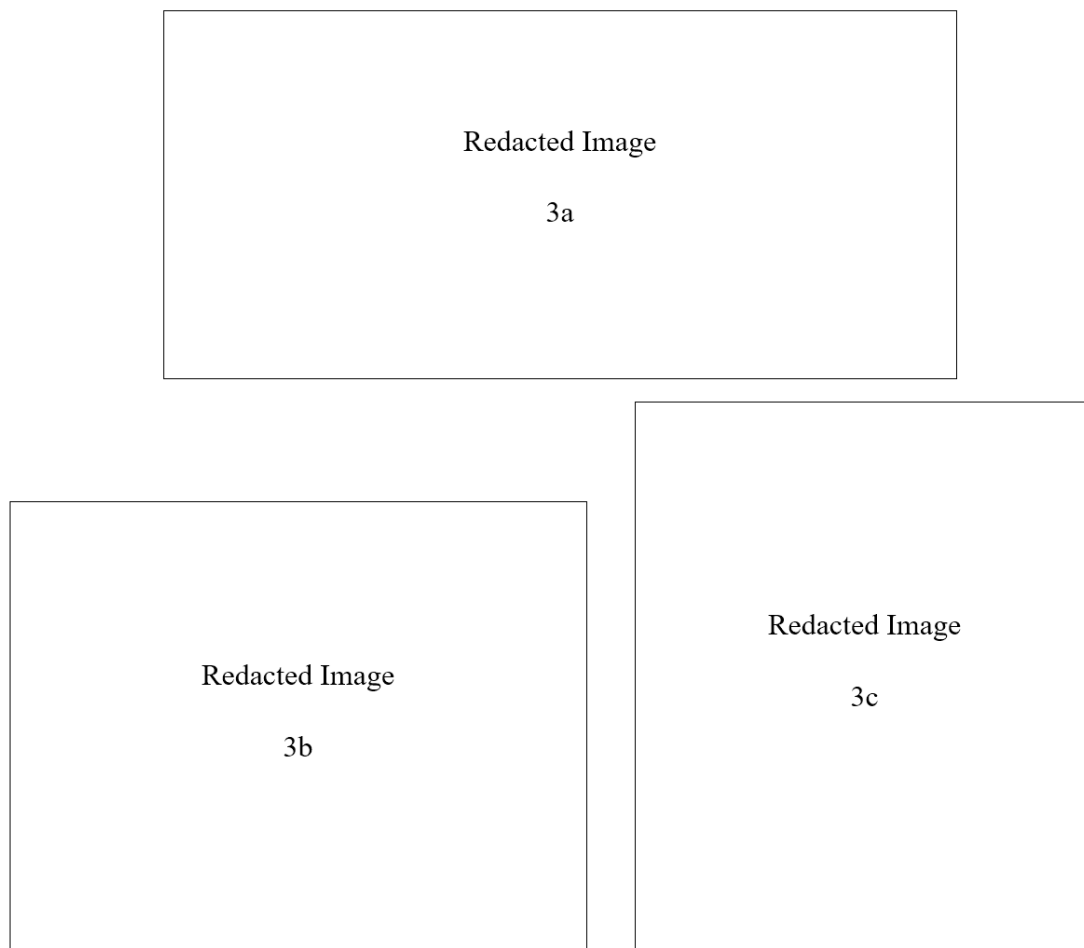


Figure 3 a: Still life with a turkey pie - Pieter Claesz (1627); b: Still life with quince, cabbage, melon and cucumber - Juan Sánchez Cotán (c.1602); c: Rudolf II of Habsburg as Vertumnus - Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1590)

For example, in Figure 3, 3a depicts a table situated in the 17th century Netherlands that is abundant with different varieties of expensive and uncommon food which was paired with containers and decorative objects imported from different countries. The crowded-looking table appears as a carefully constructed tablescape rather than a simple meal setting. Rendered in this way, instead of serving as nourishment, food should be regarded more as symbols that convey messages about the power and wealth of the country, as well as the worldly pleasure that people could have. The painting also did not serve as a simple document of a food scene, but more as a coded representation of the message of prosperity. Compared to 3a, 3b depicts more common food items that are situated in a more familiar setting: a larder. However, as learned from the documentary, being placed uncommonly (with the quince and cabbage hung by a string and melon being cut), these ordinary items were transformed into carefully orchestrated visual forms of different shapes and colours. Via such a representation, these food items were transformed into aesthetically attractive objects while the painting serves to invite the audience to pay attention to such aesthetic qualities of these humble everyday objects. In contrast to 3a and 3b, 3c appears as an uncommon representation of food. While the whole image depicts a human figure, if we zoom in, we can observe that the human figure was constructed by individual fruits and vegetables. With such a rendition, food became an architectural element that was used by the painter to build new visual forms.

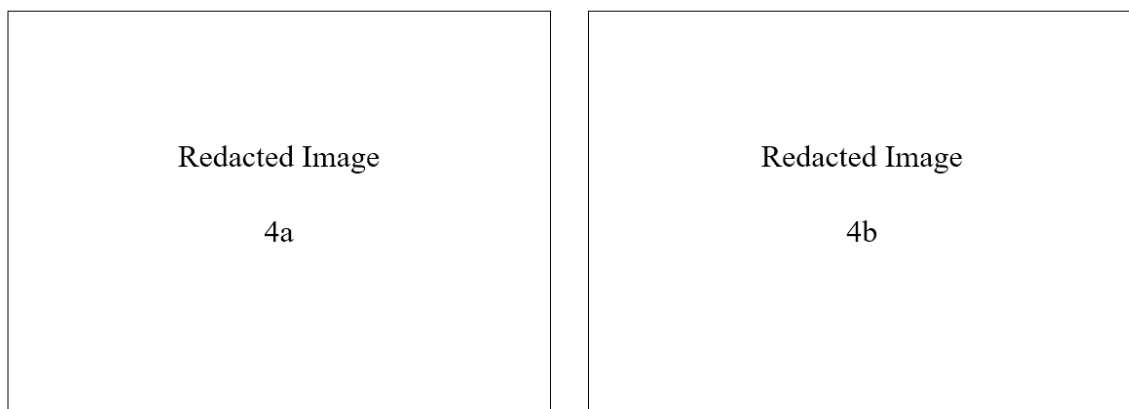


Figure 4 a: Still life with apples - Paul Cézanne (1895-98); b: Still life with water jug – Paul Cézanne (c.1892-3)

When watching the documentary, I was especially drawn to the words from Paul Cézanne: “With an apple, I will astonish Paris.” Before conducting this research, I encountered quite a few paintings from Cézanne depicting apples, but I had never questioned why. Observing both paintings in Figure 4, we can find that in contrast to how food was depicted in Figure 3, the apples in Cézanne’s paintings appear much less realistic, since they were presented with less precision and more distortion. From the documentary and an exhibition of

Cézanne I later visited, I learned that Cézanne treated the apples in his work as his media to investigate and experiment with new ways of visual representations. These attempts were motivated by his intention of challenging the canons set by the art academy so that he could “astonish Paris”: the centre of modern art, as a gesture to revolutionise the art world. Thus, the apples were treated mostly as abstract visual forms (flattened circular shapes with changes of colours) that Cézanne channelled to reflect on the visual representational medium: painting. Also, the paintings were not simple representations of what Cézanne had in his studios, but his art laboratories through which he experimented with new possibilities of seeing and representing objects, as well as defining art. Thus, in all these representative food paintings in art history, I observed that none of them simply depicted food merely as something for us to eat.

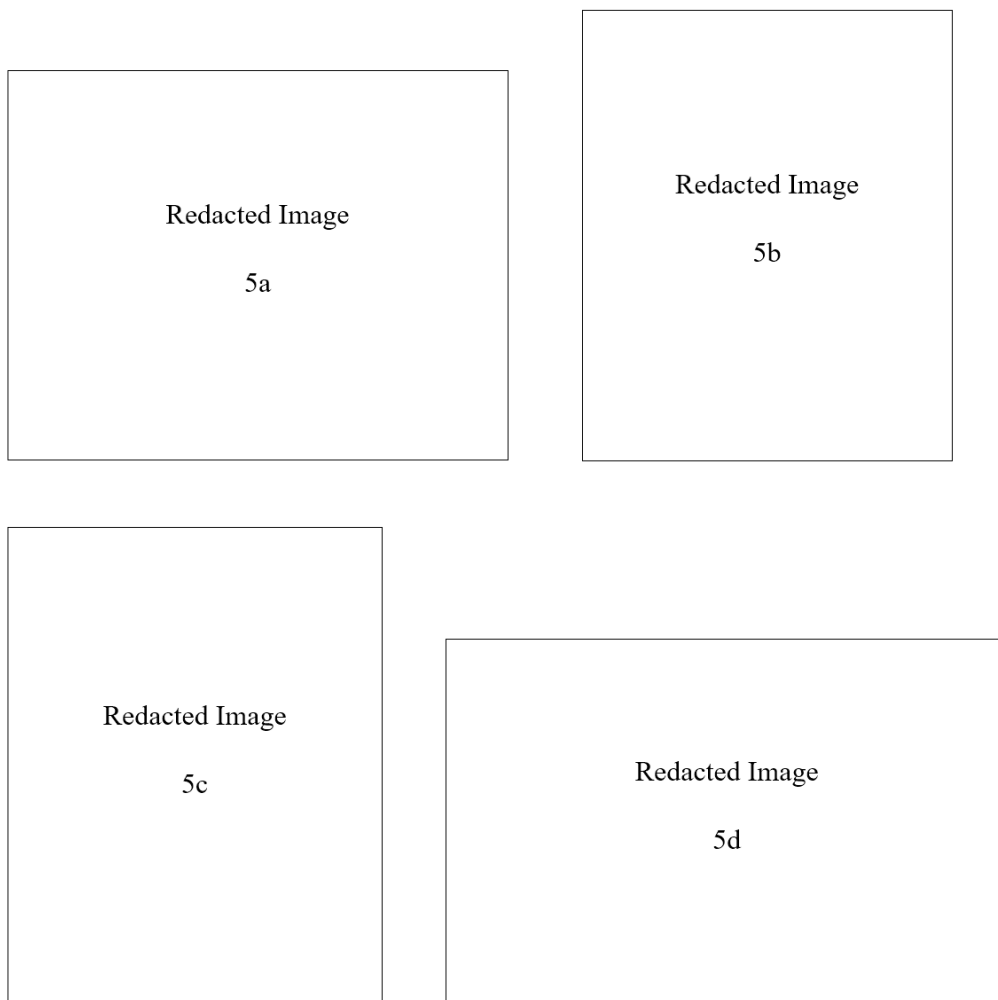


Figure 5 a: Still life with fruit - Roger Fenton (1860); b: Pepper No. 30 - Edward Weston (1930); c: Frozen foods with string beans - Irving Penn (1977); d: Still life, New York - Wolfgang Tillmans (2001)

Turning to my explorations of the historical development of food photography, I reviewed a book titled *Feast for the Eyes: The Story of Food in Photography* (Bright, 2017)

and attended its accompanying exhibition of the same name. Again, using the background knowledge I learned from such experiences, I reviewed the photos from the exhibition and my everyday life and conducted close reading exercises. From such exercises, like what I discovered via the above paintings, I observed that food also has never been treated merely as something for us to eat in the history of food photography. In Figure 5, 5a shows one of the earliest food photos. Like 3a (Figure 3), 5a depicts a tablescape which is abundant with various types of food items in a realistic manner. By doing this, like Cézanne, Fenton was using food as an example to inform the audience of the technical ability of photography to capture great details of these objects. Using this photo, Fenton was advocating that photography has the capacity to not only document things but also create art as paintings do. In 5b, 5c and 5d, we can see how such advocacy was executed differently by photographers in varied historical periods.

In Figure 5, 5b showcases a pepper with an unusual shape. As the name suggests, it belongs to a series of photos featuring similar close-ups of objects that Weston created during an extended period (Conger, 1992). Taking up the most central space of the photo, the pepper was represented with contrasting light and dark effects which contour its unusual shape. Like in 3b, instead of being a simple food ingredient, such a deliberate rendition made the pepper appear more as an aesthetically interesting visual form that deserves the appreciation of the audience. Similarly, in 5c, we can observe a sculpture formed of rectangles of frozen fruits and vegetables of different colours and textures. This sculpture was constructed by commonly seen everyday food items. However, being in a frozen condition and cut into rectangles with similar sizes, like in 5b, these common fruits and vegetables were transformed into unusual aesthetically interesting visual forms. Also, by stacking them together with combinations of different colours and textures, similar to 3c, these individual visual forms together created a new form: the sculpture. In contrast, 5d depicts a more familiar-looking food scene. In this photo, we can observe fruits and vegetables lying on a surface beside a window. The photo appears as a casually shot everyday scene. However, from the photographer's interview (Tillmans's interview by Biggs, 2014), I was surprised to know that such a scene was his deliberate composition of a random-looking everyday scene. By doing this, the photographer intended to invite the audience to look at the beauty in the imperfectness of the everyday in order to notice its value and richness though it might be thought to be a "shallow, vacuous, unimportant subject matter" (ibid). Therefore, like 3b, 5d rendered food objects into visual forms that deserve to be looked at and appreciated, as they represent the aesthetic quality of

beauty. Again, the close reading exercises of the photos in Figure 5 made me realise that in addition to being nourishment, food can also be objects photographers can use to represent aesthetic values and produce critical reflections of the medium itself: photography.

Except for being created as art, food photos were also often created for commercial purposes with common examples being found in advertisements, newspapers, magazines and cookbooks. From reading *Feast for the Eyes* (Bright, 2017) and attending its accompanying exhibition, I learned that food photos created with such purposes often have a different focus in contrast to the ones made with artistic purposes (see Figure 5). Unlike artistic food photos, commercial food photos were often made as media of visual communication of the images and lifestyles set by food brands, chefs and publishers. Also, commercial food photos were made with the collaborative effort of creative directors, food stylists and photographers. Thus, like still-life paintings, while the food is presented with a realistic visual style and the food scene appears as a casual everyday setting, the whole image-making process still involves a long time preparing (including set designing, food preparation and styling) and making the images (image production and post-production). Therefore, the food is prepared and dressed for the photoshoots. The food photos also serve as the image-makers' artistic renditions (instead of mere documents), as the photos were carefully and aesthetically constructed to convey symbolic messages and incite aesthetic reactions from the viewers.

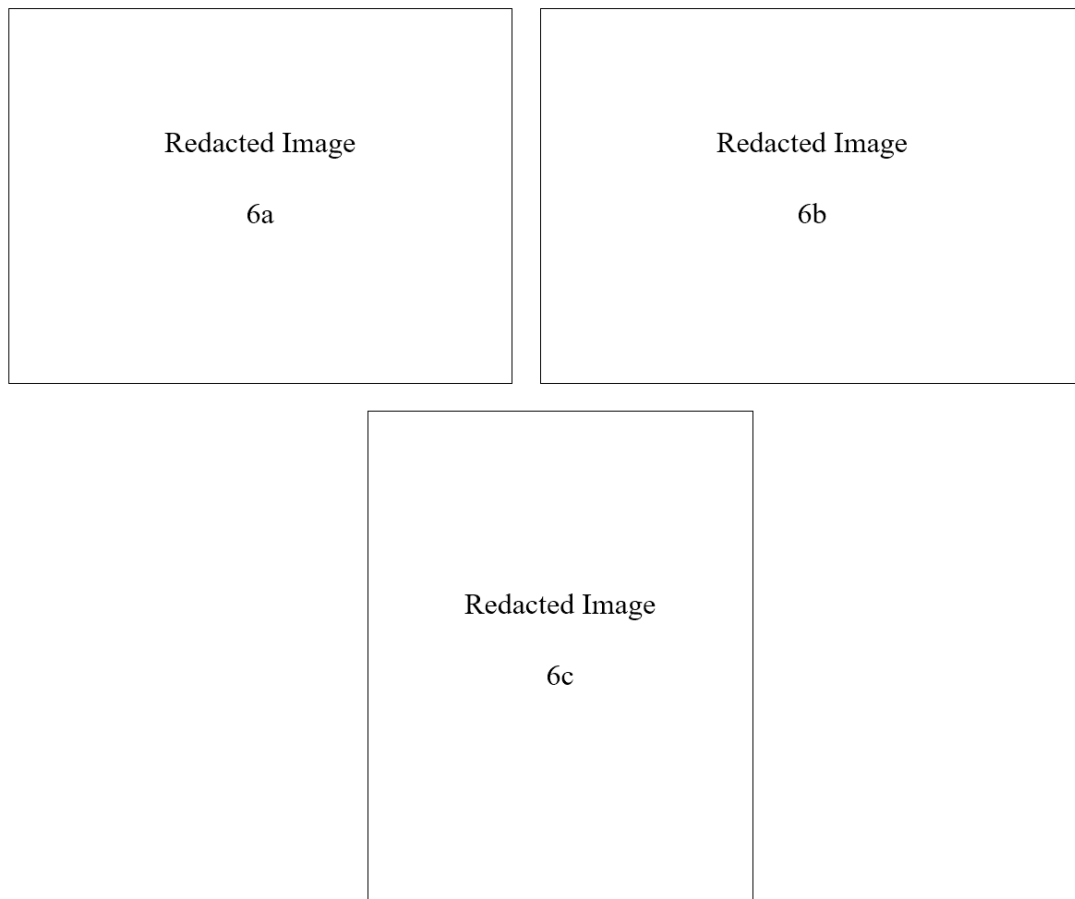


Figure 6 a: Lemonade and fruit salad (McCall 's) - Nickolas Muray (1946); b: Photo from the book: My Little French Kitchen (Khoo, 2013) - David Loftus (2013); c: Photo from the book: 5 Ingredients – Quick & Easy Food (Oliver, 2017) – David Loftus (2017)

For example, in Figure 6, 6a showcases a food scene immersed with food and drink items with very little blank space. Thus, similar to 3a (Figure 3), rather than mere food to eat, the food represented the symbolic messages of plenty and bountiful. On the other hand, when looking at the composition of the photo, we can observe that it depicts plates and glasses containing the same content. Also, looking at the photo, we can easily detect repetitions of different visual forms and diversifications of vibrant colours and textures that were formulated by the careful arrangements of the scene. With such a rendition, as Bright (2017, p.103) argues, the food was turned from food to eat into “food to be looked at and dreamed about”. 6b and 6c instead exemplify two more recent examples. In contrast to 6a, the scenes in 6b and 6c appear less like carefully composed still-life scenes and more like eating and cooking scenes with more casual settings. While 6b represents an outdoor setting with dishes being spread sporadically (compared to 6a) on a cloth with people sharing the food, 6c depicts food being cooked in a pot with bursting flame placed on a marble surface. Although both photos were created to demonstrate recipes, they also serve as representations of the themes and lifestyles

set by the two books: the enjoyment of cooking and sharing food (6b) and the coexistence of simplicity and theatricality in cooking (6c). As also argued by Bright (2017), fewer readers now recreate the recipes at home after viewing food photos from recipe books. Hence, instead of being instructional, the food photos are increasingly consumed as solely visual pleasure. In this sense, food photos we see from popular media in many cases are neither created nor consumed as mere documents of food.

1.2.2 Implications for Understanding Foodstagramming

From my exploration of the historical development of foodstagramming, I discovered that food images were never simple documents of what people cook and eat. As Manovich (2017a, p.39) argues, everyday objects such as cups of coffee “can acquire very different meanings depending on how they are photographed”. Bright (2017) and Taylor and Keating (2018) also argue that by using various visual styles, the image authors can use food images to represent symbolic ideas about cultural aspirations and attitudes. Simultaneously, with such visual tropes, they can also incite pleasure and desires from viewers while also encouraging them to rethink their understandings and relationships with food. As both studies also suggest that contemporary food photography within the digital age continues the above traditions, the graphic side of photography, which concerns the choices of different visual styles for representing food, actually plays an important role for us to understand both the purposes of people’s foodstagramming activities and the meanings of the foodstagrams they create. Therefore, I realised that understanding foodstagramming as a photographic image-making practice is essential.

Like in art historical analyses, in addition to foodstagrammers’ relationships with food (core subject matter) and Instagram (context), I decided to pay equal attention to their relationships with image-making. In this research, image-making mainly refers to photography, but it also concerns videography, since videos can be regarded as moving photos (Manovich, 2017a). Thus, foodstagrammers are treated as image-crafters (like the above-mentioned artists) who choose to portray food with different visual styles to express the different meanings they assign to the food scenes portrayed in their foodstagrams. In Manovich’s (2017a) research where he and his colleagues analysed sixteen million images shared on Instagram in seventeen global cities (including the UK) from 2012 to 2016, we can find that Instagrammers generally produce and share photos for different reasons. They also possess different levels of image-making knowledge and expertise. Moreover, the boundary between professional and amateur photographers is increasingly being blurred. Thus, compared to the above-introduced history

before the digital period, the food image-making scene on Instagram is more diversified and less clear-cut. Therefore, to understand the relationships between visual styles and the meanings represented in different foodstagrams of such an increasingly complex phenomenon, I decided to directly listen to foodstagrammers' own interpretations, as such an aspect was often neglected in the existing studies of foodstagramming.

When interpreting foodstagramming, on the one hand, such an approach does not exclude the important role food or Instagram plays, because food is the key subject matter of the photos while Instagram is the context where the photos are created, shared, viewed, circulated and engaged with. On the other hand, such an approach does pay attention to the aspects that are often neglected by existing research, which is the visual styles people use to represent their food subjects. As the above findings suggest, visual styles contribute to both the purposes of making food images and the meanings different images communicate. This is why the latter half of the research title is "Crafting Insta-glammed Eye-candies" because it treats foodstagramming as an "image-crafting" practice where food is being transformed via photography and Instagram (Insta) into aestheticised (glammed) photos for visual consumption (eye-candies) that is equivalent to the above-introduced food image-making practices throughout the history of food imaging.

With such reflections, I decided to frame my research as a project that listens to foodstagrammers' own interpretations of their lived experiences of foodstagramming: a practice that is not only about food and Instagram, but also about photography. With such a focus, I also decided to take seriously the knowledge, skills and interpretations foodstagrammers have for food, photography and Instagramming to search for answers to the questions raised earlier. Generally, the interpretation I present for this research combines foodstagrammers' own interpretations of their lived experiences and arguments generated from reviewing literature from various disciplines (such as sociology, art history, philosophy and media studies). Using such an approach, I intend to offer detailed, nuanced and multifaceted interpretations of foodstagramming which can cover the aspects often neglected by existing literature.

1.3 Sociological Importance of Studying Foodstagramming

Having introduced what my research is and why I decided to conduct it, in this section, by referring to discussions in social research regarding the importance of studying photography, I establish the contributions this research can make. In general, I treat the studying of

foodstagramming as an important means for us to understand **the relationship between individuals and the social world.**

Photography and sociology have “approximately the same birth date” (Becker, 1974, p.3) and they share the same mission of “the exploration of society” (p.6). Especially, for visual sociology (Rose, 2016, p.15), the whole field is grounded in the idea that “valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analysing and theorizing its visual manifestations: behavior of people and material products of culture” (Pauwels, 2011, p.3). Thus, understanding photography and its relations with individuals can allow social researchers to better understand the social world.

For the consumption of photographic images, the advancements in printing technology and the invention of photography have led to a tendency for people’s everyday life becoming increasingly visual (Benjamin, 1968; Hirsch, 2017; Brocklehurst, 2018) via their daily consumption of information through visual media such as advertisements, newspaper and TV. Featherstone (2007, pp.64–80) summarises such an effect as “the aestheticization of everyday life”, which includes three senses: 1. the effacement of “the boundary between art and everyday life” (p.65) in art (like Andy Warhol repurposed Brillo soap pad boxes and redefined them as art); 2. the “project of turning life into a work of art” (ibid) (like William Morris intentionally turned his home and interior design into works of art); 3. “the rapid flow of signs and images which saturated the fabric of everyday life” (p.66) in consumer culture (like the posters and advertisements we encounter on the street). While some researchers criticised such mass visual cultural content for obscuring class inequalities and numbing people’s critical senses (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2006; Marcuse, 1972; Adorno, 1975), other researchers instead suggest that researchers should acknowledge the critical ability of the content consumers and the potential for such content being used to exercise agency (Hoggart, 2009; Hall and Whannel, 1965; Hebdige, 1979). However, their common view is that visual culture (including photography) provides resources for social researchers to understand how individuals are related to the social world.

Considering making photographs, after the Kodak company released more user-friendly and cheaper cameras, photography has become an accessible image-production means, which later led to the development of the Kodak culture or “home mode” photography (Chalfen, 1987) where non-specialists create photos and videos of “celebratory occasions” (like weddings, birthdays and vacations) related to home and family. People used photos to both

document their memories and generate conversations to create social bonds with close family and friends (Chalfen, 1987; Ibrahim, 2015b; Kuhn, 2007). Later, with the emergence of portable smartphones and social media, people can create photos to be easily viewed, stored, copied and transferred on different devices (Rose, 2016, p.7), and share their photos with a much wider network via platforms such as Instagram (Tifentale, 2015). Thus, subjects such as food, selfies and parties, which were not treated as important subjects themselves in home mode photography, have all been transformed into picture-worthy subjects (Manikonda, Hu and Kambhampati, 2014; Manovich, 2017a, p.31) (such as in my foodstagram in Figure 1).

Beyond home mode photography, in the 20th-century vernacular setting, there were deviants who “attempt to liberate photographic practice from the social functions” of documenting “the ‘souvenirs’ of objects, people or events socially designated as important” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.132). These “aesthetes” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.8) often consider photography as a serious art form, so follow a “photography for photography’s sake” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.41) ideal by often featuring seemingly unimportant subjects (such as pebbles) in less realistic visual styles. Now on Instagram, Manovich’s (2017a) research also discovered photographic aesthetes who valorise the aesthetic side of photography over its documenting side. Thus, even though the aesthetes might feature similar subjects (such as everyday objects and selfies) in their photos shared on Instagram, as they often experiment with visual techniques from “good photography” and graphic design, their photos should be considered more as their aesthetic expressions, instead of mere documents (ibid).

Hence, even though a photograph can be produced with a simple click, the photo-making process is “still a choice involving aesthetic and ethical values” of a photographer (Bourdieu, 1991, p.131). Each group only chooses “a finite and well defined range of subjects, genres and compositions” (ibid) which are formulated under a collective rule related to the upbringings and social backgrounds of people in the group. Thus, for social researchers, as a practice that converges the social and individual dimensions, photography can serve as “a privileged means of apprehending, in their most authentic expression, the aesthetics (and ethics) of different groups or classes” (ibid). On the other hand, photographs can stir up deep, personal and strong emotions from the viewers, as the depicted moments can recall memory, nostalgia and sometimes melancholia related to their cherished people, objects or moments (Barthes, 2000). Thus, except for “ideology, institutions and systems”, as exemplified by Sandbye’s (2014) research about vernacular photography, researchers can also gain insights about “consciousness, lived experience, feeling, everyday social relations and ‘what is actually being

lived' (citing Williams, 1977, p.131)". In this sense, as Sandbye (2014) concludes her research, the study of photography can also allow social researchers to understand such an "existential dimension" of social life.

Having reviewed these studies, I realised that studying both the production and consumption of photography can offer me a valuable means to understand the relationship between individuals and the social world. The consumption and production of food photos coexist in foodstagrammers' uses of Instagram. While my research focuses on the production of food photos, it also interrogates how the creation of these photos is related to foodstagrammers' consumption of food images from various sources. Therefore, as suggested by the above-mentioned research about photography, I decided to use the study of the lived experiences of foodstagramming as a lens to understand the relationship between individuals and the social world.

To understand this relationship, I decided to focus on studying foodstagrammers' **selves**: their "subjective side" (Charmaz, 2007, p.4165), concerning "all those qualities, attributes, values, feelings, and moral sentiments" (ibid) that they assume to be their own. I decided to borrow theories from Mead (1934), Goffman (1959) and existential sociology (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) and use them in combination to study foodstagrammers' selves, as such a combination allows me to capture different aspects of the self.

In Mead's (1934) perspective, the self is portrayed as a relational entity that is generated through social interactions. As Elliott (2020, p.40) summarised from Mead (1934), "the self is an agency through which individuals experience themselves in relation to others". According to Mead (1934), individuals understand themselves via their relations with others, as the self is formed by the combination of the "I" (the creative part of the self which can initiate actions without deliberation) and "me" (the part of the self that deliberately monitors and assesses the "I" via dialogues with and about the self that are based on the feedback of others). Therefore, self is a process through which an individual act both as 1. a subject: a creator initiating social actions who leave traces, and 2. an object: the traces (created through the individuals' social interactions with others) that are being examined and evaluated by the subject. Extending it to the digital context, Humphreys (2018, pp.19–20) argues that in the formats of text, photographs and videos, individuals create, share, document and catalogue traces of their social interactions with others on social media. Within such digital communication processes, individuals obtain

the opportunities to turn themselves into both subjects and objects, which then be consumed and evaluated by themselves. It is through the consumption of the media traces that we can “engage, relive and scrutinize ourselves from perspectives different from our lived experiences” (p.18). Thus, creating and reflecting on the media traces provides people with opportunities to understand their selves.

On the other hand, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach emphasises that the self is constructed in action in social interactions. He suggests that our social life is a stage where individuals are actors who put on performances of varied versions of themselves according to the different situations and audiences provided. Through these performances, each performer gives different impressions of himself/herself to varied audiences. Thus, to be a certain type of person involves constant sustainment of “the standards of conduct and appearance that one’s social grouping attaches thereto” via a series of conducts that are coherently and well-articulated (p.81). Therefore, the self is derived from not only thoughts but also actions. Applying this to the digital context, for example, when presenting themselves online via blogs, people tend to selectively highlight or downplay certain aspects of their offline selves, targeting different contexts and audiences (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). Therefore, we can consider online platforms as an extended form of stage for people to perform themselves. However, an online stage like Instagram is different from an offline one. As Hogan (2010, p.377) argues, the actions people conduct to present themselves on social media are more like “exhibitions”. In a synchronous context in Goffman’s sense, individuals perform in real time for a fixed audience. Whereas, in an asynchronous online context, individuals need to submit “artifacts” (ibid) (like texts, photos, and videos): “the result of a past performance and lives” (ibid) to perform themselves. Such exhibited performances are no longer bound by a fixed context but can be “replayed in a completely different context” (p.380) to extended audiences. Despite this difference, the actions of creating “artifacts” (ibid) (like foodstagram) and interacting with audiences via them still provide people with means to work on their selves as suggested in Goffman’s framework.

Besides thoughts and actions, according to existential sociology, individuals are also connected to the social world through the bodily reactions they develop from their experiences in the world, as such bodily reactions are important factors that define people’s senses of themselves (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984). Acknowledging the self as existential can make us realise that the self is embodied, as it exists in a body that is situated in society (Kotarba, 2009). Before we can generate rational thoughts and use symbols, our

bodies are already filled with complex and primitive senses, affects, and perceptions through engagements with the world around us (ibid). While social ideas and values guide people in choosing what and how to act, as Douglas (1984, p.85) argues, “it is our basic emotions that orient or guide our will in choosing what kinds of actions to perform”. Thus, although people are influenced and restricted by social norms and values, within the reach of people’s limited freedom, they also attempt to shape and manipulate society to fulfil their most basic needs and desires: to create a positive and secure environment for their selves “to grow, to create, [and] to expand” (p.97). Especially for the digital context, both de Solier’s (2013) study of food blogging and Tiidenberg’s (2018) study of selfies conclude that an important reason why people create and share food media or selfies on digital platforms is that such practices can provide them with a sense of empowerment and control. According to both authors, such control and empowerment largely derive from the creators being able to use media content they create in a way they prefer to represent their existence and express feelings that they value. Although de Solier (2013) and Tiidenberg (2018) did not mention theories from existential sociology, in a similar vein, their research reminds us of the important role feelings play in constructing people’s selves in a digital context.

In this sense, to combine all these perspectives, by understanding foodstagrammers’ thoughts (Mead, 1934), actions (Goffman, 1959) and feelings (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) related to their selves, we can generate sociologically interesting insights into the relationships between individuals and the social world. As mentioned in section 1.1, existing studies about foodstagramming often focus on how social relations direct the actions of foodstagrammers. I do investigate this aspect in my research. However, as I presented in this section, photography also has the potential to allow individuals to express their thoughts and feelings. Therefore, in this research, as a photographic practice, I also study the aesthetics and values related to foodstagramming.

To clarify, **aesthetics** in this research stands for “sensation, affect and perception”, referring to “a world of sensual contact with things – a world of bodies perceiving themselves and other bodies, a world thick with emotion and sentiment” (Highmore, 2010, p.155). Following Olcese and Savage’s (2015, p.735) argument, this understanding does not reduce aesthetics to merely an instrument of social distinction, which as they argue is a common tendency found in social research. Aesthetics in this research also does not refer to just beauty or art, but incorporates “the whole region of human perception and sensation” including “the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body in its sensory surfaces,

of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world” (Eagleton, 1990, p.13). Aesthetics define the “whole of our sensate life together”, or the “most gross and palpable dimension of the human” that form our “creaturely life” (ibid). I pay attention to such aspects because such sensational, affective and perceptive elements permeate people’s everyday experiences, decisions and actions, so it has the power to shape the contour of the social world (Saito, 2017; Nettleton, 2013).

Value in this research refers to “the result of the whole set of operations through which a quality is assigned to an object” (Heinich, 2020, p.214). This definition does not position value as a concept that is restricted by a finite set of qualities (such as economic worth) but treats it as a process, or “valuation operations which depend on the nature of the object being evaluated, on the nature of the evaluating subjects and the nature of the context of valuation” (ibid). As Skeggs (1997) argues, although the logic of capital is now infused in many aspects of everyday social life, we should not regard social actors as mere self-interested calculators who only chase economic value. As she and Lamont (1992) both propose, beyond gaining self-benefiting socio-economic success, people also valorise emotional, ethical, political and other values. Thus, choosing to understand value as a process allow me to capture the plurality of this aspect in different lived foodstagramming experiences.

By paying attention to aesthetics and values embedded in foodstagramming experiences, I aim to generate insights into people’s reactions towards the influences that social and cultural norms cast upon them. Looking into both how social and cultural norms influence individuals and how individuals react to such norms, I intend to provide a nuanced and detailed understanding of foodstagramming and its social implication. By doing this, I also plan to provide insights into the multifaceted and complex nature of the relationship between individuals and the social world.

1.4 Research Questions

Having established the contributions my research can make, I now present the research questions.

1. Why do people create foodstagrams and why do they share them on Instagram?

This question explores the purposes of foodstagramming for different foodstagrammers. By answering this question, I intend to explore whether by looking into the lived experiences of foodstagramming from different types of foodstagrammers, we can discover alternative answers beyond just showing off one’s social wellness and/or gaining resources for achieving

higher social status. Thus, this question focuses on understanding the values and feelings involved in different lived foodstagramming experiences.

2. How do people create their foodstagramms?

This question discusses aspects such as 1. how people choose the food subjects to photograph and the image styles to portray the subjects, 2. how long the image making and editing processes take and 3. what labour and craft are involved in each process. These aspects draw our attention to the various actions conducted in the whole foodstagramming practice.

3. Why do people choose to create their foodstagramms in the ways that they do?

The third question interrogates the reasons behind the actions discussed in the second question. It concerns aspects such as 1. why people choose to feature certain food subjects and use certain visual styles in their foodstagramms and 2. why they choose to conduct certain actions and spend a certain amount of time in making their foodstagramms. Investigating these aspects can provide us insights into not only people's understandings of food, image-making and Instagramming but also the meanings they attach to their foodstagramming practices.

Compared to the existing literature introduced in section 1.1, answering these three questions can allow us to illustrate a more detailed and nuanced picture of foodstagramming. As the questions accommodate the complexities involved in the lived experiences of different foodstagrammers, answering these questions, therefore, can allow us to capture the multifaceted aspects of foodstagramming that take into account foodstagrammers' **actions, values and feelings**, which as I mentioned in the last section, are all important aspects that form people's selves in relation to the social world. Especially, values and feelings are the two aspects that were often neglected in existing research. Therefore, by enquiring about these aspects, I intend to use this research to provide a **nuanced and detailed** interpretation of foodstagramming that is generated from understanding foodstagrammers' **lived experiences**.

To answer these questions, I decided to use qualitative research methods. I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven foodstagrammers who produce and share food photos on Instagram for different reasons and with various styles. I also conducted online participant observations to examine my participants' foodstagramming activities and content. After collecting the data, I then analysed them using thematic analysis to find similarities and differences in different participants' experiences. I developed three main themes, and they together formed the main arguments of this research.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This chapter established the background and the sociological importance of this research. The first section provided an overview of why I decided to focus on the aspect of the lived experiences for studying foodstagramming. The second section presented my exploration of the historical development of food imaging and reflections on why understanding foodstagramming as a visual and photographic practice is necessary and important. The third section then shifted to discuss the sociological relevance and importance of my research. I pointed out that like other social research that studies photography, my research also provides insights into understanding the relationship between individuals and the social world. The fourth section then established the three questions for this research: 1. Why do people create foodstagrams and why do they share them on Instagram? 2. How do people create their foodstagrams? 3. Why do people choose to create their foodstagrams in the ways that they do? The section also provided an overview of the research activities that I conducted to answer them.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of the latest studies about foodstagramming. Such a review situates my research within the emerging research field of foodstagramming, which allows me to identify both the relations and differences between existing research and mine. I start by reviewing literature related to “food porn”, which is a term that is often used to describe the final product of foodstagramming: foodstagram. By reviewing the literature, I demonstrate three interpretations of foodstagramming, namely a practice that 1. oversexualises food, 2. grabs viewers’ attention and 3. commodifies food experiences. The next section shifts to review deductive analyses of foodstagramming. It evaluates two strands of critiques that frame foodstagramming as a practice that on the one hand flattens and simplifies food and on the other hand, facilitates people to gain social distinction. The last section shifts to discuss the interpretations of the nature of the labour involved in foodstagramming practices. It portrays two contrasting understandings which render foodstagramming practices either as a form of free labour or creative labour.

Chapter 3 provides a reflection on how I conducted the research. It starts by establishing my methodological approach as an inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach. To do that, I provide both an explanation of this approach and the justifications for choosing it. Guided by this approach, I recruited twenty-seven foodstagrammers who conduct foodstagramming for different purposes and with varied styles. I conducted both interviews and online participant observations to collect empirical data to generate insights to understand the lived

foodstagramming experiences of these twenty-seven foodstagrammers. The second section of this chapter thus delineates the details regarding how I identified and recruited these participants, as well as who they are. Following this, I explain both the rationales for choosing interviews plus online participant observations as the data collection methods and the activities I conducted for collecting data. I used thematic analysis to analyse the data and the format of portraits (foodstagramming cases) to present my findings. Section 4 of this chapter details the rationales for these choices, the activities I conducted for analysing the data and the meaning of portraits in this research. The last section presents the ethical considerations I stuck to throughout conducting this research and explains the reasons for doing so.

Analysing the data, I developed three themes: 1. being an artist of the self through foodstagramming, 2. exploring alternative relationships with the material world through foodstagramming and 3. linking the self to wider communities through foodstagramming. Chapter 4 introduces the first theme. This theme concerns how people use foodstagramming to exercise their agency by crafting their self-definitions according to their subjective understandings and preferences within their limited freedom. It concerns how people define themselves through 1. archiving ordinary food experiences, 2. reinventing themselves through creating food and foodstagrams and 3. negotiating their selves through balancing different roles in foodstagramming.

Chapter 5 portrays the second theme: exploring alternative relationships with the material world through foodstagramming. We tend to consider food mostly as something for us to eat. However, foodstagramming examples in this chapter suggest that food can also be regarded as a material with aesthetically interesting visual forms. Via foodstagramming, people can use food as a medium to create various aesthetically interesting visual compositions to both question and reposition their social relations with both food and the material world. Thus, in this chapter, I explain what the compositions are, how they are created and why they are created. By explaining these aspects, I illustrate how different people understand their relations with the material world, how such understandings are achieved via foodstagramming and what moral implications such understandings potentiate.

Chapter 6 illustrates the third theme: linking the self to wider communities through foodstagramming. While the relationship in chapter five centres on human-to-material relationships, the one in chapter six instead emphasises human-to-human relationships. This theme discusses how people socialise with the wider social world via foodstagramming. The

chapter starts by introducing examples of how people use foodstagramming to link themselves to the wider world, build communities and create bonds with other people. It then shifts to discuss how people use foodstagramming to express their values that challenge the mainstream food culture. After this, it demonstrates examples where foodstagrammers created and shared food photos to initiate activist actions with the intent to cultivate positive changes.

Chapter 7 presents some concluding remarks on this research. I start by summarising the core content in each of the previous chapters. Drawing from the three themes I discovered, section two of this chapter details the answers to my three research questions. Following this, I then provide three core arguments for this research regarding 1. the need to understand foodstagramming as a photographic image-making practice that is situated on Instagram which focuses on the subject matter of food, 2. the importance of valuing the empowering potential of the practice and 3. the imperative of recognising the aesthetic dimension of the practice. These arguments all suggest that instead of being merely passive, foodstagramming is a generative practice. The next section then summarises the contributions my research brings to social research. It argues that by presenting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of foodstagramming than existing studies, this research raises the importance for social researchers to insert aesthetics (concerning senses, affects and perceptions) into not only the theorisations of our social world but also the design and execution of social research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is dedicated to presenting reoccurring themes in the existing literature about or related to foodstagramming. It is divided into three parts. In section 2.1, I illustrate three interpretations of what foodstagramming produces and means. By relating to literature about foodstagrams (or specific types of foodstagrams), which are often assigned the name of “food porn”, I present the different characteristics researchers assign to the products of foodstagramming (foodstagrams) that were argued to 1. oversexualise food, 2. grab viewers’ attention and 3. commodify food experience. By illustrating these three different characteristics, I demonstrate how foodstagramming is defined via the products it produces. In section 2.2, by relating to the three characteristics of foodstagrams, I demonstrate two strands of critiques on the social implications of foodstagramming. These critiques consider foodstagramming as a practice that either reduces food to a one-dimensional object or maintains and extends social inequalities. By doing this, I aim to summarise the sociological implications of foodstagrams. In section 2.3, I discuss the nature of the labour involved in foodstagramming, which is characterised either as free labour that benefits the accumulation of capital for Instagram or creative labour that can empower foodstagrammers. By presenting both perspectives, I delineate the different interpretations of labour involved in foodstagramming.

2.1 Foodstagramming as Making Food Porn

Many researchers often equate the process of foodstagramming to making food porn. “#foodporn” is one of the most used hashtags on Instagram (with 285,919,530 posts at the time of writing this section), so this term is an important representative genre of the foodstagramming culture. As Rousseau (2013, p.748) defines, food porn refers to still or moving images of food/eating as represented in different media, such as cookbooks and Instagram. As denoted by the name itself, like sex pornography, food porn is also created to incite the desires of viewers through their viewing of images of food (Contois and Kish, 2022, p.7). To incite the image viewers’ desires, food in food porn is often depicted with various visual tropes to make it look appetising, attractive, covetable and even unattainable (Taylor and Keating, 2018, pp.309–310). In this section, by referring to existing studies, I illustrate three framings of food porn in order to understand the characteristics of different types of foodstagrams we can find on digital media such as Instagram. By examining the end results that are generated from foodstagramming, I intend to demonstrate the different characteristics assigned to the image making and sharing practice by existing studies: 1. oversexualising food, 2. grabbing viewers’ attention and 3. commodifying food experiences.

2.1.1 Foodstagramming as Oversexualising Food

As McDonnell (2016, p.243) summarises, food porn is originally derived from both the word “gastro-porn” used in a cookbook review and “food porn” used in *Nutrition Action Healthletter* (a public educational material about food and science in the US). In 1977, in a review of a French cookbook, Cockburn (1987, p.125) used “gastro-porn” to criticise the nature of the book being an unpractical cookery manual but just an eye-candy filled with coloured food photographs of finished dishes that were dressed in unattainably attractive styles for merely inciting desires and excitements from the readers. Likewise, the “food porn” used in the Healthletter in 1979 also has a pejorative connotation, for which it was assigned to represent food with an unwholesome nature that sits on the opposite side of nutritional value.

We can situate the gastro-porn and food porn mentioned in the above two occasions into the context of how food was represented in commercial food photography as seen on both print media and TV programmes starting from the latter half of the 20th century. Regarding print media, in the late 1950s, Barthes’ (1972) analysis of food content in *Elle* magazine in France suggests that food photography was often used as a tool to transfer real dishes into food that “is meant for the eye alone” (p.78) but not for eating. According to Barthes, *Elle* has a largely working-class readership made of small-income groups, but its food content often featured expensive food persistently ornamented with glazing that consists of colourful and varied ingredients which “serves as background for unbridled beautification” (p.78). Using such defamiliarised ornamentations, Barthes argues that the magazine transforms cookery into mythical fairy tales which implicate the idea that “consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking” (p.79). By doing this, the magazine disassociates its audience from worrying about the real problem that they might not even be able to afford the cooking ingredients pictured and the idea that “cooking must be economical” (ibid). Thus, in his analysis, food photos are framed not as depictions of reality, but as imagined ideal worlds to elicit people’s desires only. A similar example can be found in Nickolas Murray’s food spread for McCall’s magazine in the last chapter (see 6a, Figure 6). As Bright (2017, p. 103) comments, the food in these images was shown not to be eaten, but more “to be looked at and dreamed about” because they were placed in meticulously planned and visually aesthetic settings with different food bursting with eye-attracting vivid colours. She argues food photography here is used by the magazine to create a food dream world to sell the idea of “generosity, plenty and wholesomeness” of the American society in 1943 and the McCall’s magazine (ibid).

Similarly, on TV, according to McDonnell (2016, p.242), food programmes have cultivated “food voyeurism” for which the TV viewers are encouraged to create desires to “visually consume exotic and amazing foods that they might never have an opportunity to taste”, which is a similar relationship between sexual pornography that viewers watch. McDonnell mentions that food videography often “borrows” techniques from sexual pornography videography, such as allocating the majority of time to portray food by “lingering” on it as an object while minimising the narrative storyline and later ending with “tasting ecstasy” (ibid, McDonnell referencing Kaufman, 2005). In the UK, we can find many such examples, such as the TV advertisements of M&S food, where the moving images often feature “scrumptious slow-motion close-ups of molten deserts and pasta drizzled in sauce” to incite desires from the audience, as shown in videos in Stewart’s (2019) article.

The food porn we see today on social media both continues and extends the above traditions. As McDonnell (2016) suggests, the food photos we can find in media today still tend to sexualise the materiality of food to elicit desires from the viewers of their images. The image content of these photos often features subjects that are mostly “exoticised foods, well prepared and artfully presented” (p.264). Also, by analysing food photos collected from blogs and websites, McDonnell discovered four visual tropes people often use to photograph food: **zoom** (to show the extreme close-up looks of food objects), **framing** (to invite the viewers to imagine elements not pictured in the frame), **orientation** (to look at a familiar food from an unfamiliar angle) and **depth of field** (to direct viewers’ attention directly to the food via using the lens to focus on it while blurring other elements) (McDonnell, 2016, pp.257-262). According to her, these are the visual tropes that are used to complete the pornification of food through image-making.

2.1.2 Foodstagramming as Grabbing Viewers’ Attention

On the other hand, Taylor and Keating (2018), as well as David and Allard (2022) argue that the food porn we see on social media platforms such as Instagram today has a more polysemic nature that goes beyond just the sexual connotations, so food porn on digital media today also extends the earlier traditions of cookbook photography and images of food on television programmes. In Taylor and Keating’s (2018) research, the authors accumulated a collection of food photographs sourced from different media channels including Instagram and by comparing them to visual techniques used in food paintings in art history, they discovered four stylistic frameworks that are often used in food porn today (Taylor and Keating, 2018, pp.315–319): **innovation** (to present food in unusual or unrecognised forms to attract viewers’

attention), **entertainment** (to use both a large quantity and wide variety of food to create an endless cornucopia that signals hospitality and celebration), **mastery** (to faultlessly construct and impeccably display food using heavily styled techniques) and **authenticity** (to set up homely and nostalgic settings of food scenes with home-cooked dishes paired with tarnished cutleries and used tableware).

Taylor and Keating's (2018) framework extends and concretises McDonnell's (2016, pp.257-262) one because it explains why using certain visual representational techniques in food photos can make the images look attractive to viewers. Also, it suggests that although these frameworks are associated with sexual pornography, they are also "common tropes of visual arts" that are used to creatively disrupt and exaggerate. This means we do not necessarily have to associate the food represented in food porn today with exclusively "sexual" or "excessive" (p.320) connotations but can think beyond that. As the authors point out, with the participatory culture of social media, these visual representational tools are now dispersed pervasively in the hands of non-image-making professionals through digital dissemination. David and Allard (2022) also argue that on Instagram, food porn is often used mainly as a popular hashtag for content creators to attract more attention. Thus, in addition to understanding food porn as the pornification of food, we can also understand it as a visual tool for the image authors to grab viewers' attention. This also means that the content in food porn can be both unusual and usual food but is visually represented using various techniques that attract viewers' attention. In this sense, foodstagramming can also be understood as a photographic practice to create visually attractive food photos with certain eye-catching visual techniques to attract the attention of viewers.

2.1.3 Foodstagramming as Commodifying Food Experiences

The above two framings of food porn tend to focus on the visual aesthetics of food photos, so food porn tends to be only certain images that appear either overly sexualised and/or attention-grabbing. These images are also mostly produced by professional photographers or serious amateurs, such as bloggers. However, in another framing, food porn can also refer to any photo with the subject of food regardless of its visual style or type of food pictured. In this case, food porn can also be used to refer to casually snapped food photos produced by complete amateurs featuring unextraordinary food situated in mundane settings, as defined in Ibrahim's (2015a) research. In a related article, Ibrahim terms the "imaging of the everyday where we capture and upload the trivial and perfunctory" moments in life, such as the food we eat, as "banal imaging" (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.43). Aided by the development of mobile photography and

development of social media platforms and similar to argued earlier, such banal imaging extends Chalfen's (1987) home mode tradition of photography and "elongates this trajectory where imaging everyday life becomes an integral part of our identity construction, communication and sustenance of relationships today" (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.43).

Food has always been an important site for people to engage with through photography, as Chalfen's (1987) study of home mode photography suggests. Folding into the domestication of the everyday through photography, food, together with other domestic subjects, is a tool people use to capture their memories as a form of autobiography construction and self-presentation (ibid). Especially on Instagram, food is one of the most widely captured image subjects (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014, p.597). Also, when more and more people start to take pictures of food and share them on social media before they eat the food, the aphorism "you are what you eat" has now turned into "you are what you post and consume – not with your mouth, but with your eyes" (David and Allard, 2022, p.64). Thus, the food images are a visual representation of people's selves. While food often appeared as an element of special events in home mode photographs, the food in banal imaging in the digital age can appear as both "milestones" and "non-events" for "chronicling the routine normality of the everyday and life's mortal passage where the pace, rhythm and the rituals of daily living are composed through imagery" (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.45). While mobile phones provide the ease of capturing "fleeting and unexpected mundane moments" (Daisuke and Ito, 2003), social media platforms such as Instagram further elevate the validity and legitimacy of capturing and aestheticising these mundane moments by nudging people to continuously communicate and share the most recent photos in their lives with other people.

Influenced by both elements, food photos then become, as Ibrahim (2015b, p.46) argues, a means people use to commodify the mundane moments of everyday life and use as the basis for transactions by sharing them with other people. Since food is a subject that often taps into "our emotional reservoir, our nostalgic memories and inner psyche to elicit comfort, familiarity, aversion, desire, greed, degrees of pleasure and displeasure" (Ibrahim, 2015a, p.2), photographs about food then have the "ability to trigger forms of affect" (ibid) that can easily resonate with other people. Also, as van Dijck (2008, 2010) argues, the integration of digital photography and social media has diversified the functions of photography because the connectivity afforded by social media has turned photography into a tool for people to not only document memory but also perform their identities and generate communications with other people. Van House (2007, p.2719) also claims that social media have propelled people to create

more “transitory, ephemeral”, or even disposable images about the here and now just to be shared with others. Thus, the food photos we see on Instagram can be understood as “objects of communication” (Van House, 2011, p.125) that people use to conduct “phatic communication” (Miller, 2008b; Lewis, 2020, p.36), which means to initiate communications with other people as a form of sociality, instead of just being reservoirs of memories.

Due to all these reasons, food photos, or food porn, then can be regarded as a “currency” (Ibrahim, 2015a, p.10) that people use to invite social gaze and cultivate sociality. Foodstagramming in this case then becomes a practice for people to commodify their food experience as a practice of everyday life which also allows social communication with other people. This is how and why foodstagramming has become “an integral part of our identity construction, communication and sustenance of relationships today” (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.43).

From these different strands of illustrations, via the lens of food porn, we can gain insights from existing research about three ways of understanding food images we find online. Through the first and second renderings of food porn, for food photos where the food appears attractive or exotic and the visual arrangements appear highly stylised and planned, we can understand them as objects to either elicit desire and carnal pleasure or attract attention from the viewers. Through the third rendering of food porn, for all food photos we see that are shared on social media, we can understand them as tools people use to perform their selves and build social networks.

One common aspect is that all three types of understanding of food photos shared on social media today demonstrate the continuation and intensification of the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone, 2007) as well as the blurred boundary between consumer culture and vernacular culture. Especially with respect to food images that feature only food but not humans, before the emergence of social media platforms, such food aestheticization work was mostly produced by media professionals to be displayed in consumer culture via various media channels, such as the print media and TV. In vernacular culture, food used to appear mostly in the background as a contextualising object for family portraits but rarely as the main image subject per se in home mode photography (Chalfen, 1987; Bourdieu et al., 1990). However now, food has increasingly become a legitimate genre that is important in its own right for amateur photographers, bloggers and other non-professionals (for image-making) (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014), so these photographers have also started participating in the food aestheticization work.

Another common aspect of all these three types of understanding of food photos is that food images are laden with different sensations and emotions. All three characteristics suggest that by sharing food photos, the image creators can use these images as tools to incite different sensations and emotions from the viewers as a means of generating social engagements with each other. All three types did not suggest what the sensations and emotions mean to the image authors and viewers themselves. Through the three renditions, the sensations and emotions embedded in the food photos become merely surrogates, tools or currencies for initiating social engagements. In this sense, the importance of sensations and emotions themselves becomes unexplained and reduced. This then renders foodstagrammers as merely goal-driven individuals who wish to cultivate social relationships with others that are only **transactional**, instead of emotionally connected.

In my research, I avoid making such assumptions. To address the natures of both foodstagramming (as an image making plus sharing practice) and the foodstagrams produced via such a practice, I choose not to bring any presumptions when I conduct my research work. In this sense, while the above different framings and renderings of foodstagramming all provided me with the resource to critically understand these two topics, in my research, I choose to let foodstagrammers themselves explain their understandings of both their foodstagramming experiences and the foodstagrams they create. I do still draw on these framings to relate my findings to the larger research field, but my research represents more of foodstagrammers' own interpretations of their foodstagrams than a pre-determined critique of them. Doing this can allow us to gain a nuanced understanding of the characteristics of foodstagramming that is based on the practitioners' own lived experiences, instead of just deductive analysis derived from only analysing visual or literary texts.

2.2 The Social Implications of Foodstagramming

In the last section, by drawing from related research, I presented three different understandings of foodstagramming: an image making and sharing practice aiming to 1. oversexualise food, 2. grab viewers' attention and 3. commodify food experience. Here we should note that these interpretations can be related, as foodstagrams which depict oversexualised food are often interpreted as tools for people to either grab attention or use as currencies for socialisation. In this section, I address how we should critically understand the social implications of foodstagramming concerning these three understandings of the practice. By reviewing different research works, I discovered that most of them point to the direction that foodstagramming can be regarded either as a means to extend the male gaze (Berger, 1972;

Mulvey, 1989) that reduces and flattens food into a one-dimensional entity or as a tool for people to create social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) that exacerbates class inequality. Therefore, in this section, I delineate how these two arguments are constructed. Under such lenses, foodstagramming is generally turned into an image making and sharing practice that reinforces existing social issues and inequalities, as well as creates new ones.

2.2.1 Flattening and Simplifying Food through Foodstagramming

In David and Allard's (2022) research, the authors use their analysis of the online French food visual panorama focused on various popular hashtags such as #foodporn to argue that the representation of food continues and extends the "male gaze" which used to be found for images about women in visual culture. They reformed the term "male gaze" to "meal gaze" to encapsulate "the commodity fetishization of images of meals in a digital form" (p.65). "Male gaze" is a term writers such as Mulvey (1989) and Berger (1972) used to describe the situation of women being objectified and sexualised in visual culture to satisfy men's voyeuristic pleasure. According to Mulvey (1989, p.19), such voyeuristic pleasure means men can develop pleasure by projecting their fantasies onto female figures through gazing at women in films. She argues women are often displayed as sexual objects in films with their appearances "coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (ibid). When the development of the narratives stops but attention was drawn to women's bodies, men are then invited to contemplate such visual elements to develop desire and pleasure from such gazes (ibid). Berger (1972, p.47) observed the same male gaze through paintings in Western art history. Using the phrase "men act, women appear", Berger points out that the convention in art history of making women pose as models (often unclothed) for male spectators as viewing pleasure reduces women to their bodies and their bodies into objects subject to men's gazes (ibid). This leads to a relationship where men become active agents while women are reduced to passive and submissive objects, and such a relationship in visual culture both enacts and maintains existing gender inequality throughout history (ibid).

Similarly, for David and Allard's (2022) "meal gaze", the authors found a similar relationship in food porn that reinforces the male gaze, as argued in Mulvey and Berger's works. Relating to the first and second renditions of foodstagramms portrayed in the last section, by understanding food porn as the process of making food look overly attractive, desirable, engaging and attention-grabbing, it is very easy to find a connection between such food pornification processes through food images on Instagram and gender pornification processes in other visual cultural forms. Like women being reduced to images, David and Allard (2022)

argue that food now is also reduced to images. Just as how women are expected to look glamorous, these authors claim that food is now also judged by its look in terms of its Instagrammability, which refers to whether the food is judged as photographable in the context of Instagram. They also mentioned that “now more than ever, when deciding which dish to order in a restaurant, many customers choose a meal for more than its flavour” (p.72). Truman (2022, p.114) also argues that the “hyper-visibility of foods on Instagram” has nudged people to focus on the “aesthetic appeal of food over other attributes” when they judge its value. Thus, she argues, on Instagram we can see an emergence of “Instagram foods” such as Unicorn Latte, grilled-rainbow-cheese sandwiches and charcoal-infused ice cream, which are food items that are being popular more for their “unique visual traits” concerning colours and shapes that are made especially for Instagram spectacles, instead of for their tastes. Instead, “brown food” such as stews or braised meat dishes, which are not eye-catching in the world of Instagram, while being delicious, are posted less by foodstagrammers, especially for food influencers, as Leung and Lin (2022) observed in their research about food Instagram influencers in Hong Kong.

Not only food items but also the whole food experience can be directed towards such heightened visual features of food. As Tandoh (2016) argues with respect to the influence of foodstagramming in home cooking, more people have started to “worry more about presentation” of food (referencing findings from Waitrose, 2016). Thus, for the food they make at home, these people often make drizzles, glazes or decorations on top of the food to make sure that the food photos they snap look visually attractive. As she summarises, it can be “aesthetic first, taste later and, quite often, no taste at all” (ibid). For dining outside, Hosie (2017) suggests that the restaurant industry has now transformed the whole dining experience according to visual logic by offering nicely presented dishes in well-embellished containers and decorating their interiors just to make sure that foodstagrammers can take aesthetically pleasing photos and share them on their social media accounts. In their book *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*, Leaver, Highfield and Abidin’s (2020, p.130) foodstagramming example is related to such an argument. They discussed an example of a famous dessert café in Tokyo that serves a menu that is “tailored to maximize Instagrammability” (such as hot chocolate with a blossoming marshmallow flower floating on top and milk in a container made with edible cookie cups) (ibid). The authors wrote some customers ordered “repeat items” because they had failed to capture the theatrical movement of the folded marshmallow blossoming on top of the hot chocolate when the drink was first served (ibid). Also, the waiting staff often provided suggestions to the customers regarding which colour of marshmallow to

order to make the image look more “*kawaii*” (cute) on Instagram and which angle to choose as the most ideal to capture the blossoming moment (ibid).

In this sense, all such examples about food items and dining experiences designed especially for visual consumption on Instagram can suggest that foodstagramming has shifted people’s attention from the taste to the visual appearance of food. Thus, like women represented in visual culture, food in the context of Instagram is also turned into a flat visual object, for which the image viewers are encouraged to be attracted for their attention and derive pleasure from just looking at the images without having to eat the food. As Mull (2017) argues,

Instagram food has almost nothing to do with consumption as a gastronomic endeavor; instead, consuming Instagram food means acquiring it and sharing proof of your acquisition. This flattens it out from a sensory experience into an aesthetic one... It’s a visual-only binge.

Therefore, like in Frederick Kaufman’s comments about food porn as cited in McBride’s (2010) forum article in *Gastronomica*, a voyeuristic look implicated in food porn nudges people to “vicariously” engage with food by focusing mainly on the unattainability of food (McBride, 2010, p.45) and the visual pleasure afforded by such a look. He concludes that the voyeuristic element in such a look can alienate community and social relations because it “hides the hard work and dirty dishes behind cooking” (p.41). Also, as he expresses, “there is something indecent about playing with food when there is so much hunger in the world” (ibid). Thus, reducing food to visual objects has a socially and morally problematic connotation in Kaufman’s view.

Thus, making and eating food for creating food images are rendered as de-contextualising and alienating, because the eating of food is transformed into an unrealistic and inauthentic practice that is at the service not of people’s gustatory tastes but their visual tastes. To update Sontag’s (2005) arguments, foodstagramming is thus constructed as a photographic practice that entails a “chronic voyeuristic relation” between the photographers and the subject they represent for which the photographers tend to flatten the “meaning” of the subject (p.7): food. Sontag originally used such a relation to critique photographers who often take pleasure in photographing what they encounter in real-life at the sacrifice of being morally indifferent or non-interventive to real-life events, even when those events are tragic or horrific. While the directly photographed food scenes are not necessarily tragic or horrific, as McBride’s (2010) interview mentioned, the related unrepresented food hunger issues can be, so we can attribute a similar voyeuristic nature to foodstagramming that is comparable to Sontag’s argument. Also,

under such a framing, foodstagrammers become people who are morally indifferent (if not amoral), because they are rendered as people who just take advantage of the occasions of consuming food for creating visually satisfying pleasure. It is argued that foodstagrammers do this not because they take the food or the eating occasions themselves seriously but merely want to gain attention from others with a self-driven nature.

2.2.2 Gaining Social Distinction through Foodstagramming

In addition to the above-mentioned concept of meal gaze (David and Allard, 2022), there is another interpretation of the social implication of foodstagramming, which focuses on the enactment and extension of social inequality, especially on class, through this practice. These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive but share common ground. Gaining social distinction can partly explain why people shape the meal gaze in their foodstagramming practices. Gaining social distinction through foodstagramming is related to the second and third framings of food porn demonstrated in the last section for which foodstagrams are regarded as either tools for grabbing attention or socialising currency. This interpretation understands foodstagrammers, as creating transactional social relations with other people by sharing their foodstagrams. Via such a lens, foodstagramming is interpreted as a tool for foodstagrammers to 1. exhibit their often high economic and cultural capitals and 2. build social capital: the number of followers they have on Instagram (Airoldi, 2022, p.100). Through this process, they can then receive the socio-economic benefits of enriching both their economic and symbolic capitals, which can provide them to achieve a more privileged position in society, as portrayed in Bourdieu's (1984) work.

“Capital” used in Bourdieu's sense extended the economic definition of capital which refers to not only material but also immaterial assets people inherit and acquire throughout their lives (Bourdieu, 1986). The most common forms include economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, for individuals, these material and immaterial assets can be accrued, transformed and exchanged to gain advantages in life because such capitals provide the means to exercise or resist domination from other classes (ibid). Referring to the specific capitals, **economic capital** refers to a form of capital that has a numerical value which is normally in the form of money. In contrast, **cultural capital** generally refers to non-financial symbolic assets which people have that can allow them to show cultural superiority via 1. *objectified* state via the cultural goods people consume, 2. *embodied* state via people's long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (such as how they talk and how they appreciate artworks) and 3. *institutionalised* state via cultural achievements or resources such

as educational qualifications. Symbolic capital and social capital are capitals that are used to capture the assets people have regarding their social connections with others. While **social capital** generally means the connections and networks people can resort to if they need help from others to achieve specific goals, **symbolic capital** normally refers to people's social status or recognition which is measured by both the awards and prizes they gained, as well as how they are perceived by others (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). By bringing in the new concept of cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital, Bourdieu argues that social stratification and the power dominance of one group of people over another can be supported by the possession of not only material resources but also cultural and social resources, as well as social recognition (Savage, Warde and Devine, 2005).

In the digital context, extending Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) framework, Ignatow and Robinso (2017, p.952) raised the concept of **digital capital**: a form of capital that captures "a person's stock" concerning "the reach, scale, and sophistication of his or her online behavior". While the authors regard digital capital as a separate secondary capital, situating it into Prieur and Savage's (2013, p.141) earlier discussion, we can also consider digital capital as an emerging form of cultural capital within social networking contexts through digital platforms. Thus, cultural capital in this research encapsulates the ability, aptitude and resources related to not only tasting/making food and creating foodstagram but also using Instagram. Like "technical capital" (Bourdieu, 1986), a sub-set of cultural capital, digital capital also potentiates its holders to leverage their distinctive technical skills to accumulate particular resources and capacities for their work or reputation, in order to gain advantaged social positions (Halford and Savage, 2010, p.945).

On the other hand, relating to Airoidi's (2022, p.100) reformulation of Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) framework, within Instagram, social capital can be roughly indicated by the number of followers people have, while symbolic capital can be crystallised in the engagement that accounts manage to generate from their audiences, such as reviews or likes. As Airoidi (2022, p.117) suggests, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital can all act together to be converted into economic capital, and vice versa. In this sense, digital platforms extend and intensify Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) capital framework, as they help to solidify social stratification and power dominance. Under such a condition, social groups with more capitals and higher volumes of capitals can continue to secure more advantaged social positions within the digital context. Food has always been a status-laden area for social demarcation, for which what food people eat, how they eat and what they like to eat are all aspects that can differentiate

one group of people from another (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde, 1997; Johnston and Baumann, 2007). Therefore, similar to McDonnell's (2016, p.241) suggestion, what people show in their foodstagramms is often interpreted as objects that can represent a person's social position and indicate his/her aspirations, or trajectory in Bourdieu's term:

the style of meal that people like to offer is no doubt a very good indicator of the image they wish to give or avoid giving to others and, as such, it is the systematic expression of a system of factors including, in addition to the indicators of the position occupied in the economic and cultural hierarchies, economic trajectory, social trajectory and cultural trajectory. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.79)

In this sense, as I introduce next, most research works about foodstagramming often focus on explicating how different capitals function and how they are exchanged to deconstruct these hierarchies and trajectories. To do this, many authors indicate the social inequalities embedded in foodstagramming.

As Kirkwood (2022, p.168) suggests, cultural capital is an important underpinning for us to understand the motivations behind foodstagramming, especially for food blogging influencers on Instagram. According to her, food influencers who cook dishes in their kitchens and write their blogs are conducting activities that are perceived by our current digital food media environment as possessing "a higher moral value" (referencing de Solier, 2013, p.149) than simply consuming food. In this sense, the images which these influencers share should be considered tools for them to exhibit their knowledge and expertise in the legitimate form of culinary culture. Thus, we should regard foodstagramming as a device for these influencers to perform their cultural capital concerning food.

de Solier (2005, p.471) refers to such cultural capital as "culinary cultural capital". She defined two types of such capitals with one being "more practical culinary capital", which "involves the accumulation of cookery skills" and the other being a "more aesthetic culinary capital", which "involves the accumulation of culturally legitimate system of food taste" (ibid). She argues that while aesthetic culinary capital can help people to use their taste to "signify and solidify" someone's middle-class status, practical culinary capital can help people to use the food someone cooks to also signal their "distinction" (p.474). Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) also use the term "culinary capital" to capture the same instrumental use of food as resource people can use to link their food experiences with socio-economic status.

Going back to foodstagramming, we can find a similar argument in Feldman's (2021) research where she compared the representations of the restaurant scene in London on both

Instagram and the *Michelin Guide*. She analysed and compared reviews from 113 restaurants published in the *Michelin Guide* and reviews of 126 restaurants from 10 London-based foodstagrammers on Instagram. Her findings suggest that although culinary food reviews on Instagram are more inclusive – culturally and economically – than the *Michelin Guide*, “foodstagrammers are not the anti-elitist, amateur messiahs” (p.1355) but are people who often reproduce existing forms of culinary knowledge and quality which coincide with the *Michelin Guide* that foregrounds the contemporary standard of “good food”. Therefore, the reviewing foodstagrams that food blogging influencers post also serve as tools that perform the privileged socio-economic identities of these people via the exhibition of their culinary cultural capitals.

In addition to cultural capital, economic capital is also imbricated in foodstagramming, although often in a less obvious manner. Also, these two capitals sometimes work together to sustain existing social inequalities. As McDonnell (2016, p.264) argues, food still serves as a “status-laden arena of social demarcation ripe for the conspicuous display of particular aesthetic tastes” through the production of food porn. Food porn here refers to the first framing of food images which represent food in an overly sexualised way with unrealistic dressing situated often in a fantasy-like setting. McDonnell’s (2016, p.250) research also mentions utilitarian food photos that “emphasize education and speed of understanding over visual pleasure”, such as a casually snapped picture without highly staged or styled visual elements but which only shows the required information (for instance the ingredients needed for cooking a dish). Thus, she concludes that the contrast between utilitarian food photos and food porn demarcates the difference between people “who eat for sustenance” (p.264), as represented in utilitarian imagery, whereas food porn represents people “who eat for something more – whose class position puts them beyond the exigencies of calories for cost” (ibid). With such a privilege, the food porn authors can explore and express “alternative logics imbricated with cultural tastes” in their foodstagrams by featuring “exoticised foods, well prepared and artfully presented”, as well as adopting visual styles that show their “inclination towards the hedonistic and pleasurable that emphatically denies eating for necessity” (ibid). Therefore, McDonnell (2016, p.241) argues the “aestheticized food” portrayed in these images should be considered as “conspicuous consumption” (referencing Veblen, 1994) by the foodstagrammers – the “aspiring classes” or “upwardly mobile petite bourgeoisie” in Bourdieu’s (1984) words – that use images of food for “public demonstration of social prestige” and “the participation in high cultural capital” to imitate the tastes of “wealthier classes”.

Such exhibitions of alternative logic can also be found in other articles evaluating foodstagramming. For example, in drawing out her observation of the food images she often encounters on Instagram, Tandoh (2016) states:

Here, you will find beautifully shot, intricately staged photographs of the food and, crucially, the lifestyles of successful, creative thirtysomethings. These are wishful odes to how serene and perfect your life could be, if only you had the money, the £50 ceramic platters and the time.

Thus, in her statement, similar to McDonnell's (2016) argument, food, food scenes and foodstagrams are all tools for people who have relatively high economic capital and cultural capital to stage a "wishful" and poetic fantasy that connote their aspiring dreams of upwardly social mobility.

A similar argument is also echoed in O'Neill's (2021) research critiquing clean eating. In her study, O'Neill studies the branded persona of Ella Mills, a UK-based wellness entrepreneur who has established "a multi-platform, multi-product and multi-million pound food brand Deliciously Ella" (p.1282) which focuses on healthy eating. Mills was one of the prominent figures that helped to formulate the "clean eating" movement in the UK. Together with other proponents, Mills often posts food and lifestyle-related content that guides reaching wellness, mostly through adopting a clean eating diet. By analysing various forms of cultural content about Mills, O'Neill (2021) concludes that Mills' branded persona and the clean eating movement in the UK have transformed health from a collective social welfare project into an individual moral economy project. According to O'Neill, the cause of diminished collective attention on wellness in society should essentially be the decline of welfare systems. However, she argues, instead of stating it, Mills and other clean eating influencers have distracted people's attention from this root cause and fed them "a logic of personal responsibility to actively plan for and ensure health, so as not to burden already-overstretched public services" (p.1295).

In a related study, Goodman and Jaworska (2020) examine how digital food influencers (including Mills and similar influencers) construct, curate and share the meanings of good food through their Twitter content which includes images, texts, hyperlinks and other formats. Their findings suggest that by using Twitter, the influencers are providing a new set of good food advice that is beyond well-established traditions, such as clean eating. However, since these are all people who are mostly white and from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, the criteria the influencers set for good food still re-inscribe classed and racialised ideals of good food that

favours only the privileged group in society. O'Neill's (2021) research echoes this conclusion, pointing out that food influencers like Mills are mostly people with privilege who are white and possess high volumes of cultural and economic capitals. She adds that the clean eating movement and the wellness culture have gained a physical impact that transformed the food environment in the UK into a "class-privileged" one that is "plainly inaccessible to large swathes of people in the United Kingdom" (p.1296). Mills and her proponents thus extend social inequalities from an online to an offline context.

Also, both Goodman and Jaworska (2020) and O'Neill (2021) observe that in accompanying food images, influencers also post related lifestyle content. As Goodman and Jaworska (2020, p.184) argue, these various types of content together should be regarded as curated content "designed for rolling performances of identities, brands, personalities and, of course, value generation". Also, as O'Neill (2021, p.1296) mentions, Mills has used the content she posts on Instagram and other platforms to form a brand with multi-million economic value and a large following base. Thus, a route to wellness should be understood as "one that speaks to deep-seated desires and real material needs". As Mull (2017) comments, food has become a tool for food influencers to gain "hundreds of thousands of followers" and with these amounts of following bases, the influencers can gain much economic benefit from brand sponsorships and other income.

Furthermore, similar to David and Allard's (2022, p.74) arguments about people posting dining experiences on Instagram, the foodstagramms should be regarded as a tool people use to commodify their accounts and personal brands to "communicate an identity and sell a lifestyle more than an individual dish or restaurant". The authors state that this hides the labours and social relations behind food and the making of food. Instead, it turns food into flattened objects, like pop figurines that are made at the service of both drawing attention and material benefits to the image authors. In this sense, in extension to McDonnell's (2016) and Tandoh's (2016) arguments, in food influencers' foodstagramming practices, the exhibition of cultural capital and economic capital can work to not only sustain social dominance through their "cultural legitimacy: influenceability" (David and Allard, 2022, p.73), but also for influencers to gain further economic and symbolic capitals which can continue elevating their socio-economic status. This then can result in the continuation and exacerbation of social inequalities.

The above-mentioned examples are related to food influencers, who represent a minority group within the foodstagramming field. For complete amateur foodstagrammers, in

their foodstagramming practices, what relationships regarding the exhibition and exchanges of different capitals we can observe? In the third framing of food photos mentioned in the above section, we learned that foodstagramming in a vernacular setting is regarded as a commodification process where people aestheticise their everyday food experiences and turn them into objects, commodities or a form of currency to invite the social gaze and cultivate sociality. According to Ibrahim (2015b), social relations on social networking sites are often generated or maintained through content creation and exchange, so these platforms promote the logic of content as “a form of social currency to maintain social ties for individuals” (p.52). Influenced by such logic, creating and exchanging food photos (the social currency) thus has become a means for people “to acquire social capital in the online environment” (p.51).

Indeed, by producing and sharing food photos on social media, as Bauman (2007, p. 3) mentions, people are living in a confessional society, where they are encouraged and nudged to publicly expose their private life because such an act is considered a “public virtue”, or even an “obligation” for people to stay in the game of socialisation. On the contrary, people who fail to fulfil such an obligation to confess can easily experience social exclusion and be left out of this game (ibid). For the exchange of food photos and conversations around those images, as Ibrahim (2015b, p. 51) suggests, we can understand it through the lens of the “gift giving” culture. Browsing and commenting on other people’s photographs about their everyday life can be regarded as a form of community validation and such an act can invite the validation receiver to conduct the same action towards the provider. Thus, through the reciprocal act of validating each other’s content, people can exchange “social currency” (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.51) to maintain social ties and grow their social network to increase their social capital.

Why is creating and exchanging such social currency regarded as necessary and important in the above arguments? To understand this question, we can bring in discussions related to the neoliberal movement in Western societies in the latter half of the 20th century. Such a movement has resulted in the embracing of a free-market spirit, globalisation in economics, as well as reduced impediments from the government on economic conduct and the decline of the welfare state in politics (Gamble, 2001). Due to this reason, according to Gamble, public institutions can no longer provide the stability and predictability they use to promise to society. He adds that the massive uncertainties of the social environment, together with the penetration of neoliberal ideals through the economic conduct people experience in their work and daily lives have urged individuals to also adapt to market requirements, to make themselves marketable to succeed in society. Thus, it is argued that each individual needs to

constantly discipline and govern themselves (Foucault, 2010), in order to become a responsible “entrepreneur of the self” (Du Gay, 1996, p.157). As Mould (2018, p.14) argues, the result is the “marketisation of everything, the imprinting of economic rationalities into the deepest recesses of everyday life”, as well as the intensification of the “consumer society”.

Consequently, the impact of the neoliberal consumer society on an individual level is argued to be that individuals’ selves and their identities have become commodified. Additionally, as Bauman (2007) argues, to stay in the socialisation game, as well as to gain attention, recognition and approval, individuals have to put themselves on display. With such an understanding, individuals who are “entrepreneurs of the self” (Du Gay, 1996, p.157) are rendered as both “promoters of commodities” (Bauman, 2007, p.6) and “the commodities they promote” (ibid). Thus, according to Bauman (2007, p.6), individuals are at the same time “the merchandise and the marketing agents, the goods and their travelling salespeople”. Relating Bauman’s arguments to the previous discussions of digital media, we can see that social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, then become useful media platforms for these “salespeople” and “marketing agents” to promote their “merchandise” and “goods” (Bauman, 2007, p.6), for the values of the self to be seen by others (Beer, 2008a). Under such an understanding, due to the constant desire to stay in and the fear of being left out of the socialising game, for the case of foodstagramming, Instagram then serves as a digital platform for people to commodify and market themselves to expand their social networks, accrue social validations from others and increase social capital through the exchanges of the currency of foodstagrams about their everyday food experiences, as Ibrahim (2015b, p.51) suggests. As Bourdieu (1986, p.16) argues, social capital is convertible into other capitals that can bring privileges to individuals, thus, similar to influencers’ foodstagramming cases, in the vernacular setting, the sustaining and cultivation of one’s social capital via foodstagrams can also help to maintain social inequality.

Through such a lens, we can understand that there are various issues related to foodstagramming. On the one hand, oversexualising food and using food to grab other people’s attention via foodstagramming can result in food being flattened and reduced to superficial visual objects that are removed from the gustatory context into a visual context. This can result in the alienation of social and communal relations embedded within food practices, as well as the obscuring of food-related global issues. Related to this, attracting people’s attention and commodifying one’s food experiences via foodstagramming can also result in people with social privileges maintaining and extending their power over less privileged groups.

Indeed, both Sontag's (2005) and Kaufman's (Mcbride, 2010) comments can provide an interpretation of the puzzle I presented in chapter 1 regarding why the audience from the symposium expressed distaste or even disgust towards foodstagramming, especially in restaurants. It could be that the audience assigned a voyeuristic nature to foodstagramming. Therefore, especially as some people from the audience were academics from social science disciplines whose research often revolves around acute global issues, the morally indifferent and even problematic relationships between people and food implicated by such a nature can make the audience feel worried and uncomfortable. Also, as McDonnell (2016) argues, it is people who have the privilege to enjoy food beyond sustenance who can conjure up new relations with food and represent such relations using foodstagramming. Moreover, as O'Neill's (2021) and Goodman and Jaworska's (2020) studies suggest, it is the people who are either already influential figures in food culture or people who have privileged social backgrounds who can create the foodstagrams that attract attention and make their voice heard by others.

Nevertheless, we also need to ask whether all foodstagrammers produce and share food photos merely because they want to 1. create self-driven pleasure without considering food-related global issues we are facing or 2. show off their privileged identities. Do they all treat food as merely a tool for fulfilling such purposes without taking it seriously? Also, by aestheticising their food and food experiences, do they merely want to use the attention and engagement gained from their audience to gain more privileges? Do they merely want to gain leverage to win in the social competition of status by taking part in foodstagramming activities? Most importantly, will we find alternative interpretations if we speak to foodstagrammers themselves and understand their lived foodstagramming experiences?

As stated in the last section, in my research I do relate the above interpretations of the social implications of foodstagramming to my findings. However, to generate final arguments, I prioritise interpretations generated by taking foodstagrammers' lived experiences of making and sharing food photos into consideration. Therefore, I embrace alternative interpretations of the social implications of foodstagramming where they arise. Also, when presenting my findings in the following analysis chapters, I will explicate the complexity of people's foodstagramming practices in order to present a nuanced interpretation.

2.3 Foodstagramming as Conducting Labour Work

In the previous two sections, drawing on relevant literature, I introduced what people make and what people want to gain through foodstagramming as argued by scholars and media

commentators. In this section, I refer to existing literature to introduce different understandings of the nature of the work involved in creating and sharing food photos. The first sub-section summarises different arguments related to the thesis which considers all activities related to content making and sharing as processes where social media companies exploit their users for their free labour. The second sub-section introduces an alternative interpretation of the labour involved in different activities related to content creation, which assigns a more active role to social media users. Under this interpretation, users are regarded as using the content making and sharing activities to express themselves and form self-definitions that accord with how they prefer. These two interpretations provide different resources to understand the nature of the work involved in foodstagramming, which is a content making and sharing practice situated on a social media platform, as either “free” labour benefiting the capitalist system or craft benefiting people themselves.

2.3.1 Foodstagramming as Free Labour

To understand the relationship between Instagram and its users, we can relate to literature from social media studies to first take a closer look at what Instagram is, what the platform affords and what it can harvest from the service that it provides to its users. Instagram was first launched in 2010 as a free iPhone application. The name Instagram stands for instant camera and telegram, so as the visual and communicational connotation suggested by the name, the app was first imagined as a place for people to socialise and connect through photos (Laestadius, 2017, p.574) and we can observe such characteristics from the earlier definition Instagram gave to itself in 2016:

Instagram is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos. (found in Leaver et al., 2020, p.81)

Thus, Instagram was created to use photos to record memories and experience other people's lives as a means for building social connections, so it is a social networking platform.

However, it is not just another social networking platform. Compared to other similar major platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr at the time when Instagram was developed, the most distinctive feature of Instagram is that it offers its users an easy-to-use filter-adding mechanism (Manovich, 2017a, p.41). According to Manovich, such a distinctive

feature can be the crucial reason why Instagram became popular in multiple countries after its release (p.40), because it allows people to easily create “visually interesting and appealing” (p.40) photos. Thus, he defines, “if... Twitter is for news and links exchange, Facebook is for social communication and Flickr is for image archiving, Instagram is for aesthetic visual communication” (p. 41). Therefore, Instagram is not only a social networking and communication platform but also a space where ordinary people, whether they are visually creative or not, are nudged to create and share aesthetically interesting visual content to communicate with other users.

Throughout the years, Instagram has undergone multiple infrastructural changes, such as creating its Android version, adding more types of filters, as well as developing new features, such as video-sharing, stories and live streaming to compete with its competitors such as YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok (Contois and Kish, 2022, p.6). Thus, as Laestadius (2017, p.574) suggests, these additions were all informed by “usage patterns”, “commercial demands” and the “social context” Instagram has faced compared to other similar competitive platforms. On the other hand, Instagram has also implemented a series of changes that have significantly transformed the nature of the platform. Instagram introduced the hashtag feature in 2011 and the algorithmic feed in 2016. As Contois and Kish (2022, p.6) argue, such infrastructural changes have transformed Instagram from an archive which was based on a linear chronological logic for its content organisation and curation into 1. a “networked database” where algorithms can sort content and users can search the content using different tags and 2. a space where users’ behaviours are monitored and measured by algorithms for which the results will later be used to curate personalised content for the users to consume. Such additions afforded the commercialisation of the platform. As Laestadius (2017, p.574) and Contois and Kish (2022, p.6) summarise, Instagram rolled out extensive marketing tools in 2015 via which marketers can not only download the user behaviour data collected by Instagram (which can be used for business analysis) but also incorporate advertisement content into people’s feed.

For the downloadable user data, the content people create and the metadata left by their behavioural traces on Instagram together form a data package which is often dubbed “big data” because of their nature of being “huge in volume, high in velocity, diverse in variety, exhaustive in scope, fine-grained in resolution, relational in nature and flexible in trait” (quote from Felt, 2016, p.1, referencing Kitchin, 2014, p.68). As Burrows and Savage (2014, p.2) suggest, the big data aggregate now forms “a crucial part of the information infrastructures of contemporary

capitalism”. They are regarded as the new “oil” for capitalism, which is a rich resource “to be extracted, refined and used in a variety of ways” (Srnicek, 2017, p.40).

For capitalism, “knowledges which are transmitted through gossip and small talk which often prove surprisingly important can be captured and made into opportunities for profit” (Thrift, 2005, p.6). We can also find a similar argument in Lewis’s (2020, p.111) summary of Lazzarato’s (1996) and Jarrett’s (2014) research stating that in post-industrial capitalist economies in contemporary capitalism, financial value is increasingly generated from people’s everyday emotional and cognitive practices from aspects such as “affect, communication, cognition and the immaterial actions” (Jarrett, 2014, p.16). As people’s everyday practices are increasingly mediated by digital media, the content people create and the metadata about people’s online activities can, therefore, offer insights into the construction of people’s social life (Lupton, 2015, p.ii).

After being mined, such data can provide valuable insights for these digital media companies and other commercial institutions to understand people’s behavioural patterns, in order to make predictions and develop effective business plans accordingly (Beer, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Combined with machine learning implementations, as Airoidi (2022, p.154) argues, the “socialized machines” (machines being fed with social data and being designed and trained by social individuals) used by tech giants including Facebook (the owner of Instagram) can “accumulate and classify user data, manipulate choices and opinions... predict risks and engineer social interactions” to maximize the “extraction of economic value”. According to Airoidi (2022, p.146), nowadays, not only people, but also these (human technology combined) processes can create cultural patterns, which serve as “socio-cultural substance” that “incessantly pre-filters and invisibly directs our supposedly free human choices and behaviours”. As an effect, such human-machine combined processes can “generate social regularities” to create “socially conditioned classificatory schemes and dispositions” (ibid), which works like Bourdieu’s habitus: “internalized structures” and “schemes of perception” that structure (Bourdieu, 1977, p.86) how individuals self-regulate their behaviours to fit social expectations and their understandings about what is appropriate and beneficial for specific social situations (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, together with humans, relying on human-produced data, machines can reproduce social order, as well as draw and redraw boundaries to divide society into “unequally powerful portions” (Airoidi, 2022, p.xi).

Especially for food, as Lupton (2018) mentions, “digitised information about food and eating-related habits and practices are now accorded commercial, managerial, research, political and government as well as private value”. Thus, the behavioural data about people’s food habits can have different values to be mined and profited from. Thus, Instagram does not function merely by providing users with free services for creating and editing images, as well as connecting with each other. It also functions as a place to 1. gather data to **profit financially** from selling and harvesting such data, and 2. use data to build algorithms that **filter and direct** human choices and behaviours to influence aspects such as “which types of food... we sincerely enjoy” (Airoldi, 2022, p.146). Under such circumstances, while Instagram users get a free service that allows them to share content they create and socialise with others via the platform, it is at the sacrifice of their labour (involved in using the platform, producing content and engaging with other people) being exploited for the harvest of economic capital that benefits the platform itself but not every user. Therefore, borrowing Terranova’s (2000) term, the activities people conduct in their foodstagramming practices can be regarded as “free labour” for which their work and engagement on Instagram provide a range of commercial value for the platform.

2.3.2 Foodstagramming as Creative Labour

Together with the advertising content, Instagram has undergone several commercialisation processes. We can also observe commercialisation when we examine the cultural environment of the platform. If we refer to its current “About” page (Instagram, 2022a), we can find that the platform now provides a more diverse definition of itself compared to its earlier version. Instagram still stresses its networking nature which “give[s] people the power to build community and bring the world closer together”, being “committed to fostering a safe and supportive community for everyone”, as well as allowing people to “express yourself in new ways with the latest Instagram features”. Instead of envisioning each user’s network on the platform as consisting only of friends, the platform now encourages its users to “connect with more people”, “build influence”, as well as “share and grow your brand”. Thus, we can no longer regard Instagram as merely for people to network with their close friends, but also as a platform for people to expand their networks, make a social impact using the content they create and make financial profits from such influence.

For foodstagrams shared within a limited circle of friends and family in a more vernacular setting (as in my case), the labour involved in the foodstagramming practice mostly consists of photographing, editing and communicating around the food images. Sometimes, if

the food is cooked at home, the labour involved also consists of preparing and cooking the dishes. However, as Tandoh (2016) mentions, “there exists a sizeable and hugely profitable, industry of professional food bloggers and Instagrammers” who spend much longer time and more effort into their various foodstagramming activities. At the beginning of her article featured in the book *Food Instagram*, KC Hysmith (2022), a food Instagram influencer turned Instagram scholar, uses an example of the whole process involved in creating a food post featuring a chocolate layer cake to demonstrate how much unseen time and effort are needed to craft a foodstagram post.

Hysmith (2022) keeps a calendar which helps her to plan what food projects to conduct each day. At the beginning of the day, after choosing a topic, such as the cake, she first prepares a list of ingredients she needs to buy, drives to the grocery store and sometimes the local farmers’ market to get the ingredients and then rushes back home before the sunlight cast away from her big windows from her kitchen. After arriving at the kitchen, she spends hours first making the cake and modifying the recipe and then styling the cake and photographic scene using props either from her existing collection in her dedicated armoire or cabinet or from a store she runs to buy from. After this, she sets up all the gear and camera/smartphone and snaps dozens of photos from various angles. After shooting, she edits the selected photo by cropping its size and enhancing its visual features. When the photo is ready, she first uploads it to an Instagram planning app to make sure the content fits into her feed and other planned images. She also spends an extended period crafting captions with text that she describes as a “careful mental calculation of my personal bandwidth, my audience and the current goings-on in the food world” (p.179) and related hashtags and handles to tag before finally posting all content. Her work continues after posting, for which she needs to reply to e-mails about sponsorship or collaboration, research hashtags, reply to comments and likes received from the post, take online classes on the new photo or digital software, as well as monitor her finance. Thus, as she states, “Instagram is not instantaneous” in the case of her and other influencers (ibid). As the above activities show, the publication of a single post “can require dozens of steps; days, weeks or months of planning; and the application of myriad digital and analog skills”, as well as an “exhaustive editorial process” (ibid). However, such efforts are all hidden in the background with most people only seeing the final “perfectly framed pictures of food” (ibid).

As suggested in the above sub-section, we should not ignore the work involved in foodstagramming in both a vernacular setting and for food influencers as unpaid digital labour benefiting Instagram financially. Also, as I mentioned in the last two sections, for food

influencers, we should not neglect the economic and symbolic capitals they gain from foodstagramming. However, similar to arguments by Lewis (2020), even though foodstagramming is embedded in the context of Instagram whose culture is “thoroughly entwined with commercial capitalism” (p.22), we should not reduce foodstagramming to pure economics. As she argues, “there is a large community of people contributing creatively to the digital culinary realm whose contributions cannot and should not be seen solely in terms of enterprise culture or ‘free’ consumer labor” (pp. 22-23).

As Sennett (2008, p.9) advocates, people have the enduring basic human impulse to do crafts, which is a desire to “do a job well for its own sake” in work and life. Time is a key ingredient for an individual to excel at doing a craft because he or she needs time to constantly practice and reflect on their work. However, since cost-effectiveness is the core spirit of contemporary neoliberal work culture and individuals are rewarded for the number of tasks they can complete, rather than the quality they can achieve in each task, doing craft in one’s work then becomes a luxury, rather than a requirement (Sennett, 2016). With such a work culture, in contemporary society, many people have shifted their “craft” spirit from the workplace to production and consumption practices in leisure time and “actively respond to commodities and services, (and) consciously employing these as a means to achieving their own ends” (Campbell, 2005, p.24). They do not only consume “out of a desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression” (Campbell, 2005, p.24) but also bring “skill, knowledge, judgement and passion” (p.23) and sometimes “design and make the products that they themselves consume” (p.27).

de Solier’s (2013) ethnographic research about food bloggers’ lived experiences of producing food and food media (blogs) can provide an example of food-related craft or creative consumption in Sennett’s and Campbell’s senses. She suggests that the creation of food and food media, which should be regarded as material objects, can contribute to people’s craft of their moral senses of the self, which is a form of self-selected identity that speaks to what they feel themselves to be. Similar to Lewis (2020), de Solier (2013, p.169) refutes the idea of reducing the creation of food and food media to “simply mobilizing systems of taste or the sign-value of goods and brands to speak for the self” as conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1994), or “the superficial pursuit of distinction” in Bourdieu’s (1984) sense. Instead, she considers it as a “reflexive, serious and work-like” “self-formation” (de Solier, 2013, p.169) process where individuals find a way to anchor themselves and find a sense of “ontological

security” (Giddens, 1991) to combat their existential anxiety (ibid) brought by various uncertainties we face in the world.

Also, according to Manovich (2017a, p.138), for the photographic culture we see on Instagram, not all Instagrammers create content on the platform because they are desperately crying out for attention from other members of the platform. Rather, many users might not even add hashtags (which can help their visual content to be easily searched and detected by other users) when uploading posts. He suggests, for this type of users, they are appropriating the affordances of Instagram to 1. showcase the images they have crafted and got recognition from other Instagram users; 2. connect with like-minded Instagram users; 3. consume and give validations to content that is crafted by other users; and 4. communicate with, as well as learn from each other. In this sense, people are using their Instagramming activities to publicly make self-expression of their creative identity and make connections with like-minded people, rather than merely being exploited by the media platform and digital capitalism for their free labour.

Additionally, regarding the relationship between capitalism and individuals, both Campbell (2005) and Manovich (2017a, p.138) conclude that instead of merely viewing individuals as being exploited by capitalism or individuals rebelling against capitalist exploitation, what we can see from craft producers and consumers in contemporary society is that people can reconcile such oppositions. Similarly, in their discussion of creative labour for cultural workers, Gill and Pratt (2008) also argue that for analysing the creative labour cultural workers conduct, there exist unquestionable pains resulting from precariousness and precarity in their work conditions. However, if researchers look into the subjective meanings cultural workers give to their work, they might also find pleasurable elements (such as self-expression) that sustain the passion of these workers towards continuing their creative work. Thus, we need to look into both the “pleasure and pain” (p.21). Taking the example of Instagram, people who craft aesthetically interesting photos, according to Manovich (2017a, p.138), cannot be regarded merely as avant-garde pioneers who are creating a new culture (such as in modern art), rebels from subcultural groups who remain symbolic resistance to mainstream culture (Hebdige, 1979) or mass consumers of culture. Rather, they are highly reflexive individuals who excel in sourcing, selecting and remixing different visual aesthetic elements of existing offerings from contemporary, historical and consumer cultures to serve their own purposes for self-expression (Manovich, 2017a, p.138). Likewise, as de Solier (2013, p.168) argues, from mainstream media, people are not only taught about how they should consume food, but also

gain “practical knowledge of production, such as culinary skills”. The same can be concluded about making food photos and content creation (de Solier, 2013).

Therefore, as in Hysmith’s (2022) representation of her foodstagramming processes, even though the image-making styles resemble the commercial food photography from mainstream food media, we should not consider her or other influencers who conduct extensive labour in making their foodstagrams as merely abiding by the tradition of the mainstream culture because they are the subjects of the consumer culture. As Hysmith argues for her case as being a female food influencer, the foodstagramming experiences of her and other female influencers can be regarded as “acts of feminist collaboration and subversive resistance to commodity culture - especially for women who have been historically and systemically disenfranchised through traditional capitalist economies” (p.179). Thus, conducting labour work in producing and sharing foodstagrams can also challenge gender inequalities embedded in culture and society, even though her own blogging practice can be considered as a part of class inequality, considering her privileged social position facilitating her to freely exercise her creativity to do so, if we relate to arguments in previous two sections.

Foodstagramming for both amateurs and influencers can be explained under such lenses, for which people bring their skill, knowledge, judgement and passion in food, photography or blogging into foodstagramming. For such a leisure or leisure-like (for full-time foodstagrammers) activity, foodstagrammers can craft dishes, food photos or blog posts with a serious and work-like attitude. By doing this, according to the above literature, it can be out of the purposes of 1. doing them well for their own sakes, 2. shaping themselves as to how they feel, 3. gaining social validation from sociality and 4. disrupting social inequality. In Tiidenberg’s (2018) study about selfies: a visual representational genre that includes depictions of objects (such as food) important to oneself, she argues that making and sharing images that represent oneself can increase people’s agency. As she explains, “being seen as what I choose to share with you, through things”, “validated as a particular person” and “positively valued” on one’s own terms instead of “being categorized by others” can allow people to generate the feeling of “control” over one’s “sense of self” (p.92). Therefore, all four interpretations regarding foodstagramming purposes listed above can suggest that the labour people conduct in foodstagramming can also be explained as a form of empowering creative labour, since people can exercise personal agency via producing and sharing food photos which represent themselves.

The interpretations presented from the above two sub-sections provide us insights to understand from two different perspectives on how we can understand the nature of the labour involved in foodstagramming. As a practice that is embedded in a social media platform, foodstagramming, like all other content creation practices situated on digital media, should be understood as a practice that involves free labour that is exercised by Instagram users but harvested by Instagram. By conducting such a form of labour, while Instagram can generate economic value from harvesting both the content and metadata generated through various foodstagramming-related activities, foodstagrammers, the people who conduct the labour, instead, mostly do not get any direct economic reward for their work. Alternatively, foodstagramming can also be interpreted as a practice which involves empowering creative labour, for which the exercise of such labour can allow people to play an active role in their relationship with culture, for which they are not consumers of cultural products, but also producers of such products. Under such interpretations, we can see the potential of foodstagramming as a tool for foodstagrammers to conduct self-reflection tasks and be the authors of their own biographies, because making food foodstagrams provide foodstagrammers with the opportunities to do craft by bringing in their expertise, knowledge and effort. By doing such craft work, relating to Mead's (1934) and Goffman's (1959) theories introduced in chapter 1, foodstagrammers can have more power to shape their senses of themselves through the reflections and actions involved in their foodstagramming practices. Additionally, they can also present themselves as actions to challenge inequalities in culture and society. However, as I presented in the previous two sections, such empowering potential of foodstagramming was often overlooked or overshadowed by the critical aspects that researchers focused on.

In this sense, the different natures of the labour exercised by foodstagrammers making and sharing their food photos suggest that foodstagramming can be both an exploitative and empowering practice. Combined with the understanding presented in the last section, the pressure of the confessional society nudges people to create content and share it on social media platforms to perform themselves and maintain social relations. Foodstagramming becomes a means for people to do this. Within this practice, people invest a lot of time and effort in making their foodstagrams and curating their content and such labour gets harvested only by Instagram with foodstagrammers being exploited for their free labour. While being exploited, we should not consider each foodstagrammer only as a "helpless puppet of external forces" (Campbell, 2005, p.24) who just exercise his/her labour simply because the confessional society forces his/her to do so. Via foodstagramming, people can also exercise their agency to creatively craft

physical and digital materials, for which the process can allow them to shape their senses of themselves according to their own preferences. Therefore, foodstagramming is also an empowering practice from an individual perspective, although such empowering nature has limitations.

In my research, I acknowledge both the empowering and disempowering perspectives. As stated in the previous two sections, I prioritise foodstagrammers' own interpretations of the nature of their foodstagramming activities to generate initial arguments. However, to maintain a critical distance, I also analyse the relation between my arguments and related research, such as the studies presented above, to situate my findings within the research field and refine them to generate the final argument.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have drawn a contour of the emerging research field of foodstagramming. I started by reviewing literature about food porn, a specific type of foodstagram, to establish three characteristics researchers often assign to foodstagram: a type of food photos that 1. oversexualise food, 2. grab viewers' attention and 3. commodify food experience. I pointed out that such understandings render foodstagrammers, the persons who make these food photos, as merely goal-driven individuals who wish to cultivate social relationships that are only transactional, instead of also emotional in character. Therefore, in my research, to avoid relying on such assumptions, I choose to hear how foodstagrammers themselves interpret the natures of the foodstagram they make and their practices of foodstagramming.

I then presented critiques which render foodstagramming as a practice that uses food photos to 1. oversexualise food, 2. grab viewers' attention and 3. commodify food experiences. I summarised that under such critiques, foodstagramming was portrayed as a practice that on the one hand reduces food as a one-dimensional over-sexualised object and on the other hand maintains and extends social inequalities. Under such interpretations, foodstagramming was interpreted as a practice that has negative social implications on the alienating social and communal relations embedded with food practices, obscuring food-related global issues, as well as maintaining and extending the power of privileged social groups over less privileged ones. I questioned whether these are the only interpretations. I do recognise their importance and would refer to related literature for analysing my findings. However, I also embrace alternative interpretations coming from foodstagrammers' own understandings.

In the next section, I presented interpretations of foodstagramming from research which focuses on the angle of the labour or work involved in the practice. I noted that there are critics who consider the work involved in foodstagramming as free labour that benefits only Instagram. However, there is also an alternative interpretation which treats the labour involved in creating and sharing food photos as creative labour or craft, as people can express their senses of themselves. For my research, I present participants' own interpretations of whether foodstagramming is empowering or disempowering for them.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I illustrate a reflexive account of how I conducted the research. Section 3.1 establishes the methodological approach I adopted for conducting this research: an inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach. I start by explaining what this approach is and then discuss why I decided to choose this approach. Section 3.2 discusses the participants. It details how I identified and recruited the participants, as well as who they are. Section 3.3 introduces the research methods for data collection: interviews and online participant observations. It introduces the rationales for choosing these methods, the data collection processes and the data I collected. Section 3.4 outlines the details related to data analysis and finding representation. It first presents why I chose thematic analysis to analyse the data and how I analysed the data. It then explains why I chose to use “portraits” to present the findings and what I mean by portraits. The last section turns to illustrate the ethical considerations involved in this research. It provides an overview of the processes of how I gained informed consent from my participants regarding both their participation and the uses of their data.

3.1 Methodological Approach

I started collecting data in September 2019. Before that time, most articles about foodstagramming were either largely theoretical (Ibrahim, 2015a; Lewis, 2018) or commentary (Mull, 2017; Tandoh, 2016), so there was no established empirical methodological approach to this particular topic that I could apply or reframe. However, after I collected my data, more empirical studies emerged (like studies included in Contois and Kish, 2022). Thus, to position my methodological approach to the larger research field and capture a more recent picture of the research field, I will bring some recently published studies into the discussion. By doing this, I intend to demonstrate not only what my methodological approach is, but also its similarities and differences compared with related studies.

Many studies mentioned in chapter 2 (like O'Neill, 2021; Feldman, 2021) adopted a largely deductive approach to studying foodstagramming. These studies suggest that applying a deductive approach, which is to use existing theory to analyse the cultural practice of foodstagramming, can allow researchers to point out issues, such as power imbalance, related to the practice. It can also show how such issues can further exacerbate existing inequality issues in our social world, such as class inequality. While such an approach allows me to provide insights into how social structures influence individuals' daily foodstagramming engagements, it has limitations.

As Hennion (2005, p.132) points out, using a deductive approach can render the analysis of individuals' relationships with culture, such as their tastes, preferences or passions towards certain objects or activities as "the subject of a purely negative analysis". Thus, the approach can render the cultural activities and objects merely transactional tools that people use to achieve personal goals such as the "quest for power and the maximization of one's position in fields of power" (Lamont, 2010, p.138). Alternative types of motivation for engaging with these objects and activities, such as pleasure or curiosity (Lamont, 2009) are often absent from the analyses. Using such an approach, as Wolff (1993, p.11) argues, the aesthetic elements, which involve people's emotional and bodily engagements with cultural objects and cultural activities, are often neglected or explicated only in terms of "ideology and political values". Also, people's aesthetic evaluations were seen as "nothing but a function of one's class or other interests" (ibid). In this sense, individuals become passive actors, because their enactments of cultural activities and engagements with cultural objects were seen as merely reproducing the social hierarchies, instead of actively building a certain relationship with the activities, the objects and audiences involved in their own right.

Many analyses (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; Feldman and Goodman, 2021; O'Neill, 2021) I introduced in chapter 2 show such a tendency. While the findings in these studies are important, they tend to frame foodstagramming and foodstagramms as mainly tools and foodstagrammers as largely passive subjects who use these tools to enact and reproduce the social hierarchies of class to gain socio-economic power. Even when individuals' agency is considered, the motivation for exercising their agency is mainly to gain a privileged class position. Thus, agency is still considered as being at the service of reproducing the existing class structure. Less is known about people's subjective feelings, emotions, evaluations and meanings that foodstagrammers develop from aspects such as creating their photos, the foodstagramms themselves and their relationships with the audiences. In my research, while I also pay attention to these critical issues, I do have a different research focus.

As established in chapter 1, I intend to study people's lived experiences of foodstagramming by answering 1. Why do people create foodstagramms and why do they share them on Instagram? 2. How do people create their foodstagramms? 3. Why do people choose to create their foodstagramms in the ways that they do? In this sense, people's subjective feelings, emotions, evaluations and meanings that develop from making and sharing foodstagramms, which were neglected by many existing studies of foodstagramming, are key topics in mine. With such a focus, instead of collecting existing content as data, I decided to communicate

directly with foodstagrammers. One reason was that foodstagrammers themselves are the most knowledgeable people about their own subjective experiences and preferences. The other reason was I needed to study both how people do certain things and the reasons that motivated their actions. Communicating directly with foodstagrammers could encourage them to reflect on their own experiences and practices so that the insights and interpretations generated could capture more subjectivity, which matched my research agenda. Therefore, instead of being purely deductive, I used an approach that is **inductive, pragmatic and interpretive**.

By being inductive, the method focuses on being generative and diagnostic towards discovering the factors that influence people's foodstagramming experiences. Echoing with Highmore's (2010) argument, such an inductive stance allowed me to pay attention to the aesthetic (sensual, affective and perceptual) dimensions that were often neglected by the above-mentioned literature but are important in constructing people's everyday foodstagramming experiences. Meanwhile, it also allowed me to treat such aesthetic dimensions as aspects important in their own right, so that later I managed to identify that besides merely gaining socio-economic benefits (Bourdieu, 1984), people also create and share foodstagrams for other reasons, such as to gain aesthetic pleasure and build affective relationships with their audiences. This identification resonates with Swidler's (2010, p.285) argument which suggests that a culture creator might be driven by "the desire to create certain aesthetic effect – to move, astound, delight, entertain, terrify, or simply affect an audience" in addition to gaining various self-benefiting capitals for making socio-economic distinctions in Bourdieu's (1984) sense.

Making the approach pragmatic means that instead of focusing on just the content foodstagrammers produced, I emphasised the wholeness of foodstagramming, which means I paid attention to how foodstagrammers think and feel, what they do, as well as their relationships with both their foodstagrams and audiences. The practitioner of a cultural practice (foodstagrammers), the objects produced (foodstagrams) and the audience are inseparable and interacting parts, instead of separate entities with a dualistic relationship (meaning one is a subject of the other). As DeNora (2000) and Hennion (2005) argue in their studies of music, the practitioner, objects and audience co-form and co-define each other in a cultural practice. Also, it is the collective interactions between these entities that constitute a cultural practice (ibid). Thus, considering the constructive and performative nature of foodstagramming, a pragmatic approach focusing on the engagements and relationships between foodstagrammers, their foodstagrams and their perceived audiences involved in their foodstagramming activities is more suited to this research.

By also making the method interpretive, first, I held a non-judgemental and “verstehen” stance (Weber, 1949) when I communicated with foodstagrammers and analysed the data I collected. This means in order to generate insights into foodstagrammers’ actions, choices and preferences involved in their image making and sharing experiences, I strived to stand in their shoes and comprehend such aspects from their perspectives. Also, I treated foodstagrammers as co-creators who worked together with me to generate interpretations of their foodstagramming experiences and practices. As Heinich (1998) suggests, being able to travel between different views, logics and behaviours from different research informants is the only way for social researchers to understand the complexity of our social world and then present interpretations that can let other people understand such complexity. Following her suggestion, I considered my role not as someone to reveal or criticise what foodstagrammers say or do, but as someone to empathise with and learn from them about their experiences in order to embrace complexity. This stance allowed me to identify many elements in foodstagrammers’ experiences that were not examined in existing literature, such as the aesthetic dimensions mentioned above. It also allowed me to be attentive to different and sometimes contradictory views, so that I managed to identify and interpret the nuances and diversities in foodstagramming, which fulfilled the research purpose I initially established.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Identification

Having decided to gain insights into the lived experiences of foodstagramming directly from foodstagrammers, I started recruiting participants. For identifying participant types, as established in chapter 2, most of the qualitative empirical research about foodstagramming (such as O’Neill, 2021; Feldman and Goodman, 2021) are analyses of foodstagrammers and the content they produced. Also, the selected foodstagrammers tended to be mainly food influencers with their foodstagrams usually appearing polished with both the image subjects and visual styles being carefully designed and planned. As the name “influencers” suggest, this type of foodstagrammers only forms a minority group of the whole population.

Moreover, from my observations of food-related content on Instagram, I identified foodstagrams with both the featured food subjects and the image styles being very different. When I clicked to see the personal pages of these foodstagrammers, I discovered that they could be casual users, foodies, chefs, photographers and people with many other roles. Indeed, Manovich and his research team studied fifteen million Instagram images shared from 2012 to 2015 from sixteen countries (including the UK). They analysed both quantitatively the general

patterns presented in the dataset and qualitatively the individual images and texts. Manovich (2017a) argues Instagram image culture has diversity because people have diverse preferences for the subjects they like to feature, and even regarding the same subject, different people can use various visual techniques to present it. Such a finding is in line with my observation, so I decided to capture as much diversity as possible when recruiting participants.

To concretise the types of foodstagrammers, according to Manovich (2017a), there are generally three types of images we can find on Instagram: casual, professional and designed images. Casual images are the most common ones. They extend the traditions of the “home mode” (Chalfen, 1987) and mainly feature subjects such as selfies, friend gatherings and life updates in addition to family and ceremonial events. These images are normally made for people to document and represent experiences, situations and people, so their document function precedes pictorially aesthetic function. Professional and design images are less typical. They both emphasise the pictorially aesthetic function (although the document function can also be present). These images are normally created by people who understand and engage with the rules of “professional photography” or graphic design. While professional images tend to feature subjects such as landscapes that can show spatial depth, designed images incline to feature objects laid on a flat space that heighten strong two-dimensional rhythms (see Manovich, 2020 for a summary).

After reviewing this typology, I realised that to distinguish different types of foodstagrammers, I needed to pay attention to the different levels of emphasis foodstagrammers put on their choices of subject matters and visual aesthetics, as well as the functions they regard their foodstagrams serve. From my observations about foodstagrammers who emphasise image subjects, it appeared to me that people have different levels of interest in food. While some people might use their foodstagrams to represent the food they had just as life updates, others might have stronger interest in food, such as food bloggers, chefs and business owners. For foodstagrammers who focus on visual styles, I aimed to recruit two types: people who are professionals working in the food photography industry and food photography amateurs whose food photos emphasise aesthetically interesting visual presentations of the food subjects. Thus, I identified four categories of foodstagrammers as the sampling framework: 1. casual users, 2. food enthusiasts, 3. photography professionals and 4. photography amateurs. I regarded this framework as a starting point and working guideline which could ensure a higher possibility for me to gather a diversified sample, as I might encounter new types of foodstagrammers during the recruiting process.

3.2.2 Recruitment

Given the variety of potential participants, using a mixture of different sampling and recruitment techniques appeared to be the most practical approach. I started by using the convenience sampling method to recruit participants from the social circles I could access. I first recruited three friends and one acquaintance. This group was “simply available” to me “by virtue of its accessibility” (Bryman, 2012, p.201). Also, these participants are all casual users who mainly produce foodstagram as life updates related to food and their foodstagram have different visual appearances. Thus, I recruited them because of both convenience and suitability. Besides them, via one friend’s social circle, I also recruited another casual user. Except for my most immediate social circle, I also extended my reach to the wider community.

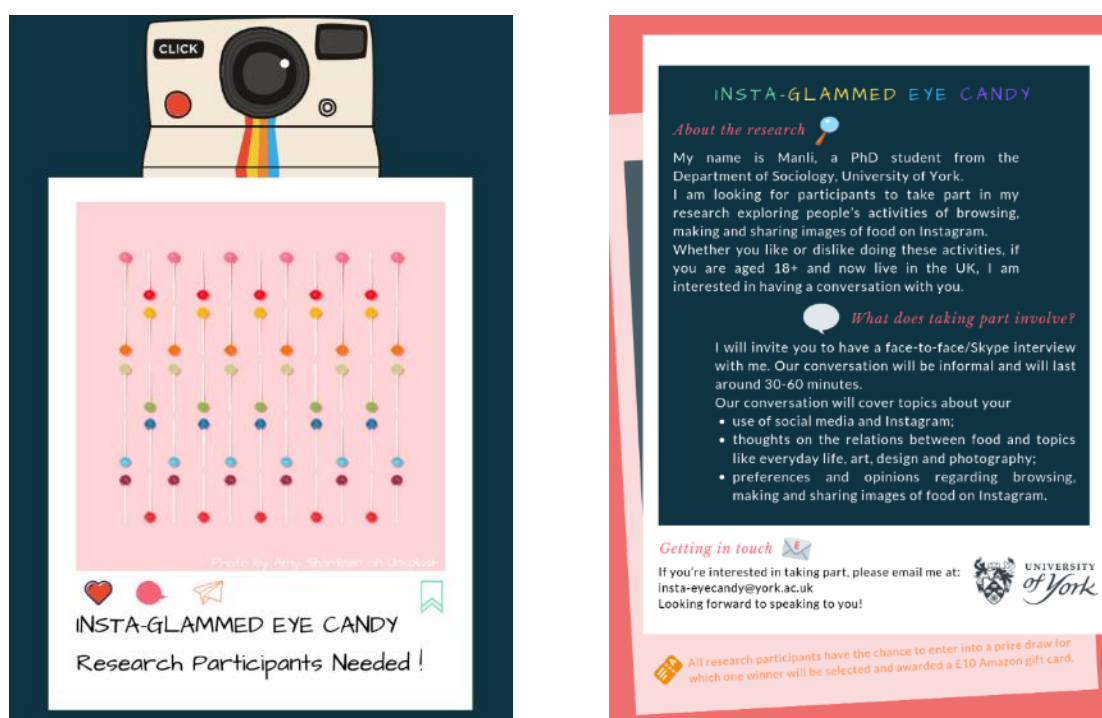


Figure 7 ab: Recruiting leaflet

Using the graphic design platform: Canva, I designed a recruitment leaflet as shown in Figure 7². I printed one hundred copies and dispersed them to different public places in central York and London (two cities I constantly travelled to), such as cafés and film theatres. Using this method, I recruited two participants: one casual user and one food enthusiast: a chef/food business owner. Through snowballing by establishing contact with another participant through

² The featured lollipop photo was created by Amy Shamblen sourced from *Unsplash*: a website offers photos to be downloaded and used for free for commercial and non-commercial purposes

the referral (Bryman, 2012, p.201) of the food enthusiast, I also recruited another food enthusiast: a food blogger.

Through the above methods, I recruited eight participants with six being casual users and two being food enthusiasts. I realised that while these methods were effective for recruiting casual users, they were not ideal for recruiting other types, such as food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs. I then decided to expand the reach and experimented with other recruiting methods. Rogers (2013, p.1) encourages social researchers to explore the “availability and exploitability of digital objects” (like hashtags and locations) and the “methods embedded in online devices” (like the searching and archiving functions of digital infrastructures) when developing research methods for Internet-based research. Since my research topic is situated in the online context of Instagram, I started to utilise the affordances of the platform for searching and contacting potential participants.

Through the search function of Instagram, I could seek various keywords and hashtags related to foodstagramming to locate relevant users. From my observations, I noticed that food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs generally keep their accounts public, and their profiles mostly have keywords related to the nature of their accounts. Also, their foodstagrams often have hashtags related to either/both the image subjects and visual aesthetics. For recruiting food enthusiasts, I searched hashtags such as “#ukfoodie”, “#ukfoodblogger” and other related keywords. From the search results, I then clicked on the relevant posts and accounts to discern whether the foodstagrammers could be potential participants. I used similar techniques for identifying photography professionals and amateurs. From the book *Visual Feast* (Klanten and Kouznetsova, 2017), I noticed that commercial and editorial food photography mostly involves the teamwork of photographers, food stylists, set designers and art directors. I first identified a few potential participants by using the same search method. For each potential participant, I snowballed from the hashtags and accounts their foodstagram posts tagged along. Using this method, I recruited one food stylist and one art director.

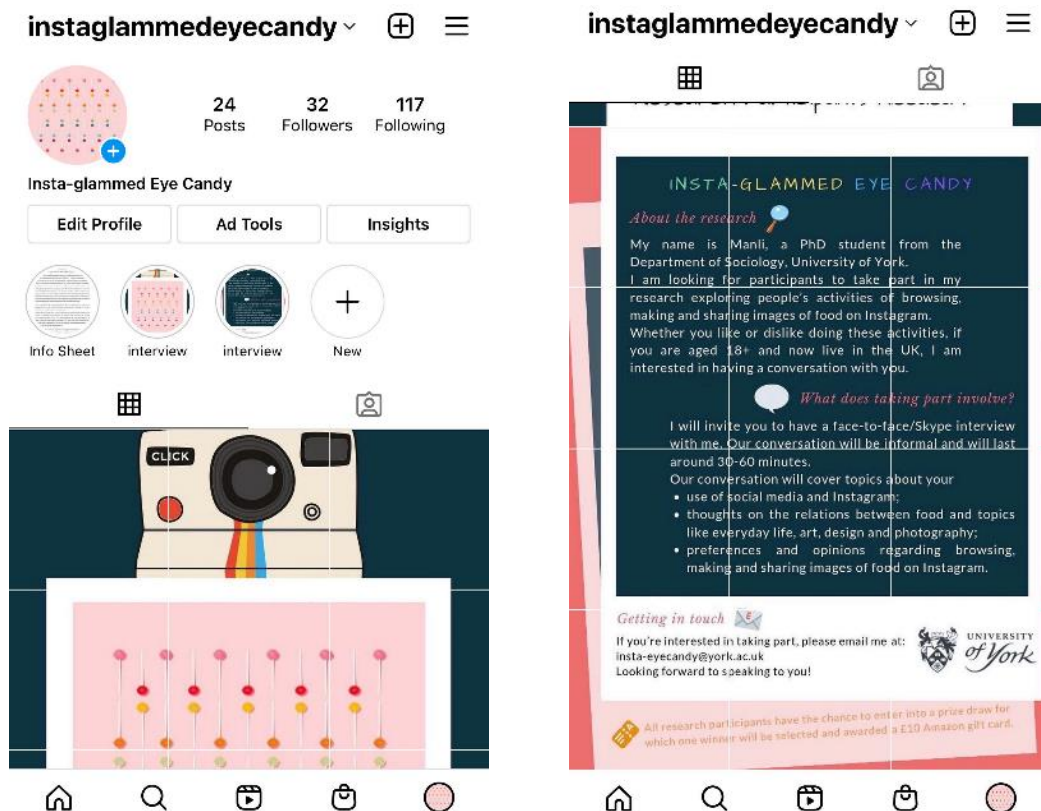


Figure 8 ab: The Instagram account of the project

Rather than just discovering participants, I also set up an Instagram account for the project and posted the recruitment poster and information sheet (see Figure 8), so that the project could be visible to potential participants. I also could use the direct messaging function offered by Instagram to send my invitations to potential participants. An unexpected benefit was that one successfully recruited participant offered her help by uploading a post to encourage her audience to participate in my research. Having an account allowed her to tag me along the post so several people contacted me and discussed their interest in participation. Except for sending direct messages on Instagram, I also contacted potential participants by sending emails, if their profiles provided their email addresses. My email address shows affiliation with the University of York and in emails, I could attach the recruitment poster and information sheet. Some of the successfully recruited participants later mentioned that on Instagram, they constantly received spam messages, so the official impression of my email was one of the key reasons for them to decide to participate.

I also experimented with offline methods, such as attending food-photography-related activities. In January 2020, I attended an Instagram Masterclass aimed at “foodies, bloggers and anyone who wants to up their Instagram game” (as the instructor advertised). It was a five-hour phone photography and Instagram workshop where the instructor taught us various

techniques related to styling and photographing food, editing food photos, as well as using Instagram effectively as a promotional tool. In the same month, I attended a public talk about food photography and publishing at the Photographers Gallery in London. In the talk, I did not only gain an insider look (although a very impressionistic one) at the food photography industry but also managed to recruit a few participants.

Extending the reach of my recruitment campaign using all the above online and offline methods was effective in diversifying the types of participants I recruited. To evaluate them, the online methods allowed me to recruit sixteen participants, including food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs. Whereas this method was not effective in recruiting casual users. I sent out more than fifty invitations on Instagram to potential casual users but received no reply. Although the response rate for other types of foodstagrammers was also very low, I still managed to recruit sixteen people. For the offline methods, although they were not effective in identifying varied types of participants, they allowed me to recruit the type of participants I was not able to get access to via the online methods: casual users. Therefore, both online and offline methods had advantages and limitations.

3.2.3 Who the Participants Are

In total, I recruited twenty-seven participants. To roughly fit these participants into the framework I developed, the sample consists of six casual users, eight food enthusiasts, eight photography professionals and five photography amateurs. While the six casual users and eight food enthusiasts emphasise the image subjects in their foodstagrams, the eight photography professionals and five photography amateurs prioritise the visual styles in their foodstagrams. I conducted participant recruitment, data collection and data preparation work simultaneously; therefore, the numbers of participants in each category were finalised when I discovered saturation, which means I could not find new patterns in new participants' foodstagramming cases, while the existing cases in each category showed enough diversity.

For the composition of these groups, the six casual users consist of foodstagrammers who mostly use foodstagramming to record interesting food moments in everyday life. Regardless of whether they set their accounts as private or public, casual users mainly post their foodstagrams on Instagram as life updates that they only intend to share with an intimate circle of friends and family. This explains why it was difficult to recruit this type of foodstagrammer through Instagram. The eight food enthusiasts consist of people who identify themselves as foodies, food lovers, bloggers and business owners. They all set their accounts

as public and mainly post their foodstagramms to make connections with people who are interested in similar subjects. The eight photography professionals include people whose professional work consists of making food images, such as food photographers, stylists and art directors, while the five photography amateurs include people who mainly treat food photography as their serious hobby and a medium of making creative visual works. Like food enthusiasts, both photography professionals and amateurs set their accounts as public and post their foodstagramms to connect with people who share the same interest.

When sampling participants, I prioritised capturing variabilities in people's foodstagramming practices and experiences, instead of people's social backgrounds. There were no comprehensive quantitative analysis results which suggest that the conduct of foodstagramming is influenced by or related to certain social categories such as age, gender and class. Also, I adopted an inductive methodological approach, so instead of assuming there are any relationships between foodstagramming conducts and socio-economic categories, I chose to evaluate if they come out of my data.

Appendix 1 lists the background information of the participants. It includes details on the gender, ethnicity, highest education achieved, foodstagrammer type of each participant, as well as his/her age, occupation and place of residence when being interviewed. Looking at the table, although the sample is overrepresented by individuals with higher education degrees and individuals working in privileged occupations, its composition still shows socioeconomic variabilities (although it was not my priority). The sample consists of seven men and twenty women with an age range of twenty to seventy. Most participants were living in England in regions such as London, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Manchester and Yorkshire, while two participants were living in Scotland (Edinburgh) and Northern Ireland (Belfast). Their ethnicities are also varied, with most of them being White, five being Asian and two being mixed-raced. Most participants were educated to a degree level, while two participants chose alternative routes, such as apprenticeships or full-time jobs. When being interviewed, around half of the participants were working on a self-employed basis as creative professionals, consultants, translators or entrepreneurs. For the other half, while two participants were undergoing a career change and one was retired, the rest of them were working either on a full-time or part-time basis as professionals or students in sectors such as education, marketing, real estate and hospitality.

Compared to previous studies of foodstagramming, the typology I modified from Manovich's (2017a) study indeed served as an effective framework for recruiting a varied group of foodstagrammers. Communicating with these participants enabled me to discover that there is not one but various ways of conducting foodstagramming to fulfil different purposes. Discussing in-depth with different participants also allowed me to discover complexity and nuance in individual foodstagramming cases. Strictly speaking, the four categories concerning the types of foodstagrammers I developed are not mutually exclusive. For example, a participant can be a food enthusiast and a photography amateur at the same time, which means he/she is interested in both food and photography and puts emphasises on both image subjects and styles. Alternatively, a participant can largely be a casual user. However, since he/she also conducts special projects related to food and he/she sometimes also shares content like a food blogger, so he/she can also be a food enthusiast. Another example is that throughout my research, a few participants experienced career changes in life. One participant could first be a photography professional but then became a photography amateur. Thus, the framework is only effective if I treat it as a working one with pragmatic reasons for accumulating a varied sample. As I illustrate in later chapters, the variabilities in the sample and individual cases are much more complex. Thus, instead of just accepting simple typologies, we need to be attuned to such complexities if we want to produce an in-depth and nuanced interpretation of foodstagramming.

3.3 Data Collection and Methods

3.3.1 Methods and Rationales

I used interviewing paired with online participant observations for collecting empirical data. This choice is in line with de Solier's (2013) exploration of food blogging as a form of digital leisure and material media production, as well as Tiidenberg's (2018) examination of selfies. Although both studies are not directly about foodstagramming situated within Instagram, like my research, they are about cultural practices that are largely based on an online setting. Both researchers used online participant observations and interviews for data collection, namely having conversations with the practitioners regarding their practices and experiences, as well as closely examining these participants' online activities and content. They argue that generating data in this way allows them to take into account their participants' lived experiences and evaluations of the cultural practices that they study, which helps them to generate insights that might contradict their previous knowledge. Thus, both authors regard such a combination of methods as effective because it allows them to reach depth and nuance in their interpretations of their research topics. I had the same expectation as these authors, so

a combination of interviewing and online participant observations was the most ideal data collection choice.

As a reminder, my three research questions concern 1. why people produce and share foodstagrams, 2. how they produce their foodstagrams and 3. why they use the visual styles that they do for creating their foodstagrams. While the second question concerns people's actions, the first and third questions relate to people's subjectivity concerning their thoughts and feelings. For all the participants (with two exceptional cases which I discuss later), I first observed their Instagram content and activities, then conducted interviews with them, and later performed online participant observations of their Instagram accounts.

The pre-interview observations included browsing through all the food-related content that each participant shared on his/her Instagram. I conducted such observations to have a general impression of 1. participants' foodstagram collections in terms of both the content featured and the visual styles adopted, 2. the changes or lack of changes in participants' foodstagram collections and 3. the distinctive features of each participant. Doing these activities allowed me to adapt my interview questions so that they were more relevant to each participant. As I needed to discuss concrete examples of how the participants made certain foodstagrams, familiarising myself with the whole foodstagram collection enabled me to quickly identify which specific examples the participants were referring to in their interviews. The post-interview observations instead refer to using longer time and duration to examine 1. the specific details of each food-related post of each participant and 2. the changes or lack of changes throughout the research period. Doing these activities allowed me to relate participants' interview accounts to their foodstagram content. Also, when I observed changes, I could contact the participants and ask questions that were not discussed in previous interviews.

Concerning using qualitative interviewing, this research regards foodstagrammers' knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, feelings and actions as meaningful properties to study, especially because these components together form the research questions. As both Rose's (2014) research on people's family photography practice and Van House's (2011) research on mobile photography exemplify, conducting qualitative interviews with the image producers is a very direct way to access the above aspects from them. Thus, talking directly with foodstagrammers, asking related questions, listening to their answers and probing specific details could allow me to "gain access to their accounts and articulations" (Mason,

2002, p.64) to produce responsible knowledge (Skeggs, 1997, pp.30) that values participants' perspectives, instead of my assumptions, of their foodstagramming experiences.

Conducting interviews is especially important in answering research questions 1 and 3, which concern why people do certain things. As Lamont's (2009, p.20) research about why professors keep maintaining the peer review tradition in academia suggests, the motivations behind their actions often involve their senses of themselves and their emotions. Thus, to gain access to the "*imagined* meanings of their activities, their self-concepts, their fantasies about themselves (and about others)" (Lamont and Swidler, 2014, p.159, italic by the authors), which are generally invisible and unobservable embedded in foodstagrammers' senses of themselves and their feelings, I decided to use qualitative interviewing.

To answer research question 2, which is about how people do certain things, interviewing was the most feasible method on hand to me, even if it could only allow me to get a reflected and constructed account (Mason, 2002, p.63) of foodstagrammers' past behaviours. As foodstagramming involves producing and sharing photos which are normally sporadic activities that can happen in any spatiotemporal setting and may situate in very private settings. Doing observations in this sense was not feasible, because it could both be intrusive on people's privacy and entailed long-time commitment from my participants which was nearly impossible to gain (considering most participants were only willing to commit a maximum of two hours to my research). After the interview, I discovered that a few participants sometimes would feature behind-the-scenes content of their foodstagram-making processes in their stories. Through such content, I directly observed their behaviours. Thus, the corroboration of such observational data with the interview data allowed me to largely mitigate the limitation of qualitative interviewing.

For conducting online participant observations, resonating with Goodman and Jaworska (2020) and O'Neill (2021), I recognised the importance of doing observations of the foodstagramming context because the content, settings, situations and interactions all contextualise foodstagramming. Thus, I needed to conduct observations of these aspects to generate a multidimensional understanding of the practice. However, different from those studies, when collecting contextual data related to foodstagramming, instead of taking the role of a bystander observer, I instead took the role of a "participant observer": an "observer" and "experiencer" (Mason, 2002, p.85) at the same time. This means except for taking notes of interesting observations of participants' content and activities, I also interacted with the

participants by reacting to their content, such as liking and leaving comments on their posts via the Instagram account I created.

This choice of being an observer and experiencer simultaneously is in line with several sociological studies of people's lived experiences of certain cultural activities. The first two related examples are the studies of embodied experiences of fell running (Nettleton, 2013) and boxing (Wacquant, 2004), where both researchers had been practitioners of the practices before conducting their research. As Nettleton (2013, p.202) argues, how she read her research data might be "invariably partial". However, "arguably, it is this 'intoxication of immersion' (Wacquant, 2004, p.4), combined with a passionate engagement, that gives rise to an empathetic appreciation of the existential quality of the game" (Nettleton, 2013, p.202). Such an effect similarly applies to Wacquant's reading about boxing. As I mentioned at the beginning of chapter 1, I had already been a foodstagrammer for a few years before I started this research. Similar to Nettleton's stance, I might be unavoidably and "invariably partial" (Nettleton, 2013, p.202). However, as my research focuses on presenting people's lived experiences of foodstagramming, my immersion and engagement in the practice could be my strength, as it could allow me to cultivate an "empathetic appreciation of the existential quality" (ibid) of the practice, which largely concerns the various sensorial, affective and perceptive feelings that might be shared by my participants.

Also, in another related sociological study from Douglas, Rasmussen and Flanagan (1977) about people's experiences at the nude beach, the researchers decided to "go native" for their participant observations at the beach. The researchers justify that human experience is more complex, passionate, and deeper than conscious experience. Thus, to understand the sensibility and to feel the things how people at the beach feel, they decided to immerse themselves in the scene to first grasp the wholeness of body experience, and then think analytically about their observations. My research does not only study foodstagrammers' behaviours and thoughts but also their various feelings. Like the authors' suggestion, immersing myself in foodstagramming could allow me to feel what my participants felt. Thus, I could better stand in their shoes to first capture, feel and understand their feelings, and then analyse and represent such feelings.

In this sense, even though being an observer and experiencer at the same time might unavoidably make me biased, its benefits still outweigh this limitation. Also, such a method was more suited to my research purpose of presenting the nuance in foodstagramming. Due to

these reasons, I decided to maintain being a foodstagrammer while conducting this research by continuing to create and share foodstagrams, as well as reacting to audience engagements. I did not conduct these activities to replicate my participants' experiences. I conducted them to develop empathy: the ability to stand in my participants' shoes to listen to their voices, understand such voices from their perspectives, and then represent such understandings with nuance in my research outputs.

Considering using these two methods together, borrowing Mason's (2011) metaphor, I treated the general research topic, the lived experiences of foodstagramming, as a gemstone which has multiple facets or planes. Both qualitative interviewing and online participant observations served as tools. These tools could help cast light that allowed the gemstone to be illuminated with different flashes. Aided by such flashes, I could understand the research topic in different ways and generate insights that allowed me to produce interpretations that capture the multi-faceted characteristics of foodstagramming as situated in different lived everyday life experiences. Also, when combining these different flashes, I could understand the image making and sharing practice on a social media platform as not only a virtual experience but also a lived experience that extends to and is embedded in the multi-sensory (Pink et al., 2015) physical environments in different foodstagrammers' everyday life. In general, using both methods could allow me to achieve depth, complexity, roundedness and multidimensionality (Mason, 2002, p.65 and 86) in interpreting the lived experiences of foodstagramming.

3.3.2 In-depth Semi-structured Interviewing

As I set to congregate a varied sample, I decided to embrace a flexible approach for the interviews in order to maximise the chance of achieving this goal. This means in addition to the conventional face-to-face mode, I also offered options of having the interviews conducted through video/audio calls via WhatsApp, FaceTime or mobile phones, whichever were the most ideal for the participants. Indeed, such a flexible approach allowed me to accumulate a sample that consists of various types of foodstagrammers. As the participants were living across the UK, if I did not offer the non-face-to-face options, many participants told me that they would not have considered participating, because they would have been concerned about travel arrangements for both me and them. For instance, some creative professionals told me opting for the non-face-to-face options offered them flexibility, because they could squeeze in my interviews in between their busy schedules or re-arrange our time if contingent incidents happened during their photoshoots. For one business owner participant, she incorporated my interview with her work: she discussed her foodstagramming experiences with me while she

was kneading the bread she sells. In general, nine participants chose the face-to-face mode, while eighteen chose to use video/audio calls.

I conducted all interviews before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Right after the first national lockdown, I planned to conduct three more interviews which I had scheduled with three potential participants a few weeks before. Due to various inconveniences and challenges that they experienced at that time, the interviews were all cancelled. This allowed me to evaluate my interviewing process. Several weeks after the lockdown, I realised that I had already discovered rich variety, depth and nuance that were beyond my expectation. Also, each group of the four types of participants had reached saturation since I kept discovering repetitions in different participants' data. Therefore, I decided to end my interviewing process.

The settings for face-to-face interviews were mostly situated in cafés that were selected by the participants. In one case, an interview was situated in a participant's office because it was a quieter space, while in another case, an interview took place at an exhibition on the theme of food photography. For non-face-to-face interviews, I normally sat in a quiet room at my home without any other people's presence while the participants normally were in their homes, studios or offices. For face-to-face interviews, because the participants and I were sitting together, we could often directly refer to the participants' Instagram content or relevant materials (such as sketchbooks illustrating the creative ideas) for reference. Also, since the settings often involve food or food-photography-related elements (such as coffee, tea and desserts in cafés and an office, or food images at the exhibition), participants often took cues from such elements and sometimes used the objects as tools to illustrate their image-creating ideas, processes and preferences. Both conditions allowed the interviewees to "evoke" a variety of settings (Lamont and Swidler, 2014, p.159) which were related to their foodstagramming practices (although not identical), which made the discussions less abstract but more concrete.

For non-face-to-face interviews, especially audio calls, as the participants and I could not see each other, referring to their Instagram content in our discussions or drawing cues from their interviewing settings was not always viable. To mitigate it, before interviews, I would observe participants' Instagram content and select a few foodstagramms to incite conversations if needed. Contextualising the talk with concrete examples indeed prevented talks from being too abstract. On the other hand, there were also advantages that face-to-face interviews could not achieve. For interviews conducted via video calls, for many participants, their homes or studios were the settings where they normally created their foodstagramms. When illustrating the

approaches that they used to create their foodstagramms, in many cases, when they wanted to show me the props they had used and places they had photographed the food, the participants often switched their cameras, so that I could see what they were referring to. This allowed me to gain a more contextualised understanding of these participants' foodstagramming settings.

In general, both face-to-face and non-face-to-face interviews have their advantages and limitations. As Mason (2002, p.64) suggests, the data researchers collect from interviews are situational and subject to the specific context of the interviewing settings. Thus, by being attentive, adaptable and responsive to the affordances and limitations of different interviewing settings, I managed to stimulate a positive interactional environment that "maximize[s] the interview's ability to produce situated knowledge" (ibid) about participants' foodstagramming experiences that are grounded as much as possible to their lived contexts.

The interviews were all audio-recorded via my phone or iPad and conducted using a semi-structured format. I prepared an interview guide (see appendix 2) with possible questions related to the research topic. The guide starts with questions related to why and how people use Instagram, what food means to them and why they produce and share foodstagramms. These questions address the first research question concerning the reasons for foodstagramming. The guide then shifts to questions concerning: 1. participants' criteria for choosing food subjects to feature and avoid, 2. the process of making each foodstagram, and 3. participants' interpretations of the visual styles of their foodstagramms. These questions addressed the second research question regarding how people create their foodstagramms. For each question related to how people produce their foodstagramms, there also followed a "why" question. Thus, answers to these questions address the third research question concerning why people decide to use certain styles to represent their foodstagramms. I used the guide to structure each interview so that it could cover discussions related to each research question. However, in interviews, while participants talked through these questions, if I discovered unclear or interesting points, I would ask probing questions to encourage them to provide more details. We would also discuss new topics if participants brought up some in our conversations.

On average, most interviews lasted around one to two hours with only four of them lasting around half an hour due to the limited time allowance participants were able to spare. For most participants, before conducting interviews, I first conducted observations of their Instagram content to identify noticeable patterns (such as changes in image styles or updating frequency) and recorded questions I had. Before conducting each interview, while maintaining

core questions, I always modified the script slightly to make sure the questions could address the interviewee's specific situation while fitting into the time allowance. My research centres on explicating the depth and nuance of individuals' foodstagramming experiences. Incorporating specific questions that were relevant to each participant allowed me to maximise the chance of capturing depth and nuance (Mason, 2002, pp.65–66).

There were only two private Instagram user participants who preferred not to let me access their Instagram content. Compared to other interviews where I was granted direct access to the interviewees' Instagram, this was indeed not ideal. However, I respected these two participants' choices. To compensate, I constantly asked probing questions based on the participants' talks to encourage them to provide more explanations on the details of their foodstagramming experiences. For example, I asked the participants to describe to me certain foodstagram examples. I encouraged them to discuss elements such as 1. what food was featured, 2. how long it took for them to create the photos and 3. why they chose to feature specific food via certain visual styles. Such conversations still provided nuanced and detailed insights into their foodstagramming experiences.

3.3.3 Online Participant Observations

The online participant observation in this research concerns two dimensions: 1. I situated myself in the setting where foodstagramming is located (Instagram) and I recorded my observations of participants' activities and experiences related to not only foodstagramming but also their uses of Instagram generally; 2. I participated in the practice by being both a foodstagrammer myself in my personal life and being an audience engaging with my participants via the foodstickers they produce.

As justified above, while being an observer and experiencer simultaneously could unavoidably make me biased, such an approach could allow me to generate empathy with my participants so that I could better capture, understand and represent their feelings which are important components of their lived foodstagramming experiences. As the generations of feelings often involve bodily and emotional engagements, following Coffey (1999, p.59), I decided to involve my body and emotion, or my "physical being", alongside my participants' in my research. By being participatory, agreeing with Pink (2013, p.35), I did not intend to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but aimed to offer my version of the experienced reality of foodstagramming that is "as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences" of my participants. By being observational of

the contextual setting where my research topic is situated, I intended to discover and represent the “relationships” between “bodies, minds, and the materiality and sensoriality” of the setting (Pink, 2015, p.28), or participants’ sensory and affective experiences, their thoughts, as well as various content they produce and consume. Also, while the interview data were collected within seven months, the online participant observations continued throughout the research. Thus, except for the above-mentioned benefits of contextualising the interview data, the longitudinal online participant observational work allowed me to discover changes and new aspects that I was unable to gain in interviews.

Before interviewing, on Instagram, my work included browsing through various foodstagramms, food-related accounts, hashtags and geo-locations to get an impression of the general foodstagramming field. Such an impression paired with my insights gained from other research enabled me to identify various types of foodstagrammers which later allowed me to accumulate a varied sample. Beyond Instagram, I revisited documentaries such as *Apples, Pears and Paint* (McArdle, 2014) and books such as *Feast for the Eyes* (Bright, 2017), *Visual Feast* (Klanten and Kouznetsova, 2017) and *A Feast For the Eyes* (Riley, 1997) to review the historical development of food imaging, for which I provided my reflections in chapter 1. During the recruiting and interviewing stages, I also attended a phone photography and Instagram workshop focusing on food, a public talk and a food photography exhibition. These experiences helped me immerse myself in food photography and understand such a practice from historical, practical and industrial perspectives. For example, the workshop, as was targeted at foodstagrammers who use Instagram to promote themselves, their ideas or their business, at class, I was able to put myself in these foodstagrammers’ shoes to feel what it would be like if I were to use Instagram with the same purpose. The public talk about food photography and publishing offered the same benefit. The image-making and Instagram-using skills and knowledge I learned from both occasions helped me to empathise with food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs so that when discussing with them their image-making approaches, I was able to capture small details and ask probing questions which helped to elicit depth in participants’ verbal accounts.

After interviewing, I continued observing participants’ Instagram accounts. My activities included closely examining individual foodstagram posts (in both their feeds and stories), observing the changes in their foodstagramms (regarding both the image subjects and aesthetics throughout the years), as well as reading through the captions, comments and conversations following different posts. These activities indeed contextualised and added depth

to the interview data. It allowed me to better relate participants' verbal accounts in the interviews with elements beyond the interview context, such as the materials they produce (content on their Instagram), their bodies (sensory and affective comments in their captions and conversational exchanges with their audiences) and their minds (the thoughts used to contextualise foodstagramms using captions). Also, especially for stories, some food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs sometimes featured their behind-the-scenes image-production processes. Thus, I was able to virtually access the physical contexts of their image-making activities and understand foodstagramming as lived experiences embedded in their everyday life.

Regarding the participatory dimension of my observations. Using the Instagram account of the project, I acted as an audience member, or a follower, of my participants when I conducted observations. Like their followers, I sometimes would "like" and leave comments on participants' posts. I only left comments if I discovered any elements in their posts that were interesting to me personally. By acting similarly to their audiences, I used such actions to minimise my role as a researcher. Also, through these actions, I intended to keep connected with the participants to maintain our rapport. Moreover, although I did not initiate such actions for the sake of eliciting participants' reactions, it became an outcome. For example, one participant who loves baking often posted the bread she hand-crafted at home in both her feed and stories. Sometimes, after I left comments (such as "the bread looks delicious") in her stories, she often replied to me by firstly expressing her gratitude for my compliment, then explaining to me how she had made the bread and possibly also sending me her recipes. In our interviews, she mentioned similar audience engagement content in detail. Thus, even though it was not directly from her perspective, through my own experience being an audience exchanging conversations with her about her foodstagramms, I generated a more embodied understanding which helped me better grasp her interview data.

On the other hand, using the image-making techniques I learned from the workshop and talk I attended, I also experimented with using various image-making skills to make foodstagramms that are very different from my previous style (see Figure 1). I sometimes also shared them on my personal Instagram account. From the process, I understood how difficult and how interesting it could be to make aesthetically interesting food images that look like my participants'. Also, when I received comments from my audience saying that my foodstagramms looked "nice" or made them laugh, I started to generate empathetic feelings with my

participants regarding their positive experiences of receiving similar comments from their audiences.

In the summer of 2022, I also attended a three-day food photography and styling course at Le Cordon Bleu in London. During the course, I experimented with styling and photographing food for commercial and editorial projects in a manner that was very different from how I usually created foodstagramms for my own Instagram (see Figure 1). Appendix 3 provides my reflection on such experiences in the course. Again, while these were not participants' direct image-making experiences, my embodied experiences generated in the course were important in helping me to empathise with the participants and understand their experiences as reported in the interviews. Generally, all the above observations before and after the interviews allowed me to generate holistic, nuanced and in-depth interpretations of different participants' foodstagramming experiences that capture their embodied feelings.

For the online participant observations, I constantly switched between the roles of an observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958, p.221) and a participant-as-observer (Gold, 1958, pp.220–221). The observer-as-participant role emphasised the researcher maintaining a neutral stance when conducting research activities. Whereas, the participant-as-observer role stressed the researcher being more engaged with participants and treating them as colleagues of the research rather than purely neutral third parties. In my case, both roles remained salient throughout the whole research process. As mentioned above, when conducting online observations, I acted as an audience member, or a follower, of my participants, where I liked and commented on their content, while also exchanging conversations with them. In this case, I was more of a participant-as-observer as I spent more time and energy participating than observing in order to capture the embodied elements of my participants' foodstagramming experiences. However, when interpreting such data, I acted more as an observer-as-participant. Although I sometimes asked my participants to address questions I generated in the observations, I mostly tried my best to maintain a neutral stance when reading through and distilling insights from the data. Switching between a participant-as-observer and an observer-as-participant allowed me to overcome the limitations of adopting either role alone. Therefore, I managed to maintain rapport with the participants to understand more details and subtleties of their lived experiences, while also being able to minimise my bias and maximize the objectivity of the research insights.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

3.4.1 Data Preparation

While I was collecting interview data, I kept notes both during and after each interview to record the contextual elements of the interview setting, such as 1. when and where the interview took place, 2. what digital and physical objects the talk involved and 3. what cues the participant took from the setting to address his/her accounts and what the participant's evaluation of the interview was. While I was waiting for new interviews, I listened to the recordings of conducted interviews repeatedly and made extra notes if I found any new information. I made all my notes using Microsoft OneNote.

After conducting all interviews, I transcribed all interviews verbatim, meaning I created a word-for-word written replication of the recorded verbal data (Poland, 1995) generated from each interview. Also, I examined how participants said their words by paying attention to the changes in elements such as tones, speed and emotions (such as bursts of laughter) and wrote down the cues alongside the words they spoke. I included such non-verbal cues to remind me to pay special attention to the section if I needed to analyse and capture participants' feelings related to foodstagramming. In line with Mason (2002, p.77), although I tried to transcribe the interview as closely as possible to how it had happened, I did not treat it as an "objective record" (ibid) of the interviews. Thus, later when I conducted analysis, I often listened back to the recordings and re-read the interviewing fieldnotes in order to capture the nuance and depth of the meanings of the words. To evaluate the whole process, although I devoted much effort and time to transcribing all interviews verbatim, it allowed me to get familiarised and intimate with the data. It encouraged me to slow down and pay attention to details that I was not able to capture during interviews.

For the online participant observations, I also used OneNote to both keep and archive notes of my discoveries, thoughts, evaluations and feelings generated from my fieldwork. My notes included both textual and visual elements, such as the 1. screenshots I took from my online observations, 2. images from the workshop and public talk I attended, 3. the food photos I created using various skills I learned from the two events and 4. the texts I wrote as my reflections. For interviews, I first used NVivo to transcribe all recordings. Its transcribing function allowed me to listen to the recordings while transcribing without having to switch between different software. After transcribing, I then copied each transcript onto OneNote alongside the observational data of each participant.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Throughout the research, I used OneNote to analyse various textual and visual data I collected. The software allowed me to store various textual and visual data in the same place, as well as easily switch between different types of data. It also allowed me to make notes wherever I prefer on a page using highlighters, as well as to type words in different fonts and colours.

I used thematic analysis as the general method for analysing both interview and observational data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). Similar to Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p.82) definition, I treated a theme as the relevant insight that “represents some level of patterned response or meaning” within the whole interview dataset which addresses the research question. I chose this method because it corresponds to my interpretive approach. One benefit of using thematic analysis was that it helped me organise and describe the data. Another benefit was that it let me find structure in the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and the relationships between different themes (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.150). The method thus helped me to develop careful descriptions of how my participants think, feel and do, which, as Heinich (1998) suggests, are the key elements of developing strong interpretations.

For the general process, I started by analysing interviews because the discussions offer summaries and general evaluations of participants’ foodstagramming experiences presented via their subjective perspectives. With such analysis, I developed the majority of the themes. I later also analysed my notes from the online participant observations. I discovered that there were topics that were not included in the interviews, and there were changes that happened to participants’ foodstagramming practices throughout the years. Since these topics and changes had similarities and were observed in multiple participants’ foodstagramming cases, I then added a new theme to the previous framework.

For the detailed process, I started by reading through the interview transcripts in a “literal” manner (Mason, 2002, p.78) by paying attention to the actual words said by the participants. I highlighted blocks of talks that are related to the research questions. During this process, I sometimes referred to the interview field notes and recordings if I needed more contextual information. For the highlighted parts, I developed codes, or “shorthand devices” (Charmaz, 1983, p.186), to summarise the topics mentioned. After developing codes, I then read the transcripts in an “interpretive” manner, which means to infer from the interviews

outside of the actual dialogue (Mason, 2002, p.78). I related participant interviews and codes with one another. I then grouped the codes that share similar topics into a small theme and later categorised similar small themes into a more general theme.

During this process, for the individual codes from the interviews that later formed into themes, I also situated them in the context of each participant's Instagram page and related the interview content with relevant images, texts and activities on participants' pages. The aim was to examine whether, regarding certain behavioural questions, there were any discrepancies between what participants said and what they did (there weren't significant discrepancies). Besides, the better-contextualised interview data could help me make the talks more concrete with examples, which could enable me to generate a more concrete understanding of certain abstract ideas (such as the visual styles of participants' images) and add depth to the verbal accounts. When I analysed individual foodstagramms, similar to both Rose's (2016) and Hand's (2017, p.218) arguments, I analysed the different dimensions of each photo. I started by looking at it closely to examine its content and compositional features, then related it to relevant interview data. Later, I situated it within its original context on Instagram to relate the photo with its caption, comments, hashtags and geolocations. Following Manovich's (2017a) approach, besides zooming in to examine individual images closely, I also zoomed out to examine the photo collection from each participant in its entirety, such as looking through the photos on each participant's feed and stories (stored ones) to identify whether I could find any patterns. As I present in the analysis chapters, studying foodstagramms from different levels generated insights that complement the interview data.

I continued analysing my observational notes on participants' Instagram accounts before and after the interviewing stage. Through this ongoing process, I discovered a recurring theme (which I called "everyday activism") in several participants' foodstagramming cases that were newly generated largely due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since this theme is related to other sub-themes that belong to a general theme ("linking the self to wider communities", I then integrated the recurring theme into the general theme. In reverse, I situated the observational data back to relevant participants' interview data to find related accounts that could explain this recurring theme. I also texted the participants through Instagram and asked them follow-up questions. Most participants wrote back to me and provided written accounts. One participant was undergoing medical treatment, so she was not available for answering my questions. As she previously accepted interviews from various mass media outlets, I instead referred to her words in those reports.

3.4.3 Presenting Findings and Generating Arguments

After generating a thematic structure, I started creating drafts for the analysis chapters. I treated it as an active-thinking process for me to combine findings generated from different data sources so that I could make sense of their relations. When finding suitable styles, in the first few drafts, I adopted a conventional approach for presenting findings generated via thematic analysis. I used each general theme as the topic of each chapter and its sub-themes as the topics of different sections. In these drafts, for each section, I first introduced the sub-theme and then patched fragments of data extracts from different participants to illustrate the detailed meanings and variations of this sub-theme. I reflected that the main purpose of conducting this research should be to present the nuance and depth of foodstagrammers' holistic foodstagramming experiences. Patching the fragments of individual participants together could only create a fragmented impression rather than a holistic picture for the reader. Also, the focus shifted from describing foodstagrammers' experiences to explaining the typologies within each sub-theme. Therefore, I realised that such a writing style was not effective for delivering the depth I aimed for.

Inspired by Miller's (2008a) book *The Comfort of Things*, I used an alternative approach to present my findings in my later chapters. Miller's book is a study about how people express themselves through their possessions at home and what such relationships can tell us about their lives. Like my research, his research studies the relationships between people and objects. Also, like my methodology, Miller and his collaborator interviewed one hundred participants and conducted participant observations at these participants' homes. Miller's book presents thirty "portraits" (p.14) of thirty selected participants' cases in thirty individual chapters. According to him, this approach equips his interpretation with more "holism" (ibid). After reading these portraits, I discovered that such an approach indeed presented a more holistic view of his research topic because each chapter not only presented in-depth details about people's relationships with their chosen objects but also accompanied the "aesthetic" (ibid) elements that account for various feelings people generated from the objects. Realising this was the effect I intended to reach, I decided to incorporate his approach into my research. The general and sub-themes still served to structure the whole chapter. However, instead of using data fragments from different participants patched together, I decided to use individual portraits in the same manner as in Miller's book to illustrate each sub-theme.

I borrowed Miller's word "portrait" as the name for illustrating the details of a participant's foodstagramming experience. Inspired by this name, I decided to use a visual

approach to assemble the illustrations of my findings and arguments. I treated myself as a **painter**. I used data extracts from both the interview and online participant observations about each participant as **colours** and the research questions as **lines** to form the general form of his/her portrait. I first used my three research questions to draw the lines which provided a contour of the main body of the portrait and then patched the data extracts together to colourise the portrait. I regarded the literature I related to as the **lighting** because drawing inspiration from theories in the literature, I managed to see and read the data extracts differently so that I could notice and capture much more details when producing my interpretation. This provided me with more room to present depth and layers in participants' foodstagramming experiences. Also, by being more focused on details, I managed to slow down to feel and experience the data, which then allowed me to read my data in a reflexive manner (Mason, 2002, p.78). I managed to incorporate my experiences developed from attending the workshop and public talk, making and sharing foodstagramms, as well as interactions with the participant as resources to empathise with the participant when I analyse his/her data. I regarded such aesthetic involvements from me as the **final touches** to the portrait, so it could capture the aesthetic elements in participants' foodstagramming experiences as close to how he/she experienced them as possible.

I later also served as a **curator**. The analysis I present in the following chapters can be regarded as different themes for an exhibition in a gallery on the topic of foodstagramming. For this exhibition, each analysis chapter can be viewed as a room for showing material under the same theme. Within this room, there would be three walls focusing on different sub-themes with each wall exhibiting two portraits of two foodstagrammers' foodstagramming cases which address the different aspects of the same sub-theme. This is where my approach diverts from Miller's. While each portrait in Miller's book formed an individual chapter, I grouped my portraits into sub-themes and themes, and this still bears the characteristics of thematic analysis. Using this approach, I intended to guide the readers to zoom in and out on each portrait to examine the details and whole composition of each participant's foodstagramming cases. Also, by reading through all the portraits in all rooms (chapters), I aimed to guide the readers to find relations between different portraits.

Overall, the writing process of the analysis chapters was a time-consuming and difficult stage, for which I sometimes felt discouraged and disorientated. However, after processing such negative feelings, I always managed to proactively take action to find solutions, such as by 1. generating insights from my supervisors and advisor's advice, 2. getting inspired by

related literature, 3. reading and feeling my data in different ways, and most importantly, 4. motivating myself to experiment with different styles. It was through such various adjustments that I was able to identify a suitable style to present my findings and arguments so that my final interpretation could demonstrate depth, nuance and complexity. It was also through experimenting with different representational formats, I was able to experience and reflect on the findings in various ways so that my interpretation not only captures the thoughts and behaviours but also the feelings of the foodstagrammers.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Before collecting data, I applied for ethical approval from the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology (ELMPS) Ethics Committee of the University of York and it was approved in July 2019. The whole conduct of the research adopted the guideline set by the British Sociological Association on conducting ethical practice (BSA, 2017b). As this research also both studies how people use a social network site (Instagram) and utilise the site to collect data (observational data), I referenced the guideline provided by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2012) and the ethics guidelines for digital research from BSA (2017a).

Before recruiting participants, I composed an information sheet (see appendix 4). I outlined 1. the topic and aim of my research, 2. the methods I use for data collection, 3. how I use the two methods to collect data and the types of data I collect, 4. the options and rights participants have, 5. where I store the data, 6. how I use participants' data in my thesis, and 7. choices participants have for their data being anonymised or not and the implications of both choices.

I generally adopted the guiding principles from the framework for research ethics offered by the Economic and Social Research Council as summarised in Rose (2016, p.358), especially on 1. not creating harm to participants; 2. seeking informed consent of voluntary participation of the research from the participants; 3. respecting the rights and dignity of participants, including their preferences regarding anonymity; 4. providing appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended use of my research. I also adopted such guidelines throughout the conduct of my research. However, as I introduce later, when encountering contingent situations, as BSA (2017a) advocates, I always stuck to the ethic of care when treating my participants and their data. The reasons for sticking to the above-mentioned frameworks and the ethic of care are twofold: As social researchers, it is our responsibility and obligation to maintain ethical conduct to do so. Also, as Aluwihare-

Samaranayake (2012, p.77) argues, being ethical can “promote respect, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice both for the participant and the researcher”.

Instead of adopting the common procedure to anonymise participants’ data, I decided to let the participants choose by themselves whether they prefer to be anonymised for both their participation and their data. There were several reasons to do so. One was that my research studies foodstagramming, which is a visual practice. In addition to what people photograph, I also study how they photograph food in their foodstagrams. To vividly present the nuances of my interpretations of the content and styles that my participants use when making their foodstagrams, as well as make the readers understand my interpretations more easily, I needed to include both verbal and visual data in my research outputs. Another reason was that foodstagramming is situated on a publicly accessible online social network platform and as both AoIR (2012) and BSA (2017a) suggest, researchers cannot guarantee full anonymity in this situation. No matter for the foodstagrams that participants discuss with me during the interviews or the foodstagrams I need to include in the research outputs, they are all publicly (or semi-publicly) accessible on participants’ Instagram accounts. Therefore, even if I anonymised participants’ data in my research outputs, if such data is publicly available on their Instagram, anonymity could only be maintained to a limited extent.

The most important reason was that on Instagram, the users were already offered the opportunity to choose to let their content be viewed by either only a restricted group of people (for private users) or anyone who can access their content (for public users). In Burgess’s (2006) research, she discovered that people share images they create on Flickr to express themselves through their vernacular creativity. Thus, like my research, for the participants who set their Instagram accounts as public, the foodstagrams they share on Instagram might also have a self-expressive nature. As Wiles et al. (2012) and Jordan (2014) suggest, if the images that researchers use in their research outputs articulate some aspect of the image creators’ identities, it would be disrespectful and dehumanising if the researcher directly chooses to anonymise the image (found in Rose, 2016, pp.360–361). Also, Holliday (2004) argues that identifiable images have more ethical potential than anonymised images, because they can enhance the participants’ power in the research process, as their identified photos in the research output can also talk for these participants.

I then decided to let participants choose by themselves whether they would like to be anonymised because it appeared to me as a more ethical and caring approach to treat both them

and their data. Such an approach could give my participants more power to decide how they would like their data and themselves to be represented in my research outputs, instead of me choosing for them (Holliday, 2004; Wiles et al., 2012; Jordan, 2014). However, to ensure all participants made informed consent, except for directly informing them that they could choose whether to be anonymised, I also addressed the possible implications for different choices. I wrote that for people who wish to be anonymised, their anonymity could only be kept to a certain level since their foodstagramms had already been publicly available on Instagram. Alternatively, for people who wish not to be anonymised, I instead reminded them of the consequences, such as their identities and data being identifiable by all readers of the research outputs. By writing these, I intended to remind all potential participants of such potential risks so such risks would not cause any issues or harm to them.

When contacting potential participants via email, I always attached this information sheet to my messages so that they could make informed decisions. If I contacted the potential participant via direct messaging on Instagram, as I could not attach any file directly, I always referred them to my account, as I had posted the two pages of the information sheet in my archived publicly accessible stories. As I acknowledged that this was not the most ideal way to read the document, as soon as any potential participants expressed their interest to participate, I always sent the information sheet via email or WhatsApp to them, so that they could read the document more closely before giving their consent to participate.

Before conducting interviews, I always ensured that the participants had signed the consent form (see appendix 5) and given their informed consent. The consent form rephrases the key information in the information sheet as questions for the participants to answer, such as whether they have read the information sheet, agree to take part in the interview, agree to let me observe their Instagram account and agree to let me use their Instagram content in my research outputs. Regarding anonymity, I offered the participants to choose between three options concerning whether they wish to be anonymised or let me refer them and their data using either their Instagram usernames or their real names.

In the end, the six casual users all chose to let me anonymise their data while the eight food enthusiasts, eight photography professionals and the five photography amateurs all chose to reveal their identities. This result is not surprising, since the six casual users are people who mostly use foodstagramming to record and share interesting food-related memories in their everyday life with people who are close to them in person (such as their family and friends).

The readers of my research outputs will not likely fit into such a criterium. Also, most casual users set their Instagram accounts as private, so this choice has already indicated their valuation of privacy. Additionally, as I mentioned earlier, two casual participants chose not to let me observe their Instagram content. Thus, as they value privacy and exclusivity for their Instagram content, it is not surprising for them to choose to be anonymised. On the other hand, the participants from the remaining three groups are mostly bloggers, creative professionals, or entrepreneurs. Their Instagram content is publicly available to anyone. Also, most of them decided to conduct foodstagramming activities because they wanted to 1. express themselves via their ideas or creativity, 2. extend their social networks and/or 3. promote their business or work. With such aims, it is understandable that all of them chose to let me reveal their identities, as my research outputs all have a public nature which does not go against these three aims. Also, the public nature of these participants' Instagram accounts has already indicated that they are willing to share content to be seen by a public audience. In this sense, as participants made different choices, it then indicates that my previous decision of letting them choose by themselves whether to be anonymised is more caring and ethical, as it shows more respect for my participants' preferences.

As stated, I decided to reproduce participants' foodstagramms to be used in my research outputs. From the consultation I had with the Research Support Team at the University of York, I understood that according to the copyright law in the UK, I am permitted to "quote" from copyright material (including images) and reproduce the images to critique or review it, if I credit the rights-holder. Therefore, the reproduction of participants' foodstagramms in my research outputs has more ethical implications rather than legal ones. According to the Terms and Imprint page of Instagram (2022b), Instagram does not own the copyright of the content that its users produce and share on the platform. As the foodstagramms that I discuss and feature in the research outputs are all photos that were created by my participants, so they own the copyright of such content (Rose, 2016, pp.367–368). Again, out of care and respect for my participants, I produced an image reproduction rights form (see appendix 6) for each participant who agreed to let me reproduce their foodstagramms in my research outputs to sign.

Except for the two casual users who chose not to let me observe their Instagram content, all other participants signed the image reproduction rights form. For the four casual users who gave me consent to use their foodstagramms, they indicated that they prefer to be anonymised. In this case, in this thesis and my future research outputs, when using their foodstagramms, I will not include any username or name-related details that could reveal their identity. Also, I will

use pseudonyms to accredit their content. For the remaining participants, in this thesis and future research outputs, I will accredit their foodstagramms using the names they prefer. Also, some participants sent me foodstagramming-related photos that they did not share on their Instagram after our interview. As I found such photos useful for explaining their lived experiences, I also sought consent from them to use such photos in my research outputs, which were all approved.

Throughout the research conduct, I also encountered contingent situations. For example, when signing the consent forms and the image reproduction forms, some participants indicated that they wish to let me use their Instagram usernames to refer to their data. They also specified the names by writing the exact form of their names on the two forms. However, throughout the years, some participants have changed their usernames. Therefore, I contacted the participants and updated them regarding their new preferences for the names. Also, I previously planned that I would only include foodstagramms without any person's frontal face in my research outputs, as my research emphasises the subject matter of food. However, during my post-interview observations, I discovered a new sub-theme. For illustrating this new theme, I would need to refer to a series of videos showing one participant demonstrating how to cook different dishes, which showed her frontal face. As I considered the example very relevant and important, I contacted the participant to gain her consent of using screenshots of the videos with her frontal face in them, and she gladly approved. Generally, when similar contingent occasions happened during my research process, like how I treated these two events, I always stuck to the ethics of care for my participants when making final decisions.

3.6 Summary

In this research, I adopted an inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach. Adopting this approach, I recruited twenty-seven participants from varied social backgrounds who conduct foodstagramming with different aims and styles to understand their perspectives of their lived experiences of foodstagramming. To generate such insights, I chose interviewing and online participant observation as the data collection methods, as the combination could allow me to capture multiple dimensions involved in the participants' lived foodstagramming experiences: behaviours, thoughts and feelings. I used thematic analysis to distil common themes of the data. To present such findings, I also used portraits to demonstrate the holistic details and aesthetic elements involved in participants' foodstagramming experiences. All these research activities were based on ethical considerations I developed both from reading

the guidelines provided by related research organisations and from my emphasis on the ethics of care for my participants.

The next three chapters present the key research findings. Each chapter focuses on introducing one general theme. Within a chapter, each section delineates different sub-themes, which capture the varied dimensions of the general theme. Also, within each section, different portraits illustrate different participants' foodstagramming experiences to showcase the variations of the sub-theme. Within each portrait, I present both verbal and visual data from a participant to show various dimensions of his/her foodstagramming experience that addresses the sub-theme. As each portrait is dedicated to one participant, all verbal accounts from him/her are italicised with quotation marks to differentiate them from quotes from related literature (not italicised and with quotation marks only).

CHAPTER 4 BEING AN ARTIST OF THE SELF THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING

This chapter discusses how participants use foodstagramming as a device to be artists of themselves, continuously crafting their selves and senses of themselves according to their own subjective understandings and preferences. How do we understand “being an artist of the self”? The data outline the unfixed nature of participants’ selves, which is similar to Simpson’s (2012), Kotarba and Fontana’s (1984), Goffman’s (1959) and Mead’s (1934) shared argument: people’s selves are not to be found somewhere but should be continuously recreated through feelings, reflections and actions in everyday life. Also, I show that aesthetic feelings, including senses, affects and perceptions, play important roles in people’s self-recreating activities in a similar way to how these elements influence artists when they create artworks (Simpson, 2012). Thus, in this chapter, I refer to participants as artists to emphasise the active and creative role they play in cultivating their selves via foodstagramming. On the other hand, I also aim to stress the aesthetic nature of the participants’ selves as involved in their foodstagramming practices.

In this chapter, borrowing Goffman’s (1959) metaphor, I present Instagram as a stage (also suggested by Woolley and Worth, 2022, p.104) where foodstagrammers use their foodstagramming activities to craft, perform and reflect on roles concerning different aspects of themselves to be examined and engaged by their audiences. These roles can be “general” roles (Goffman, 1972, p.85) participants carry beyond Instagram (such as a friend or photographer), but they can also be “situated roles” (ibid) that are especially relevant to the context of Instagram (such as a creator of foodstagrams). Through illustrating the craft, performance and reflection of roles of different participants, I present three sub-themes: 1. defining the self through archiving ordinary food experiences; 2. reinventing the self through creating food and foodstagrams; 3. negotiating the self through balancing different roles in foodstagramming. These focus on different angles in describing varied aspects of participants’ senses of themselves when they make and share photos of food using Instagram.

Section 4.1 discusses two portraits where the participants use their daily food experiences as resources to maintain or enact the different roles they cherish and regard as important in defining themselves: foodie and baking-lover respectively. I examine the importance of these roles and how foodstagramming allows the participants to maintain and enact these roles. Section 4.2 introduces another two portraits in which participants create food and food photos to craft and sculpt new roles: a creator (of food plus food photos) and a food photographer respectively to reinvent themselves. I discuss the details about why such roles

are generated, as well as how they are generated and developed. Section 4.3 moves to two other portraits where the participants use foodstagramming to juggle and balance two conflicting roles: foodography-lover (food photography lover) and business-promoter for one participant, and creator and influencer for the other. I present the details of the relations between the two roles each participant juggles and the methods they use to balance them. The last section provides a summary and presents different implications of the relationship between foodstagramming and people's selves.

4.1 Defining the Self through Archiving Ordinary Food Experiences

This section introduces portraits of two participants using their foodstagramming practices to archive selective everyday food experiences, in order to define themselves in meaningful ways. Since many participants use Instagram partly to store their cherished food-related everyday memories, these two portraits then exemplify the typical ways of how and why people do this. While seemingly ordinary, these food moments are regarded as meaningful memories to the individuals because they represent social roles the individuals have always cherished before they use Instagram. By aestheticising these food moments via images, the participants were both enacting their selves as a means of interacting with their audiences and recording their cherished roles for future reminiscence. Therefore, while the foodstagrams are tools people use to communicate with other people to create social connections, they are also the means through which people objectify and archive selected ordinary experiences to create collages of their selves at different times. As we see in the two portraits, the creations of such collages allow people to critically make sense of and reflect on the different roles they have and cherish. Therefore, foodstagramming can be a practice through which people create subjectively important definitions of who they are.

4.1.1 The Maintenance of a Foodie Role

@superbritishgirl (woman, 30-40) considers herself a food blogger. She enjoys sharing daily food encounters and consumptions through her foodstagrams. She regards herself as a foodie: someone who always has the passion and curiosity in tasting different food no matter if she likes the taste or not. @superbritishgirl used to live and study in Hong Kong. While living there, starting from adolescence, she often visited restaurants to taste different food. After such trips, she often shared content on her blog, food review websites and social media like Instagram (her account focusing on food in Hong Kong is referred to as HK account) to both record her tasting experiences and present her evaluations. She maintained such activities and

later became one of the top local food reviewers. After coming back to the UK, she started a new Instagram account with the name @superbritishgirl and started documenting her daily food encounters and tasting experiences focusing on her life in the UK (referred to as UK account, and I focus on this account for this research).

@superbritishgirl's UK account works as an archive that documents the minutiae of daily interactions she has with food in the UK. By making use of the documenting and categorising affordance of Instagram, she has built a personal system to thematise her different food experiences:

Some of the hashtags I used are sort of like. So, I go to McDonald's... then I have like a hashtag for my personal McDonald's. And also, for brands like say Cadburys... I'll hashtag that, so then I can see what I've eaten or what I've seen... Like, say #ssgchoc that'll bring up all the chocolate I've eaten or seen or drinks. (@superbritishgirl)

While her feed presents a chronological view of her fragmented food experiences, her personal hashtagging system allows her to thematically examine such experiences. Therefore, by organising her daily experiences, @superbritishgirl can maintain her foodie role through daily discovering and tasting experiences.

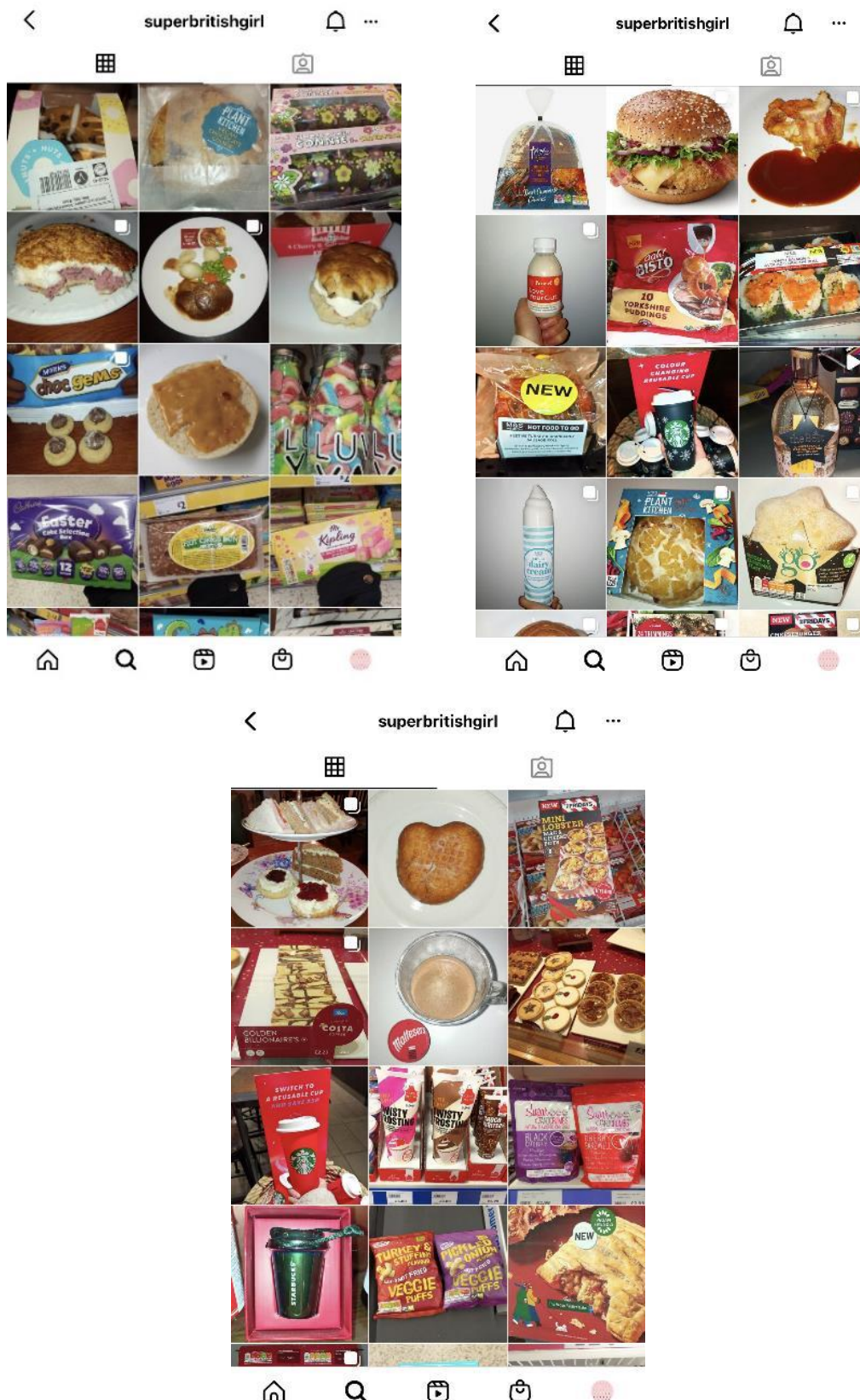


Figure 9 abc: Screenshots of @superbritishgirl's Feed - © @superbritishgirl

As Figure 9 shows, the featured food items in @superbritishgirl's feed are normally products bought or discovered in her daily shopping experiences at supermarkets such as Aldi,

Tesco and M&S. Occasionally, she also shares food from small food stalls or big chain restaurants. As a foodie, except for “*weird stuff*” such as worms or food she considers as “*I just don’t like*” (like mangos), she stressed that “*I generally try everything*”. She said people “*might get a surprise*” if they just taste different food without holding any preliminary judgements. Regarding her tendency of trying food from different cultures, @superbritishgirl explained: “*Cuz I’m a foodie and like curious of the taste and I like to see what ingredients they use and how they cook it.*” Thus, @superbritishgirl considers being omnivorous (Peterson and Kern, 1996), which means being willing to taste different types of food from different cultures, as an essential part of her foodie role. Therefore, we can regard @superbritishgirl’s activities of capturing, archiving and reflecting on her daily engagements with different food as a personal means to maintain the foodie role she has developed since adolescence.

On an interpersonal level, she mentioned: “*So like any new products, I will sort of document them on there [feed], or people wanna have a look, they can click on the hashtag, and they can see what’s there.*” This quote suggests that she is aware of the public nature of her content. As each hashtag aggregates a variety of food products @superbritishgirl encountered at different times and from different retailers, by suggesting the audience “*can click on the hashtags and they can see what’s there*”, she was expressing her willingness to transform her private food experiences into a resource that is informative to the public audience and potentially free advertising for food retailers. Such willingness thus signals that @superbritishgirl’s foodie role is constituted not only by her personal food discovering and tasting experiences but also by the social affiliations she can formulate with other people.

For such social affiliations, by introducing different food items and presenting her evaluations, @superbritishgirl is acting like a cultural intermediary (Bourdieu, 1984, p.359) who provides digital content as “symbolic goods and services”, as well as makes “presentation and representation” of food products. Through the audience engagements that her content manages to attract on Instagram, she could receive benefits such as restaurant invites (which was the case for her blogging activities in Hong Kong). Relating to Johnston and Baumann’s (2007) research about omnivorousness in gourmet food writing, the omnivorousness in @superbritishgirl’s foodstagram content aligns with the openness (toward ethnic diversity and genres) tendency in food culture as constructed by mainstream cultural intermediaries. Thus, such alignment can signal her possession of legitimate culinary knowledge, which constitutes a form of desirable cultural capital (ibid). Especially for the food that she tasted from supermarkets, we can find products from not only retailers offering cheaper prices, such as

Aldi and Lidl, but also slightly high-end retailers such as M&S and Waitrose³. It signals the economic capital that allows her to spend rather freely to buy food at different prices to satiate her curiosity and taste.

On the other hand, in our interview, she expressed that foodstagramming is largely a practice she enjoys doing with or without other people's attention. @superbritishgirl said: *"Food is sort of like something to me that I've had good food that day then I have good mood. But then if I've had bad food that day kind of, I do feel a bit upset."* Thus, her daily interaction with food influences the tone of her emotional well-being. Kotarba and Fontana (1984) suggest feelings are important parts that define people's selves. Thus, @superbritishgirl's foodstagram collection archives her sensory and emotional selves at different times. Such embodied experiences can be fragmented in life, but since she hashtags them, the structure @superbritishgirl created through such thematising actions thus allows her to examine and make sense of the changing statuses of her feelings. In this sense, @superbritishgirl's foodstagramming activities potentiate her to create an "existential understanding" (Crossley, 1995, p.54) of herself which centres on bodily reactions (sensory and emotional) towards the daily encounters with food materials.

In our interview, regarding her interest in food, @superbritishgirl commented: *"Because it's just delicious and I just wanna try everything."* Therefore, in contrast to Mull's (2017) criticism mentioned in chapter 2 that "Instagram food has almost nothing to do with consumption as a gastronomic endeavor", the food @superbritishgirl features in her foodstagrams are her "gastronomic endeavors". Moreover, except for tastes, she also takes other sensory elements of food seriously, like visual appearance:

And these days, they come up with all these different products and you know especially for Christmas, they have all these different you know limited editions and like different pairings and different creations, so it makes it more exciting... So, like even cheese, cheese is so simple, but now they got a star shaped cheese... I mean it's the same piece of cheese, but like different shapes. And lots of desserts in different shapes. (@superbritishgirl)

Thus, the changing visual appearances of food products such as cheese can give her a feeling of excitement.

³ For price comparisons between different UK merchants, see <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9553221/Aldi-named-cheapest-supermarket-comparing-basket-20-essential-items-according-Which.html>

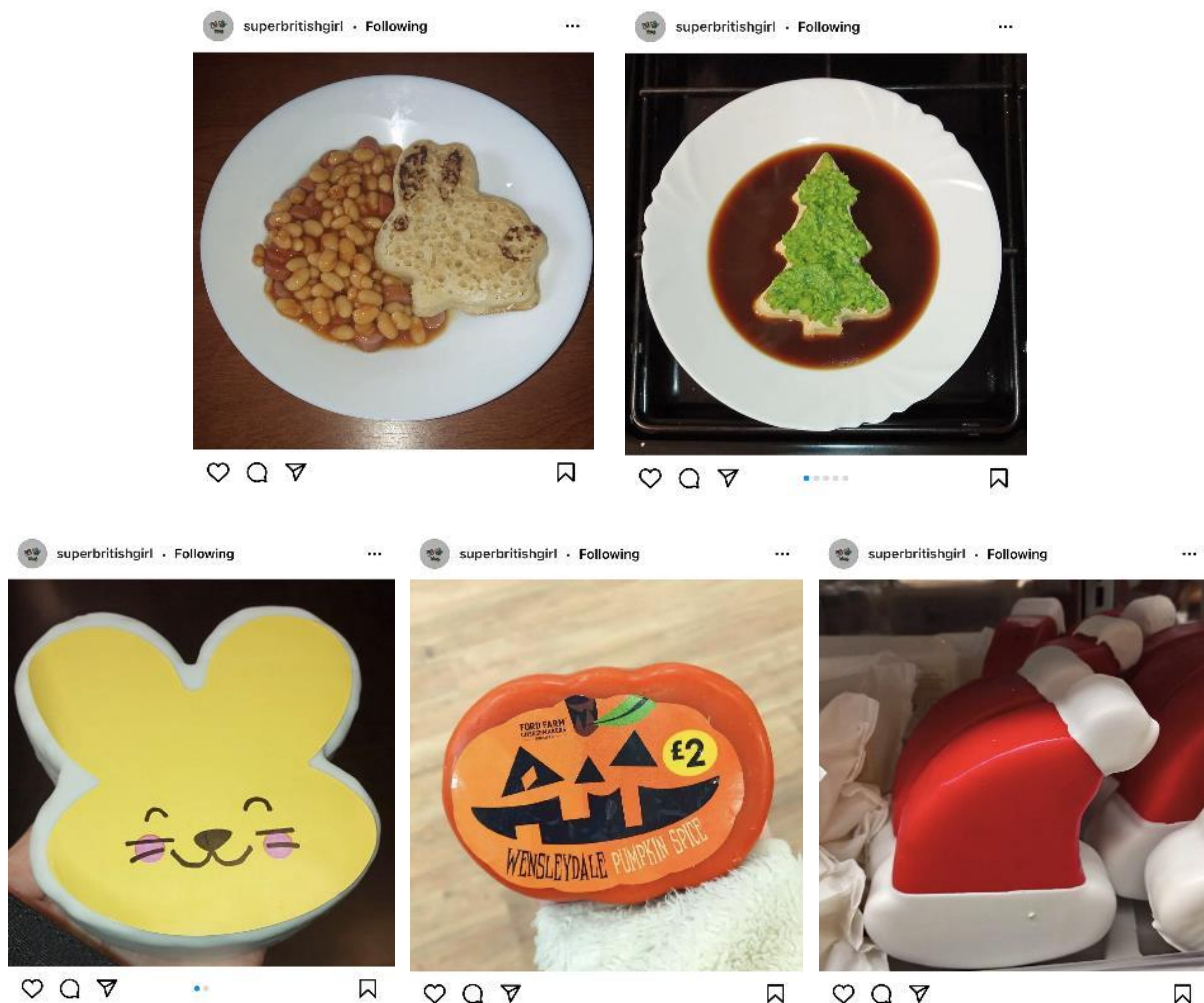


Figure 10 ab: Festive crumpets consumed, cde: Festive cheeses discovered in shops - © @superbritishgirl

Figure 10 shows two examples. 10a and 10b illustrate two crumpets she tasted before Easter, 2021 and Christmas, 2020, while 10c, 10d and 10e present different types of cheese she discovered before Easter and Halloween, 2021 plus Christmas, 2020. The captions of these posts contain either only the name of the food and her reaction to the tastes, followed by some hashtags, or for 10c: *“Easter cheese truckles are back. This year in the form of a bunny. I’m so lucky I tried the egg-shaped truckle last year.”* Thus, her bodily reactions towards finding and consuming the food are her emphasis in these posts. Especially, in her feed, with the festive products emerging from time to time, the image collection can give us a sense of seasonality and temporality, as the 2021 easter bunny cheese reminded her of the egg-shaped cheese she had tried in the previous year. The food recorded might not appear special to us, but for @superbritishgirl, their specific shapes and tastes are both small but important memories that chronicled the passing of time and the changes of the statues of her sensory and emotional selves, which were all important “fruits” she harvested from maintaining her foodie role.

For the visual execution of her images, @superbritishgirl adopts a very relaxed style. When answering her Instagrammable criteria, she explained:

If it's good, then I would share it... cuz some things I feel I should share it cuz it tastes good... I think as a foodie I should try it because it's new... and then if it looks good then it's a bonus to share it on Instagram. (@superbritishgirl)

Therefore, her foodstagramms are more like visual records of her tasting experiences. @superbritishgirl generally adopts a “snap and post” style. While knowing that creating aesthetically interesting food images is a convention for food bloggers nowadays, she still chose a relaxed style by posting mostly unedited images. She justified: “*I mean every day you're seeing too much food... so you must as well post it, or otherwise it becomes a backlog*”. By valuing recency, @superbritishgirl's image style expresses her prioritisation of food experiences per se, so it suggests that she prioritises developing an archive for herself, instead of merely showing off her social status through her conspicuous (Veblen, 1994) food consumption as critiqued by Mull (2017).

Compared to her HK account, @superbritishgirl considers her UK account as a more casual space where she documents food experiences that are more personal to her. When I compared the two accounts, I found that the choices of image content and style appeared very similar. However, I observed that she holds very different expectations regarding the goals she hopes to achieve from each account. When I asked whether she pays any attention to the number of followers, likes and comments for her UK account, she replied: “*No, not really. But I guess for the Hong Kong account that I should be.*” She explained: “*there's too much time to spend on this [HK account]... I've already done my part*”, so “*it should be better*”, otherwise “*it's no point*”. Thus, it suggests that she considers the engagement metrics as measurements of the performance of her content and this can indicate her position in the blogging field (Bourdieu, 1984). By attending to such metrics for her HK account, she positioned her role as a competitor in the food blogging game, whereas by distancing herself from the metrics for her UK account, she in contrast excluded herself from this role. While gaining more followers, comments and likes for her UK account bring her contentment, without these, she said she would still keep Instagramming her daily food experiences. As illustrated, the role she plays in her UK account leans towards someone who first, reflects on her existential self (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) via the sensory and affective feelings she developed through her everyday food experiences, and second, maintains her foodie role.

4.1.2 The Enactment of a Baking-lover Role

We can examine similar use of foodstagramming in other participants' cases, especially for private users. The difference is that while @superbritishgirl's Instagram focuses on food, most private users' feeds also feature other everyday subjects besides food. Thus, unlike @superbritishgirl, these private users would choose to feature only highlighted special food moments instead of more mundane ones. While such a photographable criterium reminds us of the home mode photography (Chalfen, 1987), the featured food moments are in contrast less formal and are usually more "fleeting and unexpected mundane moments" (Daisuke and Ito, 2003) such as casual meals had with friends and family. The communicative function of social media like Instagram has propelled such type of more "transitory, ephemeral", or even disposable (Van House, 2007, p.2719) images to be shared as "objects of communication" (Van House, 2011, p.125) that is relevant only to the "here and now". However, with the archiving affordance, as exemplified in @superbritishgirl's case, when reminiscing through such content in a future time, people can assign new meanings to such "objects of communication" and use them as means to weave personal biographies, like in Phoebe's case.

Phoebe (woman, 20-30) is a private user who only allows people she is close to in person to follow her. Her feed features mostly everyday subjects such as her bakes, gatherings with family and friends, as well as crafts she made. Phoebe mostly posts content in her feed rather than stories, because she regards her Instagram "almost" as "*a personal archive... for me to look back on*". In contrast to @superbritishgirl, Phoebe updates much less frequently (one post every one to two months). As she reflected, she only regards a moment as Instagrammable if she considers it as "*more of an activity or an event*" such as a trip back home, a meal she had with friends or her homemade bakes. While these activities are less formal than ceremonial events normally featured in home mode photography (Chalfen, 1987), they are also less mundane as in @superbritishgirl's case. The featured food signifies highlighted moments Phoebe sieved through everyday life that has important personal meanings for her. Hence, Phoebe's feed is where she draws from everyday subjects to actively construct her personally meaningful biography to define herself.

Browsing through Phoebe's feed, I only discovered a few foodstagrams which mostly feature subjects like cakes or biscuits she baked. Unlike @superbritishgirl, Phoebe barely posts her daily meals, as she said: "*I just don't feel skilled in that area*". As mentioned, Phoebe considers her Instagram as a place to archive only the highlighted memories. Also, as she considers food generally as "*just sustenance*", it is not surprising for her to mainly feature food

she considers as “*looking nice*”, instead of “*trivial*” ordinary meals. As Phoebe[^] considers her Instagram as a space for her to archive important moments that represent certain parts of herself. The deliberate choice of using her bakes instead of mundane meals to represent herself thus makes her self-presentation appear to be in a rather “calculating manner” (Goffman, 1959, p.6). From her words, we can observe Phoebe[^]’s intention of using her foodstagrams, or performances of her baking-lover role, to give her audience the “impression” that is “likely to evoke from them a specific response” (ibid) that Phoebe[^] hopes to obtain. How should we interpret the calculative characteristics of her performances?

On the one hand, as she regards her bakes to represent the practice she feels “*confident*” in doing: baking, we can regard the bakes as props that allow Phoebe[^] to perform her baking knowledge and skills, or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), to her intimate circle of friends. Therefore, like @superbritishgirl’s case, on the one hand, the impression Phoebe[^] can potentially give to her audience is that she is someone who has a high volume of cultural capital in baking.



Figure 11 ab: Phoebe[^]’s foodstagrams - © Phoebe[^]

On the other hand, when discussing her foodstagrams, in Figure 11, 11a shows the tea party full of biscuits and cakes she baked for her and her friends for celebrating the finale of their beloved show *The British Bake Off*, she commented: “*Like I went a lot of effort to kind of put that together and it did feel like an event because we were celebrating the end of Bake Off.*” Also, 11b shows a batch of scones sitting on a drying rack, she noted:

Like these scones that I was proud that you know I've never tried that recipe before, and I thought they look quite good, and I'd enjoyed doing it. Whereas I suppose even though when I experiment with cooking, yeah, I don't necessarily, enjoyed that much or. And I suppose the thing with baking as well is often, then share the baking. I might bring some into work or give some to someone as well, whereas with kind of everyday dinner I wouldn't do that. (Phoebe^)

Additionally, Phoebe^ mentioned that she used to bake with her granny when growing up and she kept baking as her hobby. When the show *The Great British Bake Off* came out, she stated: “*It just seems like a natural thing for me to be like interested in.*” Many of her close friends (also her Instagram audience) are also fans of *Bake Off*. Phoebe^ mentioned that she only shares content related to *Bake Off* on Instagram because only her close friends who also like the show can connect with her through the content. Thus, similar to what Giard (1998, p.157) suggests, for Phoebe^, although baking is a “basic, humble and persistent practice” that she often repeated at different times and spaces, it is also a practice that is “bound to childhood memory” about the time she spent bonding with her granny and is also “rooted in the fabric of relationships” with her close friends “marked” by the shared cultural context: *The Great British Bake Off*. Thus, with these special personal meanings, baking was transformed into a practice that marks important social roles (granddaughter and friend) that define who she is.

These combined elements thus suggest to us the meaning of baking to Phoebe^. Thus, we can also interpret Phoebe^'s performances via her foodstagramms as her means of evoking from her audience the impression that she is someone who is enthusiastic about food and values kinship plus friendship (which are partly formed and maintained via baking). On a personal level, baking is a practice that allows her to develop affirmative feelings. On an interpersonal level, her bakes come through the crafting process allowed her to strengthen affective bonds with other people.

As she asserted:

I wouldn't say I'd define what was Instagrammable and what was not based on like picture quality or anything like that. Cuz, I know all my pictures are poor quality cuz I've got a really bad phone... I think it's less about the picture quality but more about what it represents for me... And I guess because part of Instagram for me is this journal or this archive. It almost is the memory of that activity baking that food, sharing that food and that kind of thing. (Phoebe^)

By assigning the derogative term “poor” to evaluate her image quality, she hinted to us that she does recognise the relevance (if not importance) of good image quality in foodstagramming.

However, by establishing her images lack good image quality but she still chose to share them, Phoebe[^] was trying to stress what she values the most is the affirmative feelings and the affective bonds associated with the featured food moments, or her existential and social selves. Thus, by selectively featuring the moments that have important meanings to her, like @superbritishgirl, Phoebe[^] was defining herself through the constant enactment of the roles and associated activities that bear affective meanings to her. Hence, the calculative characteristics of Phoebe[^]'s performances acted to both signal her classed identity relating to her cultural capital, and her other identities related to kinship and friendship which hold affective meanings for her.

4.1.3 Discussion

In the above portraits, both participants chose to use foodstagramming to craft definitions of themselves via their subjective understandings and reflections of themselves from everyday experiences. In both participants' self-defining processes, similar to what Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) both argue, the self should be considered as a process that needs constant work in an individual's life rather than a fixed entity. Within the process, as Lawler (2014) suggests, people often use "various raw materials" such as "memories, understandings, experiences and interpretations" available to them in everyday life to "creatively" produce their selves (p.24) through interacting with other individuals (p.2). No matter for @superbritishgirl's foodie role or Phoebe[^]'s baking-lover role, it was through constantly drawing food memories, understandings, experiences and interpretations in their eating, baking, hosting and gift-giving activities that these roles were enacted, recreated and maintained.

Because of the social aspects of the archiving and curation functions on Instagram, foodstagramming creates occasions for both participants to enact their self-making processes. By objectifying such experiences relating to their selves via foodstagrams, both participants managed to "immortalise" (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p. 6) these ordinary and perfunctory moments and made materially tangible their "ethereal lives" (Ibrahim, 2015b, p.50) so that they could examine their selves at different times. Also, by selecting the moments that are relevant to the selves they value and archiving these moments, both participants managed to reflect on and make sense of their selves.

On the other hand, through such processes, both participants were also encouraged to become curators and creators of their selves. As Simpson (2012, p. 262) suggests, activities like cooking and social relations like friendship are not normalised and justified by external

meanings offered by social categories, so they are not normally regarded as significant. However, he argues, we can regard cooking as “an art of selecting, choosing and creating food that is pleasurable and ethical” and friendship as a vehicle for “relations which are non-normalized, pleasurable and solidary” (ibid). Through such re-envisioning of the conduct of everyday activities such as cooking and maintaining social relations such as friendship, we can find art-making qualities in these practices. Like artists (ibid), through these practices, people can not only express their values that are resistant or affirmative to their culture and society but also gain pleasure through the exercises of their creativity. We can understand both participants’ foodstagramming activities as the exercises of their agency, which according to Simpson’s (2012, pp. 262-263) interpretation, can help them develop a “unique way of living and being” (ibid) plus meanings of their lives that are subjectively important to them.

Relating to Simpson’s argument, by discovering and tasting food (@superbritishgirl), making and sharing food (Phoebe^), as well as sharing such experiences online with others, both participants acted as artists of their lives because they managed to formulate their own definitions of who they are through their food and foodstagramming experiences. Their definitions of themselves are influenced by socially assigned categories, such as class and family, so are socially bound. However, with their reflections and creation, we can still observe both participants’ attempts in using ordinary materials, which are their affirmative experiences of food to craft the roles (foodie and baking-lover) they regard as meaningful to them. While these roles are not necessarily justified externally, since the formation of such roles involves the engagement of participants’ valuations and feelings, they are important components that form both participants’ existential selves (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984): a unique experience of being within the context of certain social context. Thus, the justification of such roles through foodstagramming allowed both participants to create meanings in their lives.

4.2 Reinventing the Self through Creating Food and Foodstagrams

The last section introduced how foodstagramming can help people to discern the important roles that are subjectively important to them and continue developing these roles to constantly create people’s own definitions of themselves. As mentioned, many participants, especially private users, utilise their foodstagramming practice for such purposes. In the above portraits, the roles the participants kept developing had already existed before they started Instagram. In the sample, many participants also used foodstagramming to experiment with crafting new roles that had not been either fully-fledged or existed before they used Instagram.

In this section, I present two portraits of two different types of foodstagrammers' experiences to illustrate the diverse ways people use foodstagramming to craft new roles.

4.2.1 The Crafting of a Creator Role

Nancy^ (woman, 30-40) is a private user who only connects with her close friends on Instagram. Similar to @superbritishgirl and Phoebe^, Nancy^ also archives "*nice experiences in life*" such as reunions with her family and meals with friends in restaurants. However, in addition to this, Nancy^ also uses her Instagram to craft a new role: a creator of food and food images. Nancy^ mentioned she loves eating and cooking, and her partner who is a chef also shares the same passion. Thus, in January 2019, they started a food project of cooking 80 recipes from around the world based on the book *Around the World in 80 Days*. Nancy^ often shares results from this project on Instagram and as she mentioned, it is because of this project, she started to update more often on Instagram. Nancy^ expressed that she developed joy through cooking food and creating foodstagramms. As I illustrate next, her joy is from the creativity she can express through the food-making and image-creating processes. As someone who has always valued being creative, we can see that foodstagramming creates a suitable outlet for Nancy^ to comfortably craft a new role: a creator of food and food photos.

Regarding creating food, for the food project, to create novel dishes from different cultures, Nancy^ and her partner often experimented with new ingredients and recipes. Sometimes they would substitute or modify the recipes according to their tastes and what they could obtain in grocery shops. Similar to Giard's (1998) suggestion, the cooking process in Nancy^'s case included "manipulating... organising, combining, modifying and inventing" (p.153). Although they had recipes to follow which prescribed the "accepted, allowed and ready-made techniques" (p.156) and what the dishes ought to look and taste like, by modifying the ingredients and using their own ways to prepare and cook the dishes, Nancy^ and her partner created their own versions of the dishes. Therefore, Nancy could exercise her agency and creativity by creating different dishes. We can regard the created dishes as bricolages of not only the ingredients but also her "creative ingenuity of cleverness" (p.157), the "invention of an alternative ministrategy" (ibid) and improvisation (p. 158). As Giard (1998) argues, such qualities form "a very ordinary intelligence" (p. 158), which might appear humble and unnoticeable in everyday life, but can enable the exercise of one's creativity in the most available but unrecognised way.

Indeed, Nancy[^] expressed that she had a lot of “fun” in doing the project. As she commented: “*I think this project is quite suited to who I am*”. When she was a teenager, Nancy[^] often read her grandma’s cookbooks to relax after studying:

I would literally browse through it, and I would find looking at images of food, at the recipes. It was really relaxing but also exciting... I remember that I thought: Well, I could do this, I could cook this or that.(Nancy[^])

She now still consumes food content from different media channels to relax. A similar example can be her consumption of interior design content from brands selling home products. Even though she does not normally buy the products, she often develops “relaxing” feelings by browsing through home décor content from those brands online. Both her constant consumption of creative content of different cultural forms and the “relaxing” plus “exciting” feelings that Nancy[^] generates suggest that she appreciates and values creativity.

Commenting on her creative ability, Nancy[^] evaluated: “*I’m not a really creative person. So, I’m not really good at drawing... that types of activities... So, I’ve always seen myself as quite. Well, not just ordinary, but not interesting really.*” Thus, she used to regard the role of a creator as irrelevant to her. However, in her food projects, by cooperating with her partner, Nancy[^] managed to exercise her “ordinary intelligence” (Giard, 1998, p.158) in cooking by devoting time and effort to researching recipes, modifying the recipes and composing the final dishes. In this sense, while she often had those dishes as ordinary meals, by creating slightly special dishes in contrast to her normal quick meals, Nancy[^] managed to exercise her culinary creativity. As she stressed: “*When we cook, I’m quite happy and enthusiastic. It’s something I look forward to really.*” Thus, the exercises of Nancy[^]’s culinary creativity brought her pleasant feelings.



Figure 12 ab: Nancy[^]'s foodstagrams showing the dining ambience at her home – Nancy[^]

Besides culinary creativity, when aestheticising her food creations into images, Nancy[^] also managed to exercise her image-making creativity. As someone who likes art, photography and design, Nancy[^] devotes a lot of effort to composing, shooting and editing her images before sharing them. She mentioned that she intentionally avoided putting unclean napkins and drying laundry into picture frames. She jokingly said: “Yes, sometimes I pretend I’m all tidy and organised when in reality I’m not.” Figure 12 shows two ambience shots from Nancy[^]. The clean napkins and placements in both 12a and 12b, the minimal involvement of unrelated objects in 12a and the neatly organised plates and pots placed in the background cupboard in 12b can all send us an impression of Nancy[^]'s home, which as she intended, is clean, tidy and organised.



Figure 13 ab: Nancy^'s foodstagramms showing the plating of dishes and table arrangements

When creating the images, she said she often shot from different angles using her phone and then transferred the shots to her laptop to review closely each image and then select the “prettiest” ones. After this, she normally used around 10 minutes to modify each satisfying image on her phone by cropping and enhancing different visual features. She also specified that she would choose not to upload an image if the food does not look appetising, even though she enjoyed its taste. In this sense, as illustrated by Figure 12 and Figure 13, browsing through Nancy^'s Instagram, the impression I gained was that all the dishes presented in the foodstagramms appear appetising and carefully plated. As 13a and 13b demonstrate, Nancy^'s foodstagramms often show plates, pots and placements with interesting colours, shapes and patterns which were carefully placed on the table. Also, the images all appear well-lit with different colours and textures showing up very vividly. Moreover, Nancy^ sometimes adopted techniques that are often used in commercial food photography, which I have learned in my *Food Photography and Styling* course from Le Cordon Bleu. For example, 13a does not simply present the Mac and Cheese as the dish but also included the herbs, pasta and cheese in the image centre. While it might not be very common for people to include raw ingredients on their dining tables, such techniques were often used in recipe books to signal what ingredients are needed to recreate a recipe. Especially, 13b used the same compositional technique as 6a (Figure 6) as a photo for a magazine. Like 6a, the plates and wine glass in 13b formed a line that connects the upper right and the left down corners, which can draw our attention to the combinations of the food and drink.

Why does Nancy^ take such great care when creating these foodstagramms? On the one hand, the appetising appearance of the food and the aesthetically interesting looks of her images can send us signals that she has relatively high 1. culinary capital to make the dishes, 2. visual

capital to create atmospheric dining settings plus visually sophisticated foodstagrams and 3. economic capital to spend as much time to create both the food and foodstagrams. Therefore, as these elements consistently appear in her foodstagrams, we can understand her imaging style as her constant effort to signalling the rich capitals she possesses to perform (Goffman, 1959) her socio-economic position (Bourdieu, 1984). Especially, Nancy^ jokingly described her exclusion of some objects outside of her foodstagrams as “*to pretend*”, which suggests she also acknowledged, like in Phoebe^’s case, the “calculating manner” (Goffman, 1959, p.6) of the performances in her foodstagrams.

While such a performative element is evident, there are also other ways to interpret Nancy^’s careful attention paid in constructing her foodstagrams. First, Nancy^ considers Instagram as a very visual platform, so she said: “*I have to care about the image*”. While she does not judge the value of food according to its look, from the perspective of photography, she does realise discrepancies might happen between how food looks in real life and pictures:

So, when I go to a restaurant, I’m not really fussy about the presentation. But I know that presentation that maybe okay or fine in real life, in pictures it’s likely to look much worse... I suppose if you want to take a picture just... to focus on the food, then I think how it is presented, it plays a huge role in whether others will look at it or not.
(Nancy^)

As mentioned, the pictured dishes are Nancy^’s culinary creations that brought her satisfaction and pleasure. Therefore, being precious objects to her, it is reasonable for her to mobilise complementary visual techniques to praise these image subjects. Also, Nancy^ considers “*there is an element of fun in posting pictures about food*”, and it suggests an attitude of “*not to take life too seriously*” for which she wants to share the message with her audience through the medium of photography. Considering the visual knowledge that she has cultivated through browsing through food photos on recipe books and online resources, as well as her understanding of photography and Instagram, we can thus regard her effort in creating foodstagrams as actions to ensure the message is visually communicated to her audience.

Second, being someone who constantly exposes herself to various visual materials in consumer culture, Nancy^ might often draw on styling, photographing and editing techniques learned from those materials. de Solier (2013) argues that food media guide their audiences not only how to consume but also how to produce food and media objects for one’s self-making. This is indeed the case, as Nancy^ acknowledged, she might have been “*used to certain representations of food*” without being conscious of these, so this can explain why her

foodstagramms often adopt similar visual styles that were used in commercial food photography and communicate to us similar lifestyle messages. While in Tandoh's (2016) and O'Neill's (2020) articles (see chapter 2), such resemblance is interpreted as either conspicuous showing-offs of one's social wellness or aspiring performances intended for gaining attention, this is not the case for Nancy[^]. Nancy[^] expressed that she neither plans to show her foodstagramms to a wider audience nor wants to become an influencer through blogging her food project:

I refuse to be more involved... For me, it has remained something for fun and that makes me feel good because there are other things in life that obviously are distressing and more serious, so if this project became... I had a deadline... I would become a bit anxious about it, so it wouldn't be for pleasure anymore. (Nancy[^])

By prioritising “fun” over socio-economic gains, Nancy[^] was suggesting that what she values and anticipates from foodstagramming is the elevation of her mental well-being. Referring to Sennett's (2006) research on craftsmanship, we can understand Nancy[^]'s attitude as her action to maintain a “disinterested commitment” (pp.195–196) to craftsmanship, which is to only “do something well for its own sake” (p.194) without seeking socio-economic gains. And similar to Sennett's (2006, p.196) argument, it is such a disinterested commitment that “lift[s] people up emotionally”. Therefore, through foodstagramming, to develop the role of a creator of food and images, Nancy[^] was exercising her existential self by enhancing her brute being: the “core of feeling and perception that is our innermost selves, our beings”, (Douglas and Johnson, 1977, p.3) which are suppressed by other things in life that are, as Nancy[^] mentioned, “distressing”, “more serious” and make her “anxious”. We can thus regard Nancy[^]'s serious effort in both cooking and creating her foodstagramms as creative labour (see chapter 2) that she exercised to combat these negative elements in work for elevating her mental well-being.

4.2.2 The Sculpting of a Food Photographer Role

Except for a few private users such as Nancy[^], most food entrepreneurs and bloggers and some creative professionals also used foodstagramming to craft new roles. @jimboiuk's foodstagramming experience is a typical case, for which he used the practice to slowly sculpt a new role of a food photographer that was not relevant to him before using Instagram but later defines him both professionally and personally. @jimboiuk (man, 40-50) has an academic background in a scientific subject. His earlier career and personal experience also did not overlap with food photography or photography in general. @jimboiuk used to have a sceptical attitude towards foodstagramming: “I used to make fun of people taking pictures of food”.

When he encountered friends' images of ramen and burgers on his Facebook, he often questioned: *"Why on earth would anybody ever want to do this?"*

On a trip to Vietnam, @jimboiuk had a photography competition with an amateur photographer friend. It was through practising and discussing photography with this friend during the trip that he developed an interest in photography. @jimboiuk then started to take more photographs. As he commented, photography had changed *"how I look at things in my life"*. He explained: *"Most people would just see what's in front of them. Photographers are always looking up and down and in the weirdest places to figure out what they might be able to take a picture of."* Such a tendency allowed him to notice more about *"the smallest details, the smallest changes of something"*, such as *"someone's got a new haircut, or someone's bought a new bag"*. As @jimboiuk expressed, the attentiveness to see things more closely in life is *"what photography has given me"*. @jimboiuk then began to treat foodstagramming differently. I observed that he used to update almost monthly between August 2016 to September 2017. Since October 2017, he started updating weekly and then almost daily. Such an increased updating frequency suggests that food photography has slowly become a part of @jimboiuk's daily life. Indeed, @jimboiuk developed a special interest in photographing food. He mentioned that he had searched various resources on YouTube and Skillshare to teach himself skills in food photography. Also, he followed photographers such as Dennis Prescott, Joanie Simon and David Loftus on Instagram and attentively learned from their content. In 2019, @jimboiuk left his recruiting job and then became a professional food photographer.

Regarding his earlier rejection of foodstagramming, @jimboiuk commented: *"It is funny how that circle has come around now that, the thing that I used to... [mock] is now this thing that a lot of people know me for."* As the above overview suggests, @jimboiuk's food photographer role is neither prescribed at birth nor from earlier educational, career or personal experiences. The role was actively crafted through @jimboiuk's foodstagramming, similar to Nancy's case. Moreover, in contrast to Nancy's, @jimboiuk's role crafting process involved more unexpectedness, experimentation and transitions. Resonating with Lawler's (2014) rejection of the essentialist thought about the self being "fundamental" (p.17) and "not alterable" (p.18) against external influence, we can find that in @jimboiuk's role crafting process, his self is "socially produced, socially embedded and worked out" (p.19) through creating foodstagrams, sharing the images and socialising with other people on and off Instagram.

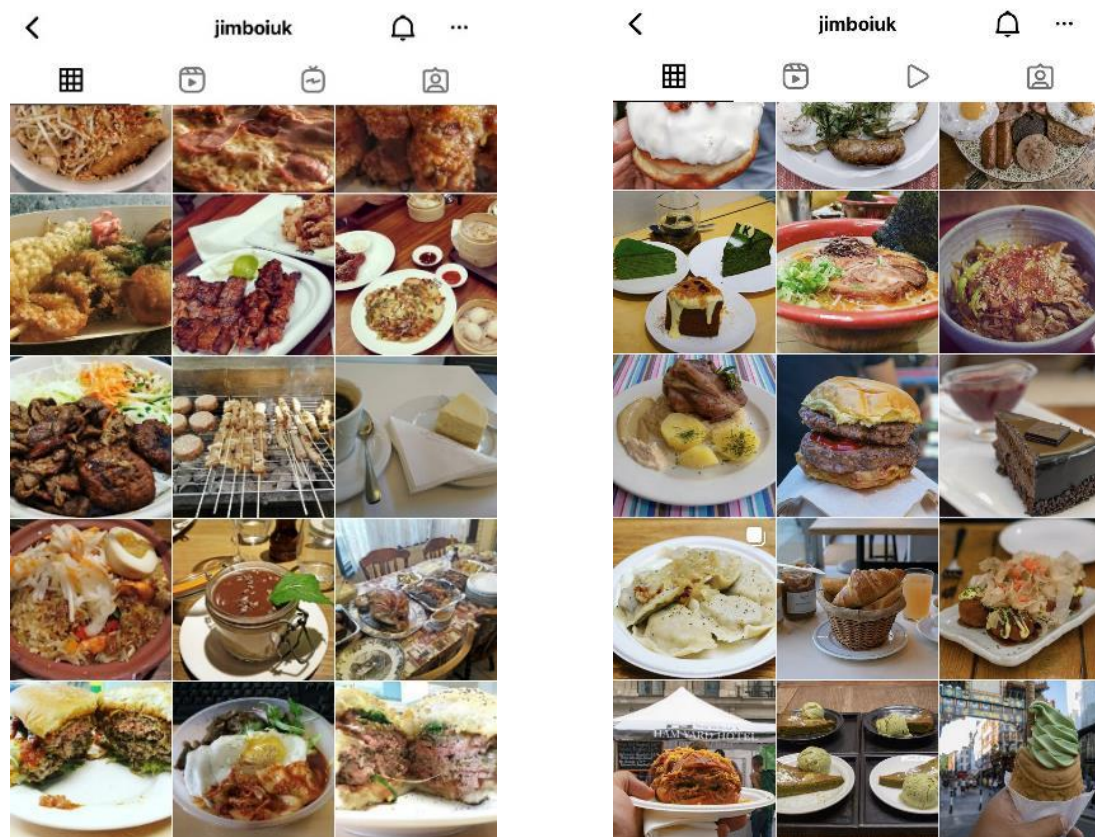


Figure 14 ab: Foodstagrams posted on @jimboiuk's feed during 2016-2017(a) and 2019(b) - ©@jimboiuk

In Figure 14, 14a shows the earliest foodstagrams archived in @jimboiuk's feed (2016 to 2017). Reading through the captions, I observed that these dishes were shared because of either their tastes or associations with special occasions (like Christmas). Compared to @jimboiuk's later foodstagrams in 14b, the foodstagrams in 14a appear more as casual snaps. Therefore, during this period, @jimboiuk mainly used photography as a tool to record memorable moments, similar to @superbritishgirl's case. A slight change happened in a later period shown in 14b (mid-2018) when @jimboiuk started to develop his interest in food photography. While he used to wait for the foodstagramming moments to occur, he then actively created such moments for which he nudged himself to visit different food venues, so that he could have more opportunities to create new foodstagrams, as shown in 14b.

If we consider socio-economic gains, for @jimboiuk, updating content more frequently can potentially help him to attract more attention and followers which can be converted into restaurant invites or product promotion/placement, as the case for one of his food blogger friends. @jimboiuk did realise such a potential benefit, as he stated, at that time "*I wanted to be like that... it's free food everywhere*". Therefore, accruing self-orienting economic and symbolic capitals for socio-economic success can indeed be one motivation that drove @jimboiuk to produce more foodstagrams. While we cannot neglect such a worldly side

focusing on gaining material rewards (Lamont, 1992, p.28), it is also biased if we overlook other sides, such as the existential side of his foodstagramming practice. As an individual who exists in this world and has a certain level of freedom to decide who he wants to be, even though he is also restricted by social influence, @jimboiuk still managed to persistently use foodstagramming to exercise his limited freedom and craft himself according to his preference (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984, p.11).

We can also understand @jimboiuk's foodstagramming activities as his work of enhancing his photographic skills to continue crafting the food photographer role that is meaningful to him. He commented, for people who have just started to take food photography seriously, *"people will want to try and replicate photos, of the scene, they don't know how to do it. So, they're walking around with whatever plate, bowl, burger or food and just try to take tons and tons of pictures"*. Indeed in @jimboiuk's case, *"visiting places and eating all the weekends"* used to be a ritual. For example, comparing 14a and 14b, while @jimboiuk mostly used a half-tilted angle in the earlier stage, he started to experiment with more varied angles (facing and half-tilted) at the later stage. Also, while most dishes in 14a were in indoor settings, the food items in 14b were in both indoor and outdoor settings. Especially for the bottom left and right photos in 14b, by using a hand to hold the food with the street scenes as the background, @jimboiuk can draw the audience's attention to not only the food but also the ambience.

In addition to developing his skills, as he began to communicate with more food bloggers on Instagram and through offline meetups, @jimboiuk started to reflect on the essential elements he likes about foodstagramming. Realising many friends managed their food accounts *"a lot better"* than he did in terms of their following bases, @jimboiuk stopped wanting to become a food influencer like he used to do. He also realised that *"I just want to take good pictures of things and food is the thing that I like the most for taking pictures of."* Therefore, through such constant creating, sharing, socialising and reflecting processes, @jimboiuk managed to gradually recognize that it is mainly picture-making, instead of the influencer-becoming part, which makes him *"like"* food photography. Thus, it was through such an enhanced understanding that @jimboiuk identified the less important elements (becoming an influencer) he should gradually chip off, so he could sculpt a food photographer role that matches what he values.

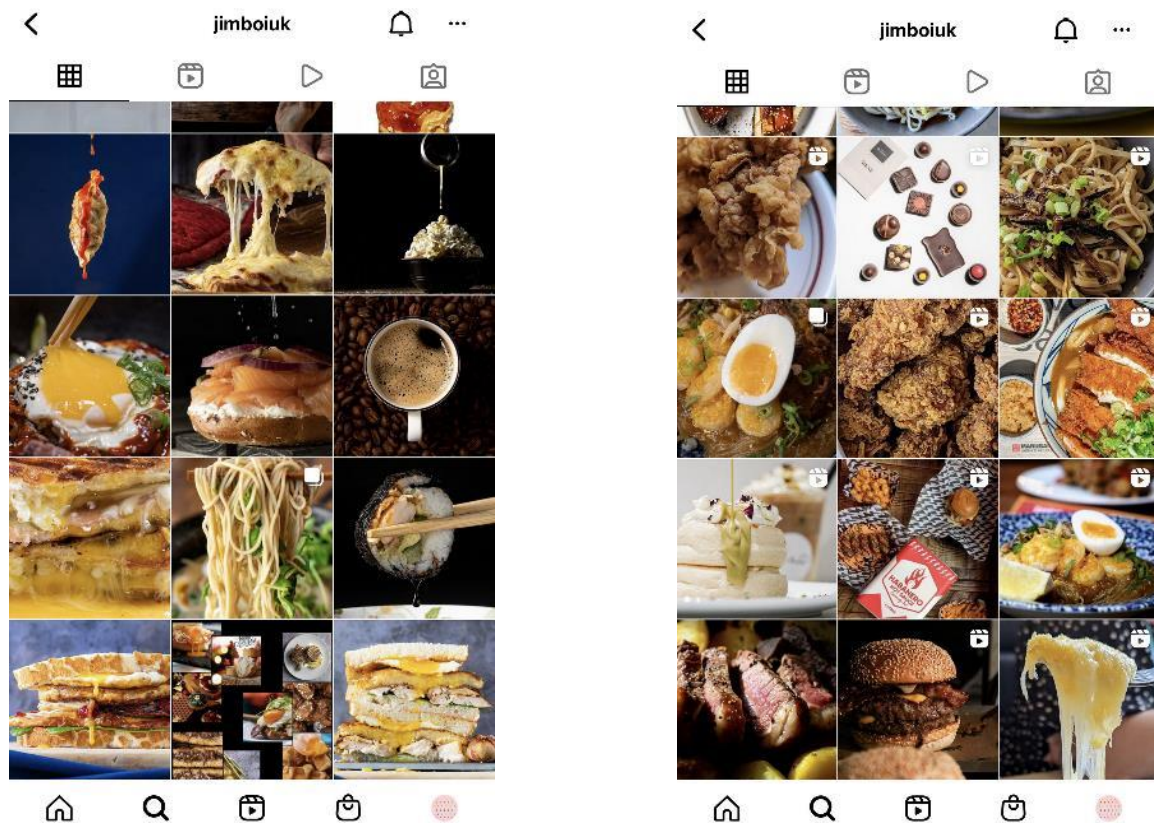


Figure 15 ab: Foodstagrams posted on @jimboiuk's feed at early 2021(a) and late 2021(b) - ©@jimboiuk

In 2019, after knowing he had saved enough money, @jimboiuk resigned from his recruiting job and became a full-time food photographer. As he evaluated, this was the “best way” to “concentrate” on things he likes doing: food photography. From then, his Instagram also became a “business tool” and “portfolio” for him to showcase his latest work so that he could be discovered by potential clients. He compared:

Previously it was always I needed to find content and generate something and have something out every single day. I'm now incredibly selective in what I do... so these [images in his feed] are some of my best shots. You know taken either natural light or full studio light set-up. The food has been styled well et cetera... In a pinch, I can still take a photo or something when I'm eating at a restaurant or something like that, but, whereas something like that wouldn't also hit my feed now. Something like that will probably just hit my Stories. (@jimboiuk)

In Figure 15, 15a shows foodstagrams @jimboiuk posted in early 2021 when he has become a full-time food photographer for more than a year. Compared to Figure 14, all the photos in 15a indeed appear well-lit with the food items that look carefully composed and placed in contrasting backdrops. We can also notice @jimboiuk's experimentation with more sophisticated photographic styles, such as food in movements: a dumpling floating with

dripping hot sauce, cheese being pulled up and liquid being poured onto the popcorn as shown in the top row in 15a. These elements can all add theatrical effects to the food in a similar manner as the fire does for the pork chop in 6c (Figure 6). Although the food items in 15a were mostly homemade, the carefully composed visual features can give us very different impressions compared to Figure 14. They should be considered more as @jimboiuk's creative expressions, rather than just life records.

The national lockdown established in early 2021 made most UK restaurants offer very limited services. This was a period I saw fewer foodstagramms from @jimboiuk's commissioned work on his Instagram. While there was no professional need for him to create food images, he still constantly created food scenes at home and updated carefully crafted foodstagramms as shown in 15b of Figure 15. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) introduce about creative labour, many individuals working in the creative industry need to conduct unpaid creative projects to win paid ones. We can understand @jimboiuk's constant creation and demonstration of food images as his tactics for getting attention from potential clients to maximize the chance of winning paid commissions. However, we also should not neglect the satisfaction he gained from being able to continue developing his food photographer role, even though the satisfaction often tasted bittersweet for @jimboiuk during this period.

In my conversations with @jimboiuk on Instagram in April and December 2021, he mentioned that his photography career has been "*decimated*" by the lockdowns. He decided he had to "*let go of the photography dream for a while*", so he returned to recruiting and joined the talent team at a technology company. As he wrote, he now only conducts a few commissions from "*clients I already work with who can be easy with me doing The work on the weekends*". Food photography thus again became mainly an interest. While having a weaker need to attract paid commissions, @jimboiuk now still updates content very frequently. As shown in 15b, he now started to experiment with a more casual and relaxed style to make his foodstagramms. For example, he now creates more reels (short videos) of him cooking his meals at home. He explained: "*I've always liked doing video work... Also, I don't have as much opportunity to do full test shoots... Video work is just easier as it's not trying to be polished work*".

Therefore, while being tied to his full-time job, within his limited time resources, @jimboiuk still actively creates opportunities to continue developing his craft in making food photos and experimenting with new techniques. Regarding image quality he now maintains,

@jimboiuk stated: “*I’ve eased up on what I post, but I still feel It needs to be a certain level.*” Thus, not being able to spend as much time as he used to do, @jimboiuk adapted by “*ease[ing] up*” and using a more casual style via mobilising the readily available resources in everyday life: the making and eating of his daily meals. However, by still maintaining the image quality to “*a certain level*”, he still keeps a serious attitude in crafting his food photographer role. Although this role no longer defines him professionally, it still defines his existential self (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984), as he still gains aesthetic and affective satisfaction in meaningful activities of engaging with food, creating photos of it, sharing the photos with others and continue sculpting his food photographer self.

4.2.3 Discussion

Looking through the portraits of both Nancy[^] and @jimboiuk, we can see that people can use foodstagramming to craft and sculpt new roles, as artists do via their art-creating practices, as Simpson (2012) suggests. In both participants’ cases, such new roles are related to their creative abilities in making food and food images. Other participants used similar ways to craft their new roles and these roles include food researchers, bloggers and business owners. Resonating with the last section, both Nancy[^] and @jimboiuk’s cases suggest that a person’s self is not fixed but always changing because of the different social interactions they have with other people (Lawler, 2014). Like in Nancy[^]’s case, after meeting her partner, hatching a food project idea together, as well as photographing and sharing her culinary creations, she managed to craft a creator role which she considered as unrelated to her in the past. In @jimboiu’s case, it is also after developing an interest in photography aided by the interactions with a photographer friend, creating occasions for foodstagramming and shifting his career to food photography (even though it is now on hiatus) that he managed to craft a food photographer role he used to mock. Thus, in both cases, the new roles were not prescribed but originated through a series of unexpected social interactions. Through cooking and styling food, as well as creating and sharing food photos, both participants managed to enact, experiment and make adjustments to these new roles. Thus, relating to Goffman’s (1959) and Mead’s (1934) theory mentioned in chapter 1, it is through conducting foodstagramming actions and generating reflections of such actions that both participants managed to reinvent themselves.

Additionally, from Nancy[^]’s and @jimboiuk’s cases, although being influenced and restricted by exterior factors, such as the abilities they had and personal situations they faced, they could craft their roles however they like. However, within their reach, both participants managed to use the available resources they had to create occasions to craft and refine their

roles. Both the creator role for Nancy[^] and the food photographer role for @jimboiuk were crafted through making/finding food, composing the food scenes, creating plus sharing the food photos and communicating with others, which are all embodied life experiences available at hand. These activities can be interpreted as performances of their cultural capitals. However, as illustrated, it was also the elements that form their existential selves (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984; Douglas and Johnson, 1977), such as the affirmative feelings they developed, as well as the better understanding and control of their senses of selves, which sustained their enthusiasm of reinventing themselves.

In this sense, people's selves are constantly in the "becoming" mode and are "situational", "embodied" and "reflexive" (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984, p.11). As for Nancy[^], it was her friends' suggestions for her to extend the reach of her foodstagramms and food project that made her realise that she only wants relaxation and fun from crafting her creator role. For @jimboiuk, it was his interactions with other food bloggers that helped him to refine his food photographer role, so he realised what he values the most is being able to excel in his craft in food photography instead of merely getting worldly or material benefits from foodstagramming. Thus, both participants' selves were always changing because they were using the reflections they developed from social interactions at different spatiotemporal settings with others as guidance to continuously craft and reinvent themselves. Also, it was the enjoyment and pleasure both participants gained through doing the things they like (creating food and food images) that made them realise the need of reinventing themselves and continue doing so.

4.3 Negotiating the Self through Balancing Different Roles in Foodstagramming

The above sections illustrated how people use foodstagramming to develop existing roles and craft new ones. This section introduces two portraits in which people use foodstagramming to juggle their different and sometimes conflicting roles. As mentioned, private users normally interact mainly with people they know in person, so the roles involved in their foodstagramming practices are less varied. However, for some bloggers, creative professionals and entrepreneurs, since their audiences include both people they know and do not know in person, they often need to juggle between roles concerning personal, professional and social selves. The next two portraits illustrate how people mobilise foodstagramming to negotiate their selves. Through this, I exemplify two ways of how, through such self-negotiations, people can juggle and balance their different roles to both reflect on and have control in their senses of themselves.

4.3.1 The Juggle between a Foodography-lover Role and a Business-promoter Role

@sharoncosgrovephotography (woman, 30-40) is a food photographer and the owner of her photography business called *Sharon Cosgrove Photography*. She has been practising photography professionally since 2006. She started her career firstly shooting portraits and then products. As she enjoys eating and considers cooking as another “*creative outlet*” for her in addition to photography, slowly, her photography subjects started to focus on food mainly. As the username suggests, @sharoncosgrovephotography’s main intention in using the platform is to promote her food photography business. She normally shares her latest works in her feed and sometimes the image creation processes in her stories. In this sense, we can regard @sharoncosgrovephotography’s Instagram as a space where she manages the audience’s impression (Goffman, 1959) of the brand image of her business, so the role she plays in such impression management is a business promoter. However, although food photography defines @sharoncosgrovephotography professionally, it also defines her personally because the practice has personal meanings to her. Thus, in her foodstagramming practice, @sharoncosgrovephotography also plays the role of a foodography-lover (short for food photography lover). While the business-promoter role stands for her professional self, the foodography-lover concerns her personal self. Next, I present how she juggles between the two roles in her foodstagramming practice when they clash.

@sharoncosgrovephotography considers food as “*100% pleasure*”. She regards cooking food as a means of expressing “*love*” to others, a “*release*” after “*a long day*” and “*a creative outlet*”. Therefore, the mobilisation of food for creating affective connections with others, relaxing and expressing herself makes the subject personal for her. @sharoncosgrovephotography considers her relationship with photography as a “*love affair*”, so photography is also personal to her because doing the practice can stir up her affectionate emotions. Food photography then is a practice @sharoncosgrovephotography considers she “*truly love[s]*” doing and can gain “*pleasure*” from, although it is also her job. @sharoncosgrovephotography mentioned she often tries “*as best as I can*” to bring across her emotions to food in her photography works, because “*that’s on another level that you can really connect with people with photographs*”. Thus, food photography allows @sharoncosgrovephotography to express herself creatively and passionately about the affective relationships she has with other people. Thus, food photography defines her

existential being (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) in aesthetic, affective and social terms, because it describes her self-definition and affects her well-being.

We can therefore regard the food images @sharoncosgrovephotography posts on her Instagram as her expressions of her existential self, similar to Nancy[^]'s case. However, while food photography is only Nancy[^]'s interest, for @sharoncosgrovephotography, it is also her career and business. Thus, while Nancy[^] can conduct food photography with a “disinterested commitment” (Sennett, 2006, pp.195–196), meaning to craft food images seriously “for its own sake” (Sennett, 2008, p.9) according to her standard, @sharoncosgrovephotography does need to cope with “conflicting objective standards of excellence” (Sennett, 2008, p.9) such as her professional competency in the commercial food photography field. Consequently, Instagram is not only a place for @sharoncosgrovephotography to express her existential self but also a game field (Bourdieu, 1984) where she needs to compete with other food photographers for attention. Thus, the foodography-lover role and business-promoter role representing her personally and professionally are both active in her foodstagramming practice. Such roles can both complement and conflict with each other, so @sharoncosgrovephotography constantly needs to negotiate herself.

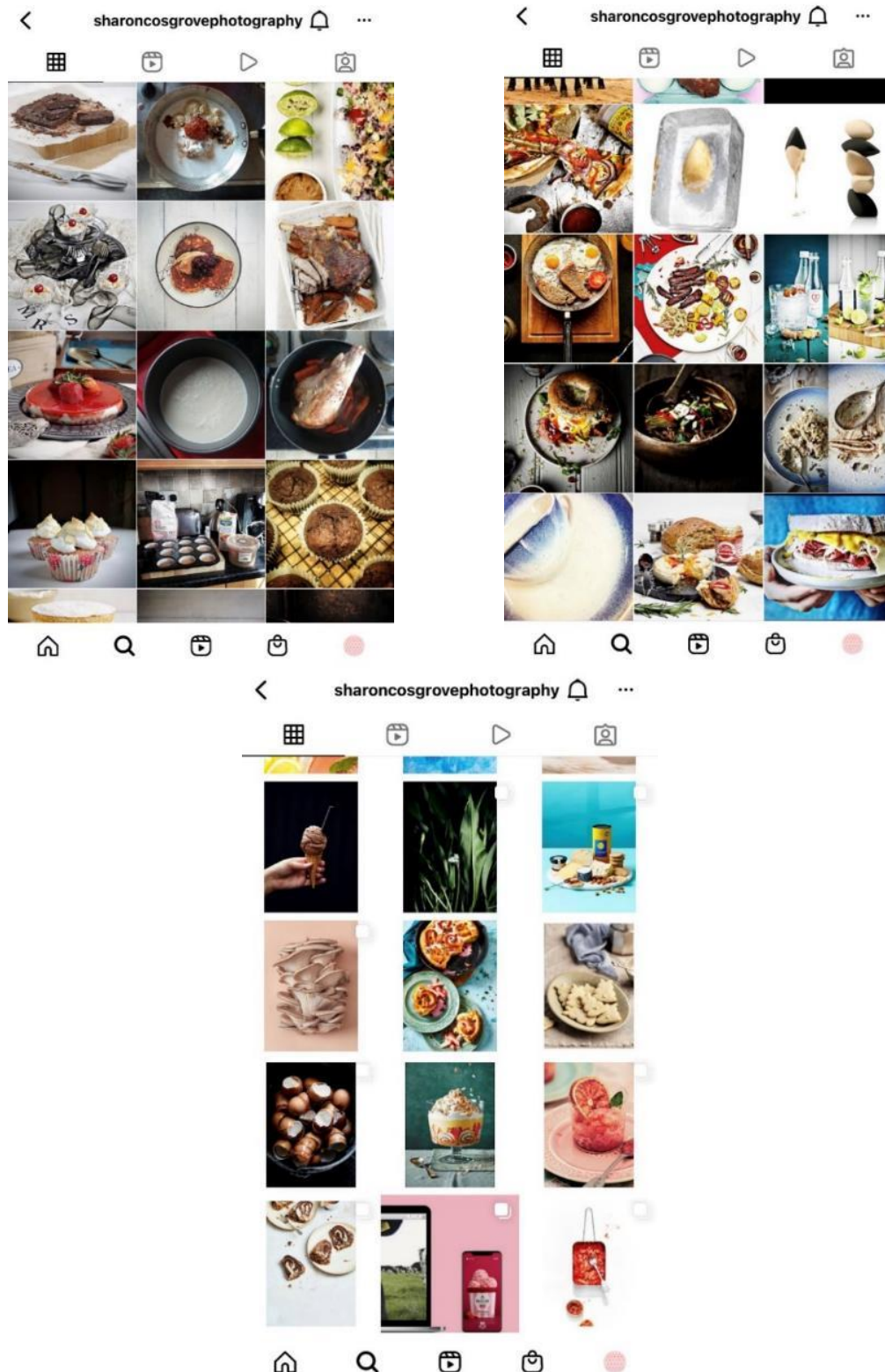


Figure 16 abc: Screenshots of @sharoncosgrovephotography's feed in 2015 (a), 2017(b) and 2021(c) -
©@sharoncosgrovephotography

Like @jimboiuk, in @sharoncosgrovephotography's feed, we can also observe changes. As Figure 16 exemplifies, in 2015, her feed mostly features more casual “ad-hoc” foodstagram about what she ate or made. Slowly, as she started to conduct commercial food photography

shootings, around 2017, @sharoncosgrovephotography also started to feature more designed foodstagrams from her commercial shoots, such as the image with the glassed bottle in 16b. Slowly, she began to post only the “*edited kind of clean versions of*” images both from her work and everyday creations. @sharoncosgrovephotography explained: “*I’ve tried to grow the business; I think I wanted to keep the Instagram a bit more professional-looking.*” Therefore, on Instagram, while she used to perform (Goffman, 1959) her personal relationship with food photography, what she intends to perform more now is her professional relationship with the practice. Indeed, she now treats her Instagram as a “*quick-look portfolio*” and a “*tool*” to “*reach out to people*” and “*attract new customers*”.

Although she intends to prioritise her business-promoter role over the foodography-lover role now, the result is not always as she expected, as she often experiences “role conflict” (Goffman, 1972, p.80), as these two roles, when played simultaneously, can clash sometimes. @sharoncosgrovephotography stated that she has a “*love and hate relationship*” with foodstagramming. She commented:

I hate that once you post something, you’re constantly looking at your phone to see: How many likes have I got? Like who’s liked it? Who’s commented? Why aren’t they liked it? Why aren’t they commenting? I hate that, but it’s all part of it. And there’s times I can just completely been on Instagram because it’s something that you never stop thinking about... And you know I think it’s more a case of if my followers are up and my likes and my engagements up. “Oh yeah, I love Instagram.” And if it’s not: “Oh, I hate this.” (@sharoncosgrovephotography)

Thus, while @sharoncosgrovephotography attempted to separate her business-promoter role and foodography-lover role, emotionally, they are often bound together. In her understanding, the engagement metrics are supposed to be the measurement of the performance of her business-promoter role, therefore her professional self. However, the constant attention engagement and the mood swings all suggest that emotionally, @sharoncosgrovephotography treated the metrics as measurements of her personal self. As Beer (2016, p.17) argues, metrics are often created to enact competition and “enable competitors to be judged and for hierarchies of winners and losers to be created”. Not achieving high scores in the metrics thus might bring @sharoncosgrovephotography the feeling of being a loser. As introduced, food photography is a very important element that defines @sharoncosgrovephotography’s personal self. The deflated feelings thus can make her doubt her self-worth and existence, so, understandably, she can generate negative emotions.

To cope, @sharoncosgrovephotography recognised that she has to be on Instagram if she wants to promote her business because it is “one of the biggest platforms” and “the main platforms for photographers”. She added:

I try to detach myself from it a little bit and just think of it as: “It’s nothing at all personal, it’s just me as my business and I’m just there and do that.” Rather than putting myself on there on a personal level.
(@sharoncosgrovephotography)

Thus, while realising there are things she cannot change, within her reach, she can shift her mindset and try to emotionally “segregate” (Goffman, 1972, p.80) the business-promoter role and foodography-lover role, and just prioritise the former when conducting foodstagramming activities and reflect on such activities. As we can see while @sharoncosgrovephotography can still experience negative emotions sometimes, having a more “detached” mindset allows her to recover more quickly.

For example, @sharoncosgrovephotography felt that “there’s a lot of talent... a lot of brilliant photographers” who are “young” and came to Instagram before she does. Sometimes, she doubted and thought whether her promotional work would “fail” because of being “late coming to the game”. However, she said getting “more exposed” to other similar food photographers’ works and “see[ing] what everyone else is doing” could help “open my game” and generate the thought of “I wanna do that and I wanna do that better”. For her, this can be “good, healthy competition”, because it empowers her to achieve her original goal of winning more business opportunities. Also, @sharoncosgrovephotography considers Instagram as a “tool” that can help her to “systematically” study “stuff that I can never learn from a course” and “get ideas for maybe my next shoot”, as she mentioned:

You just flip through and you’re like, you see repeated things and you want to do it in a different way and you just kind of latch on to what you think people wanna see, what’s popular. And then you just sort of, maybe not directly copying, but take elements from things that you can see that are popular and that people are attracted to and what’s getting attention and probably implement it, to my work and my style.
(@sharoncosgrovephotography)

Facing positively on the competition thus encouraged @sharoncosgrovephotography to reflect on her own food photography practice, discover trends and generate new creative ideas. Therefore, @sharoncosgrovephotography can refresh her creative depository and refine her skills and be more competitive in her professional field. In this sense, while @sharoncosgrovephotography unavoidably has to position herself in the professional food

photography field (Bourdieu, 1984) and compete with other photographers on Instagram, separating her business-promoter role and foodography-lover role emotionally allowed her to find a “*healthy*” way to empower herself to fight in the game.

Such emotional separation of the two roles can also benefit the development of her foodography-lover role alone and enhance her personal self-sense of her worth. After comparing other people’s works with hers, @sharoncosgrovephotography stated: “*Sometimes it can be a bit reflective and I’ll go through my feed to, like way back to the start, and I can see how far I’ve come along so, it’s nice to do that.*” Thus, the stimulus she gained from seeing other people’s work can encourage her to reflect on her foodstagramming journey, so that she can both understand herself better and acknowledge her growth. Although she still constantly generated the thought of “*I’m not good enough*”, she reflected:

It doesn’t stop me from doing what I’m doing. I think it fires me up to try and make my next image better than my last... I choose to approach it that way rather than get deflated by looking at other people’s photographs and think: “I can never do that. That’s way better than mine.” I choose to look at it and think: “How if that I’ve done that? How if I shot that?” So, I think it’s very easy on Instagram, social media too. Everybody compares themselves. We all do. I do it every day. But... it’s how then you interpret that and going forward. (@sharoncosgrovephotography)

In this sense, by being more reflective, @sharoncosgrovephotography has transformed the external competition and comparison from negative factors that can devalue her sense of self-worth into nourishment to grow herself for “*going forward*”.

4.3.2 The Balance of a Creator Role and an Influencer Role

Like @sharoncosgrovephotography’s case, in @yasgoesto’s foodstagramming practice, we can also observe the negotiation of the self through different roles concerning different sides of herself. While in @sharoncosgrovephotography’s case, she constantly needs to juggle between different roles because there are often tensions between them, in @yasgoesto’s case, since the roles involved in her foodstagramming practice mostly complement each other, she mostly centres on balancing them, meaning making sure to prioritise one role over the other. Next, I introduce what the roles stand for @yasgoesto and how she balances them.

@yasgoesto (woman, 20-30) is a blogger who uses her Instagram to present content about subjects she is personally interested in, such as food, travel and design. Like @superbritishgirl and Phoebe^, the featured moments in @yasgoesto’s feed are from her life

experiences. However, unlike these two participants, @yasgoesto regards her images as visual creations rather than simple records of her life experiences. As @yasgoesto referred, her Instagram is more like a carefully “*curated*” space featuring the photographic creations of her favourite subjects. Thus, instead of being journals like in @superbritishgirl and Phoebe^’s cases, @yasgoesto’s feed is more comparable to a lifestyle magazine.



Figure 17 ab: Screenshots of @yasgoesto’s feed - ©@yasgoesto

Before interviewing @yasgoesto, browsing through her foodstagrams, I observed that, unlike other food bloggers, her foodstagrams do not only feature food, but also the dining settings, such as marble tables, decorated walls, colour-coordinated furniture, neatly organised bars and views outside the restaurants, as shown in Figure 17. @yasgoesto’s foodstagrams appear visually very similar to images in food and design-related books, such as *Delicious Places* (Gestalten, 2019). Some photos display the flat lays of different dishes on tables also resemble 6b (Figure 6) as a photo of a cookbook, with @yasgoesto’s flat lays in an even neater manner. As exemplified in Figure 17, every foodstagram appears carefully composed with the uses of varied photographing angles, arrangements of interesting forms (colours, shapes and lines) and coordination of the food with its setting. These foodstagrams are placed next to her

travel and design-related photos as shown in Figure 17. With similar visual styles, although they are about different subjects, these images can blend in together and consistently send the audience messages related to sophistication, relaxation and enjoyment. As Figure 17 shows, the atmospheric and design elements included in her foodstagramms can give us the impression that most of the food venues @yasgoesto visited are sophisticated. Indeed, most restaurants she visited are situated in trendy central London neighbourhoods (Barnaby, 2022) such as Covent Garden, Soho, Shoreditch and Bermondsey and their menu prices are normally relatively higher compared to restaurants in other regions.

Similar to what Tandoh (2016) represents as the stereotypical popular foodstagramms on Instagram (see chapter 2), from @yasgoesto's feed, I can find "beautifully shot, intricately staged photographs of the food" placed in nicely decorated and atmospheric restaurants situated in the so-called "cool" (Kacary, 2019) London neighbourhoods. Also, combined with her other cityscape (in similar central London neighbourhoods) and travel photos, from her feed, we can sense "the lifestyle" of a "successful" and "creative" young individual who has both "money" and "time" (Tandoh, 2016) to consume the food and places, as well as the creative ability to craft visually interesting and professional-looking images. Therefore, the dishes and places @yasgoesto consumes, as well as the visual creative ability she exhibited all send us signals that she has relatively high economic and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1984).

Also, in her foodstagramms, by presenting both food and its surrounding atmosphere, dining was transformed from a taste-central experience into a multi-sensory experience that engages the senses of both vision and taste. As mentioned in chapter 2, in Mulls' (2017) view, the inclusion of vision in eating "flattens it out from a sensory experience into an aesthetic one", so food is often transformed from a "gastronomic endeavor" into money-making tools for the "thin, conventionally attractive women" to accrue followers and make money. @yasgoesto indeed accumulated a sizable following base (over 13,000 followers at interviewing time). According to the benchmark from *HypeAuditor* (Agrawal, 2019), @yasgoesto can be considered a micro-influencer. She indeed often receives restaurant invites, PR gifts and product placements. Therefore, as Leaver, Highfield and Abidin (2020, pp. 81–82) suggest, she has taken advantage of the affordances of networked connectivity provided by Instagram. Her content also has brought her economic and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu, 1984). We can see there are two roles involved in @yasgoesto's foodstagramming practice: a creator and an influencer. From such observation and analysis alone, we might argue that the performance of

her creator role is at the service of an influencer role. However, after hearing her subjective understanding of the two roles and what they mean to her, I discovered a different relationship.

@yasgoesto's professional and personal life revolves around food and foodstagramming. @yasgoesto is a communications manager of a restaurant group in London. She often visits different restaurants in the city *"to know what's happening in the scene"*. Besides work, she regards herself as a *"foodie"* who enjoys *"keeping in the know of what's opening in town or what's cool in town"*. She studied architecture, so unlike other food blogger participants who value mainly the taste of food, @yasgoesto also pays attention to the spatial atmospheric elements of her physical dining settings. Thus, when choosing restaurants to visit, she considers both the food and ambience *"need to be good"*, so no matter whether it is *"little coffee shops"*, *"casual dining spots"* or *"fancy dining spots"*, as long as she finds the place has *"a character and good food and good atmosphere, good ambience, interesting interiors"*, she would be *"interested to check it out"*.

Regarding foodstagramming, @yasgoesto mentioned her full-time work revolves around creating food images, editing them, writing captions and managing social media audience engagement. For her personal life, @yasgoesto regards creating and curating content for her blog on Instagram as a *"hobby"* that she enjoys doing, because it allows her to *"continue being creative"*, meaning creating visually aesthetic images. @yasgoesto mentioned when she studied architecture, *"drawing would be a big part of it, and I would be very creative"*. She noted, after studying, *"I still wanted to continue being creative and... photography really allowed me to do that"*. @yasgoesto noted, whenever she goes out walking, travelling or dining, if she discovers any aesthetic qualities of a scene, she would photograph the moment using a portable digital camera she bought specially for such occasions. Finding Instagram *"a very visual platform"*, as *"a very visual person"* who *"love[s] curation"* and making images, she then started her blog. In this sense, foodstagramming provided the means for @yasgoesto to continue performing (Goffman, 1959) her creator role to maintain the creative side of herself. She also mentioned her feed as a *"very curated"* space of *"only selected images"*. By consistently and selectively including similar content as shown in Figure 17, @yasgoesto did not only simply perform herself but also, similar to Hogan's (2010, p.377) argument, organised *"an exhibition"* of herself to curate and reinforce such a creator role.

Relating to Bourdieu's (1984) argument introduced in chapter 2, @yasgoesto's taste is often objectified by high-end refined food and venues, as well as the legitimately recognised

mainstream image styles, and this objectification can reflect her high economic and cultural capitals. Such performances have brought her increases in the number of followers and privileges such as restaurant invites and gifts. Thus, as Walsh and Baker (2020, p.583) argued, we cannot overlook the attraction of “attention” and enhancement of “status” @yasgoesto has gained. However, the above two paragraphs suggest to us that she values the role of a creator, because tasting food, experiencing the dining atmosphere, observing various design details, then creating aesthetically pleasing images and curating her whole feed are all activities that she enjoys doing. As someone who values being creative, constantly conducting such activities, therefore, allows @yasgoesto to maintain the role of a creator which was developed in an earlier time, similar to @superbritishgirl’s case. Thus, foodstagramming allows @yasgoesto to continue being an artist of herself in using the role that is meaningful to her to define herself.

For the influencer role, although it is often assigned to @yasgoesto when she receives invites and collaborations, it is also a role she actively cultivates by mobilising various tactics that are mentioned in Fiers’ (2020) research about tagging strategies on Instagram, such as adding a series of tags and hashtags in each post:

I have a pre-made set of hashtags... there’s, a lot of big accounts... focused on cities or... food... They have their own hashtags, so I would use their hashtag, for like a chance to be re-posted. Or I would use other more general hashtags like... #londonbrunch or #londonfood... #pancakes or #pancakeday... And that’s just a set of hashtags I would always use and change a little bit from post to post. (@yasgoesto)

We can regard the uses of such tactics as @yasgoesto’s careful performances (Goffman, 1959) that she constructs in the hope of her audience’s attention, which as Fiers (2020) argues, could be interpreted as actions that stand for status-seeking. However, if we refer to @yasgoesto’s interpretation of using such strategies, we can generate new insights.

As she commented: “I don’t mind being bigger than like 13,000... because with more exposure you get more opportunities for collaboration, more opportunities to go places, or see stuff, or travel, and yeah meet people.” Thus, more attention means more occasions and resources for @yasgoesto to exercise her creative ability and maintain her role as a creator. @yasgoesto regards her blog essentially as a place where she can freely express herself. For example, when we discuss the topic of “food porn”, @yasgoesto explained that she understands the word as an “expression of making something over the top desirable, so the emphasis is on food. She commented: “I do it a lot for my job... I mean I don’t mind it. It’s just not my personal account style.” As exemplified in Figure 17, when creating foodstagramms that represent herself,

as @yasgoesto remarked, *“I think more of the setting itself”*. Thus, what she considers Instagrammable normally are *“a cute kind of layout of a few dishes”*.

In this sense, although she often receives invites from different types of restaurants, @yasgoesto stressed *“I wouldn’t take all invites”* if *“it’s not really a place where I would usually go and hang out with my friends”*. She added: *“I wouldn’t take it just because it’s for free. I would much rather that I go somewhere else and pay myself instead because I’m interested to see the place rather than just go everywhere.”* Also, @yasgoesto stressed that she would create her content in the same way for her invites and the dining experiences she paid by herself:

When I, for example go and pay for a meal myself, I would also take pictures... I would definitely do that, still. And that’s how I started. When my Instagram was small, like it’s pretty much you pay for everything, you don’t get invites. But I just did it because I enjoyed it and I still do because I enjoy it, it’s just that it’s become, you know, easier to do that. (@yasgoesto)

Therefore, being able to express her personal aesthetic preference in both dining and image-making is essential for maintaining her creator role through foodstagramming, because it is the enjoyment that she gains through doing such activities that maintained her enthusiasm for keeping her hobby in foodstagramming.

On the other hand, in marketing, since the word influencer derives from the large number of followers a content creator can attract (Agrawal, 2019), the role implicates the large social impact this person’s content can exercise on other people’s tastes and choices. However, this is not how @yasgoesto understands her influencer role. She regards her blog *“essentially”* as a *“curated”* space where *“I post things I recommend and I enjoy and would like people to check out”* instead of a magazine or newspaper where she plays the role of a *“food critic”*. Her distance from a food critic, therefore, suggests that she does not consider her taste holds legitimacy as food critics normally do. Indeed, for @yasgoesto, her relationship with her audience is like when a friend asks her *“recommendations of a place”*, she would answer: *“why don’t you go on my Instagram and see what would you like”*. Her attitude is to recommend, rather than prescribe. Also, although @yasgoesto mentioned that she considers having more followers as positive, she specified, *“I wouldn’t want to be extreme”*. She values the *“personal relationship”* with some followers often *“liking and commenting on my content”*.

In this sense, attention implicated in @yasgoesto’s influencer role means opportunities for expressing her creativity and social recognition of her creativity, along with numbers that

can be converted into economic and social values. Thus, the reason why she cultivates the influencer role is that it helps her to maintain her creator role. Therefore, the influencer role according to @yasgoesto is a by-product, rather than the end-product she purposefully chases because as she stressed in the above quotes, what maintained her foodstagramming enthusiasm was the enjoyment of being able to express her visual creativity, the satisfaction of getting her creative ability recognised and her existential being is being valued. Hence, according to her interpretation, both the influencer and creator roles are present in her foodstagramming experiences, and these two roles can support and restrict each other.

4.3.3 Discussion

The above two portraits exemplified to us how people use foodstagramming as a tool to negotiate themselves through the juggling and balance of different roles that conflict with and complement each other. Both participants' cases suggest that such self-negotiation processes allowed them to have a better understanding of their values so that they can have better control of their senses of themselves. Other participants, such as bloggers, creative professionals and entrepreneurs that are relevant to this theme have all faced similar situations. Especially when they have acquired increasingly more followers and have to promote businesses that are formed out of their passion and interests, these participants all need to constantly juggle between different roles to reach a balance to have better control of their own definitions of themselves in existential terms instead of only in regards to metrics, comparisons or social influence.

As in @sharoncosgrovephotography's case, her foodography-lover and business-promoter roles at first clashed due to the pressure and discouragement from the metric and competitive logic embedded in Instagram. However, by shifting, reflecting and adjusting her mindset, she managed to proactively utilise these mechanisms as resources to both let her two roles reach balance and grow respectively. In @yasgoesto's case, her creator and influencer roles mostly complement each other, because the metrics of measuring her social influence often contribute positively to her understanding of self-worth. For @yasgoesto, when her cherished creator role conflicted with the influencer role, since she realised what she values is the opportunity to maintain the creative side of herself, she would choose to prioritise the former role over the latter one.

Similar to Couldry, Fotopoulou and Dickens's (2016) view, people who use social media to enact self-developments nowadays are required to face unavoidable metrics. People's

senses of themselves and self-worth can be affected by it either negatively (@sharoncosgrovephotography) or positively (@yasgoesto). However, with “reflexive adjustments” (p.132) in negotiating themselves by juggling and balancing different roles, people can form “new forms of agency and reflexivity” (p.118). With such agency and reflexivity, they can continue to understand and adjust developing themselves according to their own preferences through their foodstagramming practices and still have a certain degree of control over their senses of themselves.

In both participants’ cases, we can find activities conducted to match the measurement and competitive logic in the metric mechanism on Instagram, such as @sharoncosgrovephotography’s engagements with trends and @yasgoesto’s effort in using hashtags. These are all activities that can attract attention which can be converted into, like Goodman and Jaworska’s (2020) and O’Neill’s (2020) research about food-related influencers suggest, socio-economic benefits, no matter intended or unintended. On the other hand, in both @sharoncosgrovephotography and @yasgoesto’s cases, the metric mechanism is not utilised for measurement or competition per se but was transformed by the participants as resources to allow them to know themselves better, enhance their abilities and continue being artists of themselves (Simpson, 2012) who unceasingly work on developing themselves as making artworks.

4.4 Summary and Discussion

Through the six portraits, I demonstrated how creating pictures of food and sharing them on Instagram can be a way for people to be artists of themselves, meaning having control of their self-senses and self-definitions. As I constantly stress in previous sections, resonating with Lawler’s (2014) and Kotarba’s (2009) view, people’s selves are constantly changing and always in the making. Therefore, as Simpson (2012, p.261) suggests, “the self is not to be found, discovered, manipulated, or confessed”, but to be “continually (re)created through sensualized, revelatory and strategic modes of conduct, themselves modelled on aesthetic imperatives” via social practices and “embodied modes of thought”. Foodstagramming is such a practice that has allowed people to formulate embodied reflections about themselves through reflections (Mead, 1934), actions (Goffman, 1959) and feelings (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984).

In @superbritishgirl and Phoebe’s cases, it was through recording, archiving and reflecting on their everyday food experiences imbued with feelings and emotions that they maintained roles that might be trivial to others but are important for defining who they are. In

Nancy^ and @jimboiuk's cases, it was through experimenting with creating food and images and developing satisfaction and enjoyment that they realised the need of crafting new roles that redefine themselves. Also, in @sharoncosgrovephotography and @yasgoesto's cases, it was through constantly juggling different roles, as well as assessing, making sense of and adjusting their feelings that they gained a better understanding of who they are and how they want to define themselves.

Existing literature about foodstagramming (Mull, 2017; Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; O'Neill, 2021) suggests that people create and share food images mainly to show off their social wellness and acquire more economic and symbolic capitals as resources to elevate their socio-economic status. However, by understanding the practice from practitioners' perspectives as lived experiences, I discovered that while gaining socio-economic benefits is indeed present, the satisfying feelings and emotions that people gained from being able to express, understand and recreate themselves in aesthetic ways suitable to their own preferences are, in most cases, reported as more important reasons that sustained people's foodstagramming enthusiasm. As I argued, the socio-economic dimension and the existential dimension do not always clash but sometimes can complement each other. However, we cannot overlook the existential gains or reduce them to socio-economic gains.

As the six portraits demonstrated, even without gaining economic benefits or wide social influence, being able to express, understand and recreate oneself and discuss with an intimate circle of friends on Instagram about these can also be enjoyable and fulfilling. Or when the two sides clash, people could prioritise their feelings and emotions of themselves over socio-economic gains. It is because the process of gaining such positive feelings and emotions can allow them to make sense of themselves and have control over who they are and what they value. It is also the agency people can exercise in defining and crafting themselves that sustained their passion for foodstagramming, rather than merely pursuing socio-economic gains as end goals, even though they sometimes accompany as bonuses.

Also, similar to Manovich's (2017a) research about Instagram culture, when people want to exercise their agency, they no longer choose an alternative approach (Hebdige, 1979) but can draw inspiration and creative resources offered by the mainstream culture. As portraits in section 4.2 and section 4.3 suggest, the image subjects and styles of the four participants can look very similar to the food images we find in mainstream culture. After understanding these participants' subjective views about their image-creating processes, we can find that although

they are influenced by the mainstream media, when they create their own images, they take resources and bricolage different elements to create their own food images that are suitable for their expressive intentions. In this sense, it is still exercising their agency to express, define and craft themselves that fulfils their existential goals, instead of just being forced to commodify themselves to comply with the rest of society (Bauman, 2007) or get an advantageous position in a neoliberal society (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; O'Neill, 2020) as argued by many previous studies as presented in chapter 2.

The next chapter shifts to discuss the second theme concerning how participants use foodstagramming as a device to explore and develop alternative relationships they can have with food and the material world that they live in.

CHAPTER 5 EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MATERIAL WORLD THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING

The last chapter illustrated the first theme of how participants use foodstagramming as a device to be an artist of themselves. This chapter shifts to discuss the second theme concerning how participants use foodstagramming to explore and express alternative relations with food and other similar everyday objects in our material world. Concerning food especially, such alternative relations as demonstrated in participants' foodstagramming experiences stand for acknowledging and appreciating food for its own sake, instead of treating it merely as a functional entity (such as the fuel of our body, a delicacy to enjoy or symbol for representing meanings). This chapter especially brings the photography dimension of foodstagramming to the forefront, as it is because of such a dimension that participants are encouraged to pay special attention to the visual and material characteristics of food, explore alternative relations with food, and then visually represent such relations.

This chapter also especially highlights the expressive nature of foodstagramming. Beyond visually recording food, as represented in participants' experiences, foodstagramming (as a photographic practice) also helps them visually express their aesthetic feelings and axiological values (such as aesthetic and moral values) towards food. By analysing both the verbal and observational data, I discovered that when producing their foodstagrams, most participants do not merely snap certain food subjects and share the photos straight away. Thus, we can understand foodstagramming as a form of "expressive photography" (Barnbaum, 2017) which affords participants to use their foodstagrams to visually express their "meaningful statement[s]" (p.2) about not only their heightened feelings but also moral values about food, the material world and people.

The following sections present three main approaches that participants use to visually explore, represent and express their relations with food and the material world: taking 1. abstract and disinterested, 2. exploratory and appreciative and 3. imaginative and playful looks at food when creating photos of food. We can consider each of these three ways of looking at food as participants' endeavours to use a "photographic eye" (Barnbaum, 2021, p.66) to look at the material world that is full of various objects, such as food. As I present in the following sections, what such a photographic eye affords is for the participants to look at the food subjects as plain objects that have different materials qualities, such as shapes, colours and textures. Through photographing these food subjects, participants develop varied "visual relationships"

(p.67) with the food items in the forms of various combinations of shapes, colours and textures, and then in the photos, the participants highlight such key messages.

Section 5.1 introduces two portraits where participants use an abstract and disinterested look at food when making foodstagramms. Via such a look, the participants managed to divorce food from its usual gastronomic context, and then use food to create visual sculptures that are either purely interesting in their own right or represent abstract conceptual ideas. Section 5.2 presents two portraits where the participants use an exploratory and appreciative look at food in their foodstagramming practices. Using such a look, both participants are encouraged to acknowledge and appreciate the value of food by recognising its visceral, sensuous and aesthetically pleasing qualities, and then in their foodstagramms, both participants also visually heighten such aspects. Section 5.3 presents another two portraits where participants adopt an imaginative and playful look at food as well as play with food like children in order to pay close attention to the unnoticeable but interesting details of food. By creating comical and cartoonish foodstagramms that heighten such details, via their foodstagramms, both participants intend to highlight how easy it can get for us to gain pleasurable experiences from mundane objects in our everyday lives. In the last section, I summarise the findings and discuss the aesthetic and moral implications of these three looks.

5.1 Taking an Abstract and Disinterested Look at Food

This section introduces two portraits, where the participants: AARON and SANDY use a disinterested look to approach food when making foodstagramms, which means looking at food from a “distanced” and “contemplative point of view, without direct immersion” (Featherstone, 2007, p.70). Such a disinterested look divorces food objects from their gastronomic nature and instead treats them as material objects that are interesting in their own right. To accentuate such a look, both participants chose to use food to make inedible “sculptures” with aesthetically interesting combinations of visual forms situated in often unfamiliar settings. Both participants regard such foodstagramms as artworks. Thus, by looking closely into how such photos were made and why they were made with certain styles, we can gain insights into how foodstagramming can be a tool for foodstagrammers to express artistic creativity and make statements of their aesthetic values.

Most other participants in the sample do not approach food with a predominantly disinterested attitude. Their foodstagramms also do not appear as abstract as AARON’s and SANDY’s. However, appreciating food as stand-alone objects interesting in their own right is a shared action that many participants reported that they often conduct when making their

foodstagram. The only difference is while AARON's and SANDY's foodstagram are direct visual representations of the importance of such a look, other participants only mobilise the look as a technique for aiding them in representing other messages. Thus, through AARON's and SANDY's examples, I explicate the meanings and implications of such a disinterested look.

5.1.1 Appreciating Food for Food's Sake

AARON GRAUBART (@aarongraubart, man, 50-60) is an experienced food photographer who has been working in the food photography industry for more than 20 years. AARON referred to his Instagram first as a “*portfolio*”, as it is a dedicated space to share various food photographic works he created for food brands and publishers with the hope of networking with other creative professionals and being discovered by potential clients. He also referred to his Instagram as a “*blog*” and a “*sketchbook*”, as it also showcases outtakes from his work projects and photos from his personal projects that represent more about his own ideas. AARON regards photography as a practice to “*communicate*” himself, “*experience the world*” and “*look at the world*”. Thus, we can consider AARON's Instagram on the one hand as an exhibition space that performs himself as an experienced and skilled professional food photographer and on the other hand, as a space where he expresses his personal self through how he “*experience[s]*” and “*look[s] at*” the world aided by photography.

When referring to food photography in general, AARON stressed: “*I use photography to make things. I make pictures, rather than taking pictures*”. He explained:

I'm not really so much involved in somebody went to a restaurant and take a picture with their iPhone. I don't really look at things like that... In their instances, it's really about them sharing an experience... Whereas I am, it's not so much about an experience, it's about making something beautiful about this food... I mean it's related but it's a different thing. (AARON)

Therefore, unlike in @superbritishgirl's case, AARON's foodstagram do not have any reference to his everyday food experiences on a gastronomic level. Instead, we should regard the images as AARON's visual expressions through which he “*communicate[s]*” his aesthetic experiences of the world with food in it. Also, in AARON's view, we should consider food objects more as visual forms which he uses to create images, but less as something to eat.

When answering questions relating to how he approaches food objects when making photographs, AARON's answers often stressed the material qualities of food, such as the “*texture*”, “*movement*” and “*essence*”, which he calls the “*personality*” of food. What he

mentioned less were the taste and meanings the food is associated with, which are important elements many participants in the last chapter value. The foodstagram from AARON's personal projects can explain what he means by approaching food as visual forms, as such photos do not often communicate any concrete ideas, but simply exhibit aesthetically interesting visual forms.

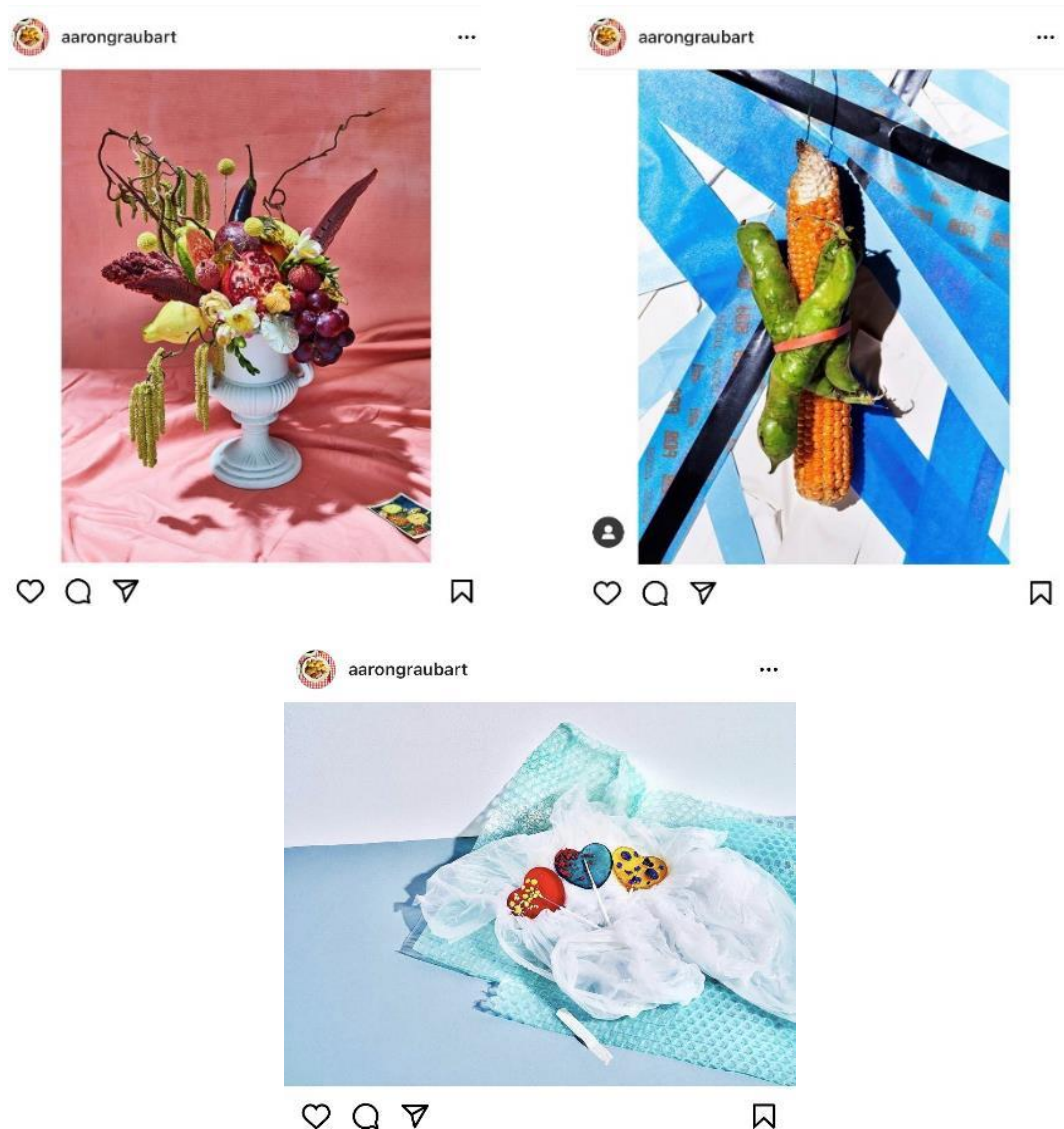


Figure 18 abc: Personal projects from AARON - © AARON GRAUBART (@aarongraubart)

When examining AARON's foodstagram before our interview, I observed that many photos from his personal projects have an abstract nature. For example, as Figure 18 shows, no matter the vegetable and fruit items that were placed in a vase in 18a, the corn and peppers being tied by a rubber band sitting on top of a paper surface with tapes in 18b or the lollipops sitting directly on top of a plastic sheet in 18c, they appear more as visually interesting sculptures that are composed with food than as food that we crave to eat. These photos resemble

the still-life painting in 3b (Figure 3) and photos in 5b and 5c (Figure 5). None of the food in Figure 18 was situated in common gastronomic settings. Also, especially for 18a and 18b, the food items were not cooked or prepared but are combined into abstract visual forms. Visually, the theatrical lighting of the scenes, the balance of the colours, the contrast of the textures and the coordination of such visual forms all make the three photos visually interesting. Therefore, my impression was that these photos were created with a fine art nature which is likely to communicate a message of “art for art’s sake”, which means they are created mainly as visually interesting images that do not need to convey certain concrete messages.

In our interview, after AARON explained to me why he created works for his personal project and what these works stand for, I expressed to him my “art for art’s sake” impression of such works. He responded: *“Thank you, that’s absolutely the point.”* AARON added: *“If I show you one of my photographs and you understand what it is what I’m saying, or you appreciate something about the photograph, then it’s successful.”* This sentence appeared in his discussion of how important the role visual aesthetics play in defining his own style of creating food photos. What AARON attempted to say using such photos are his aesthetic values, as he mentioned,

Photography is about visual aesthetics... If you’re making work that has any value, you need to be aware of everything that’s in the photograph and what it represents, whether that’s a shape of something, or it’s a colour or it’s a shadow, or whatever it is... So visual aesthetics is everything. The most important thing. (AARON)

Thus, visual aesthetics, including elements of visual forms such as “shape”, “colour” and “shadow”, is a part of the message he conveys through such food photos. Also, being in line with the “art for art’s sake” nature of such food photos I suspected, he stressed:

I mean there isn’t always a narrative, sometimes it’s just beautiful for the sake of being beautiful... Sometimes just being beautiful is enough. And sometimes there’s a narrative too, but not always. Sometimes it’s just: “here’s a thing”. (AARON)

Therefore, being visually interesting, or “beautiful” (as he defined it), is the most important message he intends to communicate via the food photos from his personal projects. In his logic, food photos can just be beautiful “for the sake of being beautiful” without having to be vessels that contain any symbolic ideas. In this sense, the reason why AARON said “thank you” to me can be that he considered my decoding of his aesthetic messages as correct. For him, such decoding can stand for my acknowledgement of his photos being “successful”. Since as he

stated, his photos are also communications of his views about the world, my correct decoding can also be considered as the impact his photos have made, which is his voice being heard and aesthetic value being expressed successfully.

Why is it important for AARON to express his appreciation of visual forms for their own sake? AARON stated that he is “a visual person”:

I was gonna be a painter, you know, I went to an art school where I studied painting... I'm usually on camera, but like I said it's the same thing about making a photograph as oppose to taking a photograph. I think of these things [food objects] as very kind of like carefully composed creations. And so, no, I'm not using a paintbrush, I'm not a painter, but it's more, it came in my mind as more akin to that [painting an image] than sort of like documenting a memory, or a space. (AARON)

Particularly, AARON often adopts a disinterested view to approach food and an abstract style to create his food photos for his personal projects. AARON's image-making style is in stark contrast to the style adopted by participants I introduced in chapter 4. Also, he distinguished his photography as “making”, instead of “taking”, photographs. Also, regarding food photography, he commented:

Food photography is weird. Because there is... almost sort of traditional idea what food photography is supposed to look like. It's a very narrow depth of field: Very natural looking light that type of thing, which is fine, but it has been the same for 40 years, so why keep doing it? And that's why I'm more interested in doing more experimental things and more kind of interesting things. (AARON)

Here we can see his intention of making innovations in his field that disrupts the current structure of his field. Thus, the foodstagrams that he created for his personal projects can express to his audience that he is a photographer who is capable of being experimental and exploratory of his craft. Also, by constantly updating such works on Instagram, he can express his intention of incessantly making innovations in his craft.

Since AARON claimed that his Instagram is a designated space to showcase his food photography works, relating to Bourdieu's (1984) and Goffman's (1959) arguments introduced in chapter 1 and chapter 2, we can understand AARON's foodstagrams as performances of his embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17) concerning the knowledge and skills he has in visual arts. Such embodied cultural capital concerns his 1. awareness of appreciating food for its material qualities, 2. his understanding of the medium of photography, 3. ability to both compose visually interesting forms using food and the complementing visual styles to portray

such forms photographically and 4. competency in critically understanding his field to make innovations. By doing this, as AARON mentioned: *“I have met a lot of people that I collaborate with and stay in touch with photographers and designers and food people all over the world”*. He added: *“I’ve been hired for work because people found me through Instagram”*. Thus, presenting his embodied cultural capital on Instagram allowed AARON to gain social and economic capitals, even though at the beginning he did not plan to gain such resources, as he suspected Instagram only to be *“another social media thing”* that he *“didn’t really even see the point”*.

On the other hand, we should not regard foodstagramming as only an instrumental device for AARON to achieve a better socio-economic status. As for him, foodstagramming is also a *“fun”* activity that he said, *“I really enjoy it now”*. As mentioned, the food photos from AARON’s personal projects centre on visual aesthetics, as for him, visual aesthetics is the *“most important thing”* about photography. As he also stated that he uses photography to *“communicate”* himself, *“experience the world”* and *“look at the world”*, we can find a close connection between visual aesthetics and his self.

Using 18b as an example, based on the above words from AARON, we can find that the value of the photo does not come from the corn or the peppers being delicious (like in @superbritishgirl’s case) or the whole scene being an important memory for him (like in Phoebe’s and Nancy’s cases). Instead, the value should lie in that he can compose these objects into aesthetically interesting visual forms, as well as accentuate such quality in photographs by mobilising the visual techniques he acquired from his study and work. In this sense, the visual creations he managed to construct using food (instead of the food items themselves in a gastronomic or symbolic sense) are the key elements that represent his self, as it demonstrates how he *“experience[s] the world”* and *“look[s] at the world”*.

Concerning the role of food, AARON mentioned that he understands food as *“different things”*: something to fill his stomach when he is *“just really hungry”*, something that is *“simple and very tasty”*, something as *“an amazing sensory experience”* or *“great art”*, and something that has a *“history”* that is *“so closely related to the history of civilisation of history of different cultures”*. However, when making food photos that express himself, he stressed that he instead treats them more as visual objects that are interesting, *“natural”* and have *“organic shapes and colours”* that he appreciates. Thus, when expressing himself through food photography, relating to such interpretations, for AARON, on the one hand, food attracts him because it

possesses formal beauty that he appreciates about the material world. On the other hand, because AARON discovered such features and has the visual creativity to make use of such features, he can also use food as a creative medium to construct aesthetically interesting visual forms, which can express both his confirmative aesthetic feelings generated from his engagements with the material world and his aesthetic valuation of organic beauty that exists in the material world.

DeNora (2000, p.47) argues that people's music experiences contribute to the "constitution and maintenance" of their senses of selves. In a similar vein, we can also find that AARON used his foodstagramming experiences to constitute and maintain himself, and he did this by experiencing and feeling the world via food together with mobilising the visual ability he acquired in the past. As DeNora (2000) and Hennion (2016) argue, we should take the cultural objects involved in cultural practices seriously. Thus, when understanding AARON's foodstagramming practice, we should also take the foodstagrams he created seriously in their own right. Only in this way, we can recognise that beyond gaining career-wise achievements and recognition, there is another reason that motivated AARON to create and share food photos on his Instagram. From his accounts, we can find that such reason can be the opportunity he gets to use aesthetic means that represents his artist background to express himself via his aesthetic feelings and values that he generated from experiencing the world.

5.1.2 Using Food as a Sculptural Material

In a similar vein, another participant SANDY SUFFIELD (@sandysuffield, woman, 40-50) also adopts a similar disinterested relationship with food in her food photographic projects as AARON. SANDY has an educational background in graphic design and art direction. She is a set designer/art director who often works collaboratively with photographers to produce still-life images about both food and non-food subjects. Like in AARON's case, SANDY's food-related works also have a collaborative nature. SANDY stated that her art director role is to "*hatch the ideas away*" at the beginning of a photoshoot about how to visually execute certain topics or concepts at hand and her set designer role is to then find props to build the settings that are needed for the shoot. In addition, during the shoot, she also works together with the photographers and sometimes food stylists to complete the shoot. Like AARON, SANDY also shares food photography works from both her commissioned projects which are normally either from her editorial projects commissioned by publishers or her personal projects she conducts with her colleagues for "*fun*". Similarly, SANDY's foodstagrams also represent both her professional and personal selves. By sharing these photos, SANDY said, on the one

hand, she is “*just kinda putting stuff out there and see if anything speaks*” that can help her to “*get work*”. On the other hand, since her work has a conceptual nature, by sharing her images, SANDY said she also hopes to create “*a form of entertainment for mates*” through the interesting combination of visual forms and the concepts they represent.

Like AARON, SANDY also adopts a disinterested way to approach food. In a similar vein to AARON, SANDY also regards food as material forms that have aesthetically interesting visual forms, so she also uses food as a creative medium to make sculptures. SANDY mentioned that she does love food because it is an “*amazing thing*” and “*a really beautiful thing for connecting people*”. However, when she creates her food photography works, she often switches to a more disinterested mode, which she defined as “*a drier approach*” to treating food. For such an approach, she explained: “*It’s not got the whole sort of sensory thing that you have, with, a sort of real food. This is sort of looking at food much more as a sort of a sculptural thing.*” As mentioned, AARON’s food sculptures often do not represent any concrete meanings but mainly showcase aesthetically interesting visual forms. For SANDY’s food sculptures, while they also appear as aesthetically interesting visual forms, they do represent certain concepts, although not always directly related to food.

SANDY brought up an example in the interview that can explain what she meant by treating food as a “*sculptural thing*”. This example is called: *THE ODD COUPLE*. It is a series she created for a book called *The Flavour Thesaurus* (Segnit, 2010) on “*funny food combinations*”. When explaining her art direction process, SANDY said:

Those were presented very very simply with a kind of nice, creased paper tablecloth which kind of helps with the colour, but it was really about not tryna disguise that simple idea of, you’re talking about two foods. And they were treated in a very sculptural way because it’s not a sort of academic tone for the book, but it’s an awful lot of, sort of analysis, so it [the art direction] had that sort of slightly cool approach I suppose. Rather than shooting in natural light and sort of overhead and just making it look like something your friends just prepared.
(SANDY)

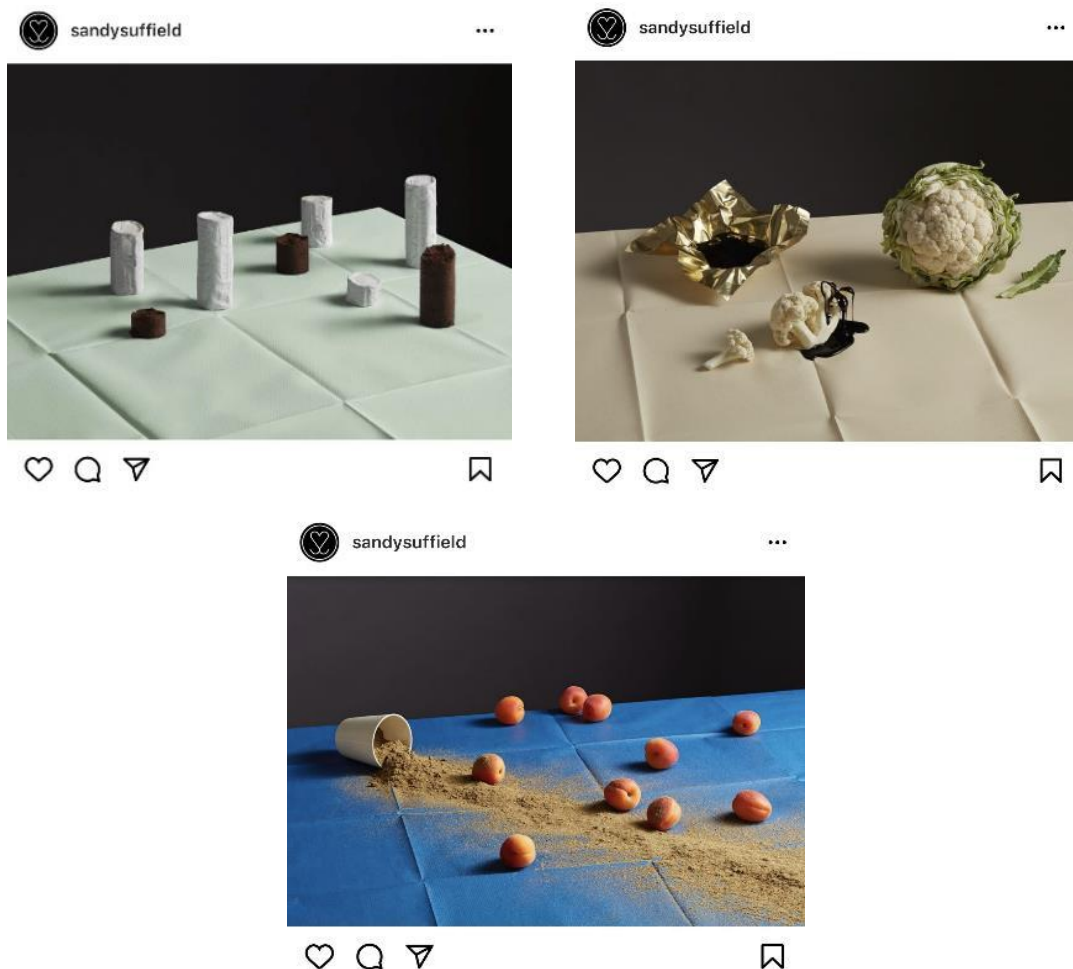


Figure 19 abc: Selected posts of *THE ODD COUPLE* - © SANDY SUFFIELD

In Figure 19, for the goat's cheese and coffee in 19a, cauliflower and chocolate in 19b and apricots and cumin in 19c, rather than cooked or prepared dishes for gastronomic consumption as in food commercials, they were simply placed on a coloured creased paper uncooked and unprepared. Such compositions resemble the one in 5b (Figure 5) where the vegetables are stacked as rectangle ice blocks in front of a white backdrop. As SANDY stated, it was her deliberate choice because her role was to execute the concept of “*that simple idea*” of the combination of two foods and such a “*slightly cool approach*” fit the analytical tone of the book. Thus, we can regard not “*making it look like something your friends just prepared*” but using food to construct visually interesting sculptures as the key to her art direction. By doing this, she could guide the readers' attention to the concept of the interesting combinations of two ingredients, instead of any other unrelated information. Thus, in each foodstagram, the uncommon visual form the food sculpture is in can serve as the “creative disruption”: “the strategic application of visual techniques, which challenge audience expectations” (summary from Taylor and Keating, 2018, p.308 of Waldman, 2012) that SANDY used to detach her

audience from wanting to eat the food directly. To do this, as she stressed, she instead intended to encourage the audience to think about what the food objects are and ruminate on the thoughts of the uncommon flavour combinations that the pictured two types of food can create while reading the book. She also summarised:

So, in short, it's all good food in the context of my work, because it excites me, because... what it's doing conceptually... But it's really not about good as in, the value of it nutritionally. (SANDY)

If we observe SANDY's Instagram, we can find that all the foodstagram she shared have a conceptual nature where she used food to make visually interesting sculptures to represent certain concepts either she and her colleagues set or are requested by her clients. Why such an approach is important? As she commented:

I think that's just the way my brain works and that was why most of my career was as a graphic designer because it's about tryna find the strongest way to communicate something. So, you chip away and get rid of anything that's sort of extraneous, you get rid of stuff that you don't need, in order to bring clarity. (SANDY)

Thus, SANDY's conceptual style of making photos and her sculptural relationship with food define how she creates her photographic works. According to her, it is the fittest style, as that is “*just the way*” how her brain “*works*”. On the other hand, for SANDY, the approach is also how she prefers to express herself and how she experiences the world.

As introduced earlier, SANDY said she started sharing her photographic works on Instagram intending to get her creative ability as a creative director/set designer more exposure, so that she could potentially gain more commissions. According to her, Instagram was not effective in helping her to win commissions. She suspected that the reason might be that her works are conceptual and editorial so that they fit into a smaller market than more commercial food photography works:

I'm guessing at least some of them [other food photography professionals] would be shooting a lot more commercial stuff than me. You know maybe for big supermarkets... so I understand why they can kind of choreograph it [Instagram] more and how that might genuinely get them more work because I think there's more of that work out there to get. But the types of work I want to get, I think there isn't as much of it. There are fewer places where my work will fit... They're more of an editorial context, like KINFOLK is a good example. (SANDY)

However, understanding this, she stated: “*I just have to continue doing what I want to do because I can't really do stuff just because it'll get me a job for [a large UK chain*

supermarket].” In this sense, she has a strong intention of getting more commissions and she understands that doing more commercial food photography and sharing such works on Instagram can help her to reach such a goal. However, as “*doing what I want to do*” is an important ethos she said she often stuck to in her work, SANDY still chose to maintain her conceptual style by treating food more as sculptural materials, instead of delicious food in food commercials. On the one hand, such a consistent style works almost as a business card that represents herself as a creative director who is willing to take commissions on conceptual photographic projects. On the other hand, this style also represents how she chooses to feel the material world and who she is as a creative professional. In this sense, in SANDY’s foodstagramming experiences, her need for self-expression is as important as gaining more socio-economic benefits via getting paid commissions.

Indeed, most of SANDY’s foodstagrams are from her personal projects. Although she shares these projects now to “*try and sort of attempt to get me commercial work*”, they were initially made, using her words, “*partly for fun, to be frank, cuz I just enjoy doing it*”. For SANDY, such personal projects are labour-intensive, as she reflected in the interview that “*all decent work, it takes a lot of effort, even though it’s hugely enjoyable, it’s pretty involved*”. Like @jimboiuk’s case, we can regard the effort and time SANDY spent on making these food photos partly as free creative labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) that she had to exercise to win paid commissions. Also, it is a game she has to play for working in the creative industry. While the authors define such labour as exploitative, from SANDY’s earlier words, we can also see that she initiated such labour-intensive work because she wanted to do craft work. We need to recognise that SANDY decided to conduct such craft work and share her final results on Instagram because she has the desire to “do a job well for its own sake” (Sennett, 2008, p.9). Thus, the effort she devoted can also be interpreted as creative labour (see chapter 2).

SANDY informed me that she often comes up with conceptual ideas which are “*never really big ideas*”, but “*just quite small ideas*”. For coming up with ideas, she mentioned: “*I don’t really know where ideas come from and I think that’s partly the beauty of them... It’s sort of being given to you and if you’re lucky enough, you’ll be there to kind of catch it... I don’t know, but I’m very happy that they arrived*”. In this sense, SANDY’s idea generation process according to her is not instrumental but aesthetically felt. It is because she did not force those ideas to form but waited for them to come to her unexpectedly, which she considers “*the beauty*” of such a process. A personal project that she shared on Instagram in 2016 named WOBBLED is an example.

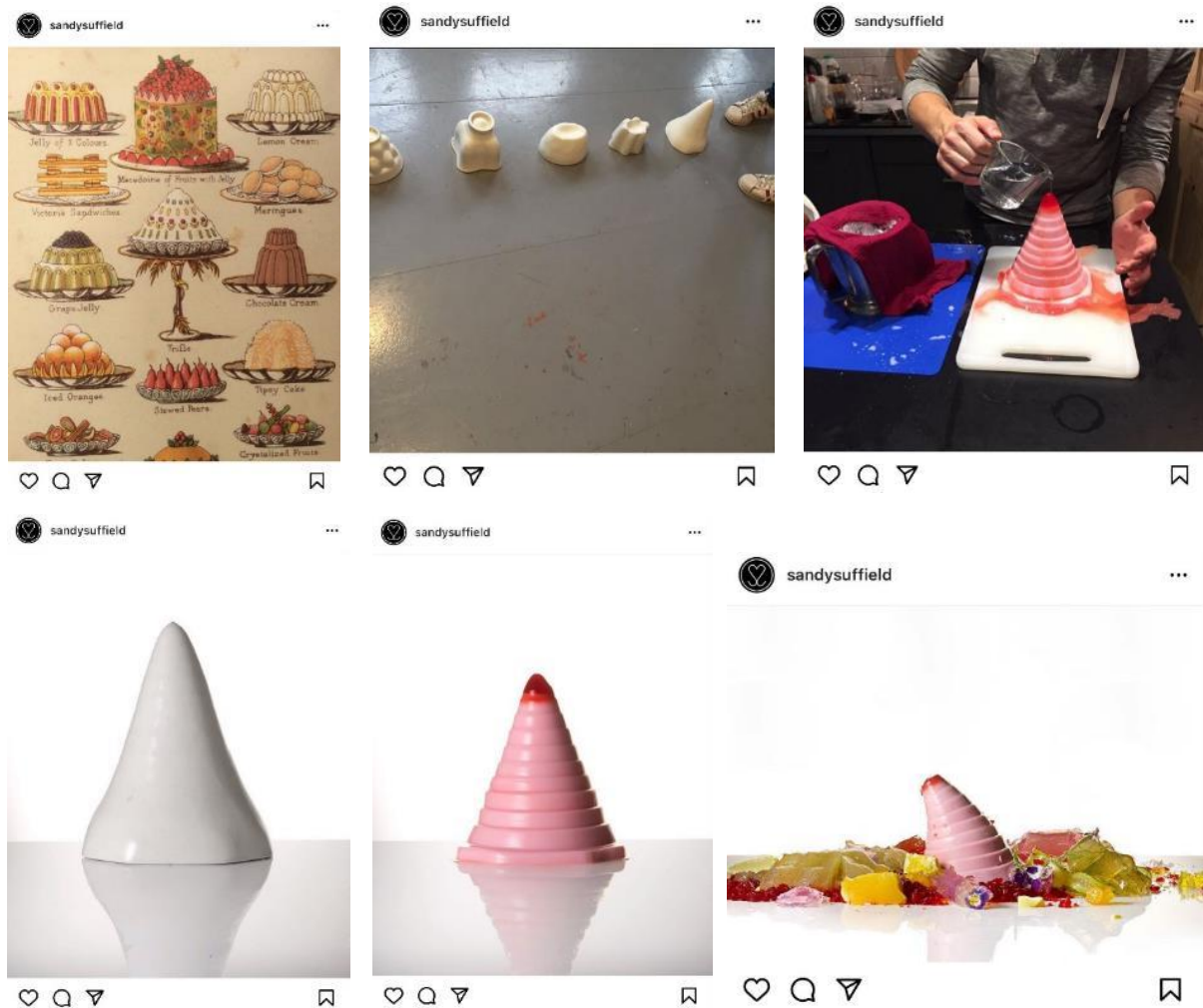


Figure 20 abc: The creative process of WOBBLED; def: Selected posts of WOBBLED - © SANDY SUFFIELD

For this project, SANDY mentioned that her mother has a collection of “*really beautiful Victorian jelly moulds*”, so she generated “*just tiny little playful idea*” to “*simply*” represent the jelly moulds so that the audience could see “*the outside of the jelly mould and then that inside of what’s actually produced*”. Figure 20 demonstrates the creative process of how the project was hatched and executed, as well as the final product. 20a shows the historical document SANDY referred to at the initial stage about how moulds are used in the past to make food. 20b provides us with an overview of the mould collection. 20c demonstrates how the jelly was made using one of the moulds by SANDY’s food stylist colleague. Then in the next row, in 20d and 20e, we can examine the final photographic representations of one mould and one jelly. In 20f, we can see a collection of all the jellies made using different moulds (see 20b) with most of them smashed and laid around the pink piece wobbling right in the centre of the image. The representational techniques she used were very simple. By featuring the main subjects right in the middle in front of a plain background, our gazes are likely to be fixed on the moulds or the jellies. Thus, indeed as she stated, her work visually represented her “*tiny little playful*

idea” of showing the “*really beautiful Victorian jelly moulds*” from different angles, such as how they look like and what food products they can be used to make. Creating these photos indeed takes much time and effort, but Sandy expressed that “*I’m just excited that an idea has come rounded in my head and I’m just very impatient to go and get it made*”. Therefore, from the excitement and impatience she mentioned, together with the “*fun*” and joy she gains by executing her ideas and sharing her work via Instagram with her “*mates*”, we can discover SANDY’s self-motivation in driving her to conduct such labour-intensive craft work: the need to represent herself creatively.

5.1.3 Discussion

From observing both AARON’s and SANDY’s cases, we can find that both participants have a more disinterested and abstract relationship with food when making their images. When observing their foodstagram, seeing that food is being divorced from its gastronomic forms, we are encouraged to see food as interesting material objects in their own right. Both AARON and SANDY expressed their enjoyment in eating food and socialising with other people via food occasions. Also, they reported their recognition of the important role food (as a gastronomic entity) plays in forming our culture and social relations. However, from the above portraits, we can find that via photographing food, they both chose to refrain from such understandings but to actively explore alternative relations they can develop from food. Encouraged by the visual nature of photography and influenced by their backgrounds related to art and design, by making food photos, they chose to especially pay close attention to the visual dimension of food as different material objects exist in our everyday lives.

Regarding creating their foodstagram, AARON and SANDY both featured visually interesting sculptures that are made of food to represent their aesthetic feelings and thoughts that are related to their engagements with the material world. They then visually represented such sculptures photographically. Thus, similar to Barnbaum’s (2017, p.346) description of his expressive photographic approach, AARON’s and SANDY’s photos are not simple records of certain moments taken from everyday life but are visual expressions which depict the “essence” of food as how the participants “see” and “feel” it. For such food sculptures, in AARON’s case, they are simply aesthetically interesting visual forms, while in SANDY’s case, they are representational of certain concepts. No matter whether these sculptures represent any concrete meanings or not, as illustrated in both the above portraits, they all bear the aesthetic feelings and reflections of both participants that were derived from their engagements with the material world. The uncommon appearance that the sculptures have, the bizarre settings that they are

situated in and the inedible form that they are in are all intended by the participants to disassociate their audiences from automatically considering food merely as something for us to eat. By disassociating the audience from such automatic thoughts, as illustrated in their interpretations of their foodstagram, both participants aimed to encourage their audiences to put aside their previous understandings of food to understand it anew by recognising food itself as an entity that is important in its own right.

The foodstagram both AARON and SANDY posted were not specially created for their Instagram but were originally created in photoshoots either for their commissioned work or for their personal projects. Both participants mentioned that they use Instagram partly as a networking tool with their portfolio so that they could promote their professional work to both win commissions and connect with collaborators. On the other hand, both participants also mentioned the personal meanings of their accounts beyond their work. In AARON's case, it is to *"sort of showing off a little bit"* in a *"fun"* way of *"look what I did"* to *"gauge response"* from the audience so that he can get feedback and inspirations which can aid his future photographic creations. For SANDY, it is to share her excitement, enjoyment and *"fun"* of creating her photographic works and bring *"entertainment for mates"*. How should we interpret their actions of sharing their works on Instagram then?

On the one hand, both AARON and SANDY have loved art since they were very young. They both have family members working in the creative field. They both received extensive training in art or design in their degrees and have been working in the creative industry for decades. Also, when creating images, both participants choose to take a disinterested approach and try to distance from the documenting function of photography. As both Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p.8) and Murray (2008, p.154) identify, being able to document and preserve life is the social function of photography that makes image-making familiar and important to the majority of us. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p.8), "the great majority subordinates" to the "social function" of photography, "namely and principally the recording and compilation of the 'souvenirs' of objects, people or events socially designated as important". In this sense, when photography is valued for its documenting function, the "artistic activity" of "elaboration of 'pure' forms" that is important in artistic image-making would subordinate to the social function of photography (ibid). In contrast, "aesthetes" would contrarily use photography as an attempt to "liberate photographic practice from the social function" (ibid).

As we can find in AARON and SANDY's cases, neither of them treated the food objects or scenes as "souvenirs" to be recorded in their lives. The food objects in their foodstagramms do not have any connection to both participants' gastronomic experiences. Instead, AARON and SANDY chose to photograph the food objects because they possess certain materials that can help both participants to create the specific visual forms that they need to convey either aesthetic or conceptual meanings in their minds. Thus, AARON's and SANDY's disinterested way of treating food and their valuation of pure forms make them fit the definition of "aesthetes" (Bourdieu et al., 1990, p.8). As mentioned in their words, both participants also positioned their understanding of food to the opposite side of the commonsensical ones while also distancing their photographs from simple documents. Therefore, we can partly interpret both participants' foodstagramming practices as their means to signal their differences from other people.

However, we cannot simply understand such differences as their actions of making distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) from other people, as AARON and SANDY do not intend to elevate their aesthetic taste at the sacrifice of devaluing others'. From the interviews, both AARON and SANDY specified that they are not against people who treat food simply as something to eat or a device to represent a memory. Additionally, they also expressed their acknowledgement of people using photography to record and represent food in those terms and have fun through their foodstagramming practices and do not consider such an approach inferior to theirs. As I presented in the above portraits, it is because the more disinterested way of approaching food suits the aesthetic feelings and values that they generate from experiencing the material world. Also, it is through such a disinterested and abstract way of representing food that they managed to highlight the shared message: food needs to be appreciated in its own right. We should therefore understand their styles of creating their foodstagramms as approaches to allow them to express their "imagination or vision" (Barnbaum, 2017, p.246) of the way that they prefer to "see the world" (ibid). Through observing, feeling and thinking about different food objects, together with aestheticising these objects via creating their foodstagramms, we can understand both participants' styles as their means to aesthetically represent their corporeal beings (Spyer, 2006, p.126) and existential self (Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) that are defined through their experiences and reflections of their daily engagements with everyday objects in the material world.

5.2 Taking an Exploratory and Appreciative Look at Food

In section 5.1, I presented two portraits about taking a disinterested and abstract look at food when conducting foodstagramming for which the participants divorce food from its gastronomic settings and instead regard it as material objects that are interesting in their own right. While not all participants choose to use the same styles as AARON and SANDY, many participants did report that in certain moments of their foodstagramming practices, they focus on observing the materiality of food and then communicate certain qualities that they consider as aesthetically pleasing photographically. While the examples presented in the last section emphasised divorcing food from its gastronomic settings to highlight its own material importance, in this section, I present the portraits of another two participants: @matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH to introduce a different way to look at food, which I call an appreciative and defamiliarised look.

Within this look, with a similar mission to highlight the material importance of food via their foodstagrams, @matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH choose to approach food objects as how they appear in their original everyday settings, such as kitchens, dining tables or markets. Instead of using food to create inedible sculptures, both participants choose to use their cameras to take zoomed-in and zoomed-out looks at the food objects. This is a defamiliarising-looking technique for which while food objects are still situated in familiar everyday settings, they are turned into visually interesting objects with certain textures, colours, lines and movements that deserve our aesthetic appreciation.

Various other participants (including casual users, food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs) also mentioned that creating foodstagrams has made them attend more to the material dimension of food that they used to ignore. Many of them also mentioned that through such visual experiences, they have gained enjoyable feelings and appreciation towards food as interesting material objects like @matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH. Thus, @matt_inwood's and LUCY-RUTH's portraits also serve to exemplify how other participants use a similar exploratory and appreciative look to approach food in their foodstagramming experiences.

5.2.1 Deriving Affirmative Feelings via Observing Ordinary Food

@matt_inwood (man, 40-50) is a graphic designer/art director who often works with chefs to develop food-related books. He is also a phone photographer who uses his phone to conduct shootings for restaurants to produce visual content to be used on their social media.

Additionally, he is a teacher who organises Instagram masterclasses to provide tips for foodstagramming enthusiasts to enhance their smartphone photography skills and Instagramming techniques. Like AARON and SANDY, @matt_inwood referred to his Instagram as a “*marketing platform*” to showcase his work-related creations. In the meantime, @matt_inwood also treats his account as a platform to “*show off beautiful content*” and get the “*oxygen*” (“*feedback*” from the audience), which he thinks all creators need to aid their creations. @matt_inwood stressed he has developed “*a lot of pleasure*” from food in life, but food is not the reason for him “*to get up in the morning*”. He does not consider himself a “*foodie*” who, for example, will “*get genuinely excited about sourdough bread*”. Thus, while @matt_inwood often shares foodstagrams featuring his own meals, his focus is not simply on sharing with the audience recipes he tried as other foodie participants often do. Instead, as we can observe from @matt_inwood’s words, @matt_inwood also uses his foodstagrams to represent the heightened aesthetic feelings he often generates from closely observing food.

Similar to AARON, @matt_inwood also expressed his appreciation of the formal beauty of food objects. Thus, when he makes foodstagrams, he often takes a very “*graphic*” approach to highlight their beauty. In early 2020, I attended his Instagram Masterclass and from the class, I got to know what @matt_inwood’s “*graphic*” approach means. The first technique @matt_inwood taught us for creating food images was to “*simplify things*” and “*reduce a shot down to the most important shapes and lines*”⁴. As he wrote in the workshop handout, he often channels the graphic designer self when making food photos. For designing a book, he said he often chooses to “*reduce the content to a series of shapes*”. Also, when making food photos, he mentioned he often chooses to reduce a plate of food “*to just a circle inside a square*” and would search for the “*strong lines*” that “*lead the eye around the frame*”. For @matt_inwood, such compositional elements can “*offer very strong templates for impactful images*”. Exempt for this, @matt_inwood also emphasised throughout the masterclass the importance of light. As he also stressed in our interview, “*I truly believe that the light gives everything its form and once you show the form of that thing really very clearly, it will allow the dish to speak for itself*”. Thus, the key in @matt_inwood’s “*graphic*” approach is to “*objectify*” food and the whole scene, which means turning these elements into material objects with interesting shapes, lines, colours and textures.

⁴ Quotes from @matt_inwood’s masterclass slides

Why does @matt_inwood want to objectify food? @matt_inwood mentioned that when he conducts photoshoots for his restaurant clients, he often uses such objectifying technique:

I do like to... objectify the food and divorce it from the restaurant or the kitchen service, or their expensive £90 menu that is a part of them. And let's just focus on what it is, that little tower of rice, or the form of these things, because they are so visually interesting and if we can get lights onto these subjects in a really interesting way, then I think you want to eat it. (@matt_inwood)

In this sense, objectifying food can help to accentuate the formal qualities of food, so that the audience will likely focus their attention on the food itself. By focusing on the food as material objects that are “so visually interesting”, as his words suggest, the audience can create a more vivid imagination through the foodstagram. Thus, the audience can almost feel that they were in the setting seeing and touching the food objects by themselves, as well as generating fond feelings and cravings for the food. @matt_inwood commented: “*That’s a wonderful thing because that’s the power of that photograph that has persuaded that action, but also that’s telling one of my clients that they should book me again to do more photography for them.*”

In this sense, we can first understand @matt_inwood’s objectifying approach as a technique to create visual communications for his clients’ products to enable them to have the “power” to “persuade” potential consumers. At the same time, such an approach can also help him to win more future commissioned work. Like AARON, we can also regard @matt_inwood’s abilities to 1. objectify food, 2. appreciate its material beauty and 3. use complementary visual techniques to represent such beauty photographically as monikers of his embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17). As @matt_inwood stated that he uses his Instagram partly as a “marketing platform” to showcase his work-related creations, similar to AARON’s case, the performance of @matt_inwood’s embodied cultural capital can therefore allow him to gain more economic capital.

Except for such an instrumental purpose, on the other hand, presenting his objectifying approach towards food also has personal meanings for @matt_inwood, as such an approach reflects and expresses how he experiences the material world and what his aesthetic values are. He expressed:

I do become quite fixated on the thing itself and I like to see it away from... the whole story of the kitchen behind that thing. I love that... it can stand on its own right, and it can be its own thing. I love that... it appeals to people on that basic level. (@matt_inwood)

This is the reason why he always chooses to treat his image subject “*as an object first that has form*”. For the foodstagrams he posts on his Instagram, @matt_inwood said: “*I uniquely, I hope that I can do something that’s uniquely me and my take on something.*” Thus, he explained, there is a difference between how he creates content for his client’s feed versus his own feed.

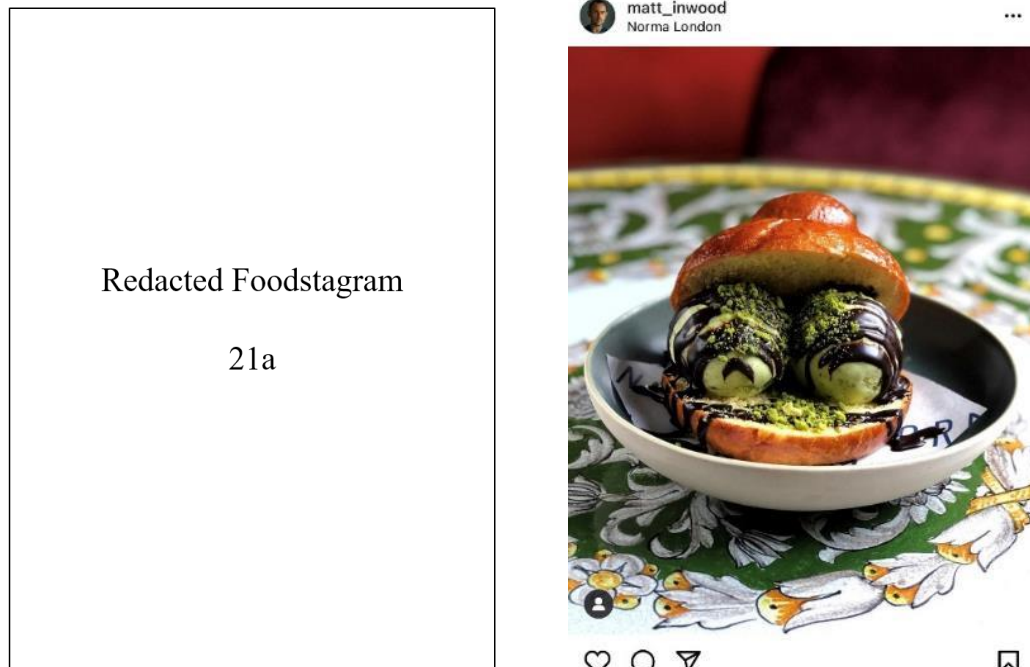


Figure 21 ab: The same ice-cream brioche posted on @matt_inwood’s client’s Feed⁵ (@norma_ldn, 2021) and his own Feed - © @matt_inwood

He mentioned an example to illustrate the difference. In Figure 21, we can see two foodstagrams about the same dish which were shot during the same photoshoot but were posted by @matt_inwood’s client and himself respectively in their feeds. He interpreted:

They are generally different shots... You know that same brioche bun for my feed might be different to the one that goes onto theirs [clients’]. And if it is for theirs... then I know that actually my first priority must be to sell the dish ... But if I’m given free rein to do my thing and the image that goes onto my account, rather than the one that goes onto theirs, will probably be that slightly more graphic thing I think. (@matt_inwood)

In 21a, with the plate, table, chair and wall all showing parts of their forms, the sandwich is the only object that shows its full form. Also, the plain dark background sits in noticeable contrast to the patterned dark brown drizzle and light green sprinkle, as well as the bright and shiny ice cream and brioche bun. Additionally, compared to 21b, in 21a, the image

⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTrmuEfIONV/>

angle makes the sandwich appears more upwardly tilted so that the ice cream filling faces more directly towards the audience. Also, 21a presents a closer look at the food compared to 21b. These are all elements that can invite the audience's gaze directedly towards the food subject and crave to have the dish. Whereas, the dish is placed further away from the audience in 21b. However, we can note the reappearance of the round shapes from the ice cream, sandwich, plate and table rim. Also, the floral pattern on the table is as striking as the dish and its green and yellow colours resonate with the colours of the powder, ice cream and brioche. Additionally, the contrast of the light-coloured and patterned table and brioche sit in close contrast to the dark-coloured and plain chair and wall. Thus, although 21b is also an aesthetically interesting representation of the dish, the interesting shapes and forms make it more graphically interesting so that we can spend more time noticing the variations of the different visual elements. Therefore, relating to @matt_inwood's words, we can then find our experience with 21b fits more closely to how he likes to experience the butter: to appreciate the formal beauty of different material objects and recognise their importance in their own right.



Figure 22 ab: @matt_inwood's foodstagram depicting mundane food objects and scenes- © @matt_inwood

When observing @matt_inwood's feed, I often discovered foodstagram of mundane food objects and scenes, such as shown in Figure 22: used kitchenware lying in the sink (22a) and opened butter lying on top of its packaging (22b). These are not commonly featured subjects in other participants' foodstagram collections, but in @matt_inwood's photos, we can see them being depicted in a similar affirmative way as Sánchez Cotán's painting (3b, Figure

3). For 22a, @matt_inwood simply captioned: “*When your washing-up is the prettiest available thing to point your phone camera at...*”. Thus, the reason he captured the kitchen sink scene in his foodstagram was that he found beauty in such seemingly mundane and widely “available” “washing-up” in everyday life. In a similar vein, for 22b, he wrote:

Butter, just opened. One of my favourite mundane things to photograph. These sorts of photos bring far more pleasure than all manner of colourful and complex subjects and arrangements. The mass of the object, the creases in the foil packet, the shadows and highlights (the light... always, the light). (@matt_inwood)

Therefore, again, the reason @matt_inwood created this foodstagram was that he found aesthetically interesting material qualities in the “mundane” “object”: butter. From such a widely available object in everyday life, he discovered the aesthetic qualities of the shape of the butter (“mass”), the line created by the packaging (“creases”) and the contrast of the light (“shadows and highlights”). For him, these qualities of the mundane object have much more aesthetic value than any other objects that are commonly perceived as aesthetically important (“all manner of colourful and complex subjects and arrangements”), as photographing the butter brought him “far more pleasure”.

For some of such foodstagramms featuring mundane objects, at the end of their captions, @matt_inwood sometimes also tease out his phone photography workshops, so as argued, we should not ignore the instrumental nature they serve in helping @matt_inwood gain more economic capital. However, as I illustrate in another portrait of @matt_inwood in the next chapter, unlike some participants who have separate Instagram accounts for their career and personal life, @matt_inwood chose to use just one account. He also uses his Instagram to present his personal self, via “expressing” his “opinions”, “rant”, feelings and values. He stressed that he does not use his Instagram to merely promote his professional self, as he stated: “if it’s just work? I don’t think it would interest me so much really”. He also intends to build a “caring” relationship with his audience, which means to “care about the people I’m talking to and hoping to engage in a conversation with them”, because “that matters”.

In this sense, for the two examples in Figure 22, we should also recognise them as @matt_inwood’s visual expressions of his personal self to his audience regarding what he likes and what he regards as valuable. As @matt_inwood stressed in his caption, the washing-up in 22a and the butter in 22b are very mundane objects. However, in 22a, he presented the bowl, spoons and leftover liquid with bright light in high definition and contrast right in the middle of the photo, which can directly attract our gazes to notice the interesting combinations of

colours, lines and textures of different objects. In 22b, he presented the butter and creased paper on top of a dark background which highlights the glistened conditions of both the butter and the creased paper. Also, the surfaces of both the butter and the creased paper were not flat but slightly uneven, which can highlight the contrast of the light and shadow on both of their surfaces. Thus, as Carter (2014) refers to Szarkowski's (1966, pp.6–12) argument regarding the “distinctive visual and pictorial characteristics” (Carter, 2014, p.86) of photography, @matt_inwood was using various photographic image-making techniques to accentuate the formal details of his valorised mundane but beautiful objects in each foodstagram to create a view that “emphasizes description and formal discoveries” (ibid). By sharing such foodstagram with his audience, @matt_inwood enables his audience to “deepen and personalize their experiences of the details of the world surrounding them with the aid of the camera” (ibid) so that they are encouraged by him to experience their material surroundings differently and be appreciative of objects forming such surroundings. Thus, we can also interpret @matt_inwood's foodstagramming practice as his visual means to communicate and share with his audience his aesthetic feelings and values, which work as reminders of the importance of appreciating our material world.

5.2.2 Exploring Varied Feelings via Sensing Food

Similar to @matt_inwood, another participant LUCY-RUTH HATHAWAY (@itslucyruth, woman, 30-40) also mentioned her enjoyment of closely observing and feeling food in her life. Like @matt_inwood, LUCY-RUTH also expressed her appreciation of the different material qualities of food and when interpreting her foodstagram, she also often stressed such qualities. However, while @matt_inwood's foodstagram often stress qualities that are related to affirmative feelings such as beauty, in LUCY-RUTH's foodstagram, except for beauty, she also stressed various other qualities.

LUCY-RUTH has degrees and diplomas in both photography and film, as well as culinary art. She is a food stylist who works collaboratively with photographers, art directors and set designers to conduct commercial and editorial food photographic and videographic projects. Like AARON, SANDY and @matt_inwood, Instagram for LUCY-RUTH serves as a tool to “*share my work*” and “*promote myself professionally*”. Similarly, like the three participants, LUCY-RUTH also uses her Instagram to share her own work to express herself. In the interview, she mentioned her recent decision of starting “*sharing more images and videos that I take myself*” because that could make her feed appear “*more interesting*” and “*people get a bit more of a sense of my personal taste and aesthetic and also what I'm doing*”. She pointed

out that as she did not tend to share photos of herself on Instagram, sharing her “*taste*”, “*aesthetic*” and activities could offer “*an alternative way of showing people what I’m doing with my day, with my life*”. Thus, in addition to being a work tool, Instagram is also a space LUCY-RUTH uses to express herself via what she likes, what styles she uses to create her work and what activities she does in her daily life.

What is LUCY-RUTH’s taste in food and her aesthetic (style) of food photography? In the interview, she expressed:

I love bright colours, I love anything with texture, and I like things with movement in the texture, like liquids or any of those elements of the food that feels playful, but also sometimes borders on feeling perhaps unsettling. I like this playfulness with, in food, or imagery. (LUCY-RUTH)

Thus, in LUCY-RUTH’s account, we can discover her appreciation of the different material qualities of food, such as colours and textures. She is attracted by (“*love*”) such features of food because attending to them can bring her various interesting aesthetic feelings, which involve not only “*playful*”, but also “*unsettling*” ones. In the last sentence, we can also observe her same preference for image-making.

When I asked LUCY-RUTH how she defines her personal aesthetic/style when making her foodstagram, she mentioned: “*someone described my work as very ‘visceral’*” and she considers it as “*probably, maybe a good description*”. I then asked her to explain what she meant by “*visceral*” and why she considers such a quality can define her style. She compared visceral with sensual, as she likes things “*that make people, perhaps also feel a little bit uncomfortable, but also create desire*”. She then contrasted what she meant with the widely used term and hashtag on Instagram: food porn and #foodporn:

I really hate the phrase “food porn”. It’s not. I find it really cheapen the aesthetic skill and art of what food and the photography in food and styling of food is about. But I understand why it is a word because it is making a correlation between how food appeals to our innate animal senses and instincts of desire. So, I understand why it ended up being a word, but I don’t like how it ends up sounding kind of tacky as a description to what is a whole set of skills and a whole, I suppose, aesthetic language around how to make food look delicious. But basically, I get why it’s a phrase. I get that it’s useful to people. (LUCY-RUTH)

In this sense, in her understanding, food porn stands for “*a correlation between how food appeals to our innate animal senses and instincts of desire*” that emphasises just the senses of

taste, in a gastronomic sense. In chapter 2, I introduced that food porn is often interpreted as a phrase people often use to describe foodstagramms which feature highly inviting dishes for the audience to eat (McDonnell, 2016; Taylor and Keating, 2018). Thus, in line with LUCY-RUTH's understanding of this phrase, the attractiveness that food porn catches about food lies in its gastronomic nature, but not its material nature. We can find that LUCY-RUTH's approach to sensing food and styling food, as well as the feelings she expresses via her foodstagramms also stress how food appeals to "*our innate animal senses and instincts of desire*". However, for her, the appeal and attraction of food come from its nature of being objects with material features that are interesting in their own right, but not from it being an entity that we can consume gastronomically.

Before interviewing LUCY-RUTH, I discovered that she often attaches the hashtag #foodporn in her post captions. Thus, while understanding that she "*hate[s]*" this word from the interview, I was confused. I mentioned my puzzle and she explained:

That's because it gets a lot of likes. So, it's a big part of my business is. Not just business, but self-promotion you can call it, is you know making sure that I get a lot of followers and likes... Maybe this is why I resent the phrase, because it feels like I wish there was another way of describing this kind of intense visual experience that you can have with food imagery other than food porn. (LUCY-RUTH)

Thus, she uses the hashtag only for instrumental reasons for benefiting and promoting her business and herself. The definition food porn is often associated with does not define exactly what she valorises, but as someone who has to use her Instagram to attract attention for receiving more commissioned work, she has to attach such phrase in her post captions, even if she "*hate[s]*" it. As we can also see from the last sentence, she does not dislike the word per se, but "*resent[s]*" the discrepancy that is created by the common understanding that the word is associated with which lacks recognition of the "*intense visual experience that you can have with food*".

In this sense, through the above two quotes regarding LUCY-RUTH's interpretation of her view on the relationship between the word "food porn" and her food photography aesthetic, we can discover her intense feelings and appreciation of the material quality of food. Why is expressing such feelings and appreciation important for her? As I demonstrate next, it is because it defines how she has always been experiencing food since a very young age, which now also forms a large part of her current work and life experiences. Thus, how she experiences food can partly define who LUCY-RUTH is.

In her book: *The Food Styling Encyclopaedia*, LUCY-RUTH defined the practice as “*the art of making and preparing food for the camera*”. As LUCY-RUTH conducted training in a culinary school and had work experience in the hospitality industry, I asked her in the interview what the similarities and differences are between “*making and preparing food for the camera*” and for guests dining in restaurants. She answered that for both occasions, she needs to use some basic visual skills to make the food look “*aesthetically pleasing to the eye*”. However, as she added: “*for the camera, things get more complicated*”.

She mentioned that the image-making process for one food image can take hours in commercial shooting and a stylist needs to make compromises and use some styling techniques to cope with various practical limitations, such as food getting cold and ice or ice-cream getting melted. Also, when shooting adverts or moving photos, they need to bear that the audience might only have “*less than two seconds to identify the food*”. Thus, in her job, LUCY-RUTH said she often needs to showcase the definitive material characteristics of food to make the food in the photos appear “*legible*” to the audience so that anyone can quickly identify what the food is in seconds. Furthermore, she commented that demonstrating food in certain forms for a camera, such as cheese being pulled from a pizza when someone takes a slice, is “*very challenging*”, as “*these things are expected visual skills that you will have and they’re not just visual skills, they’re visual end results of your physical, tangible skills*”. Therefore, she summarised what food styling means to a food stylist: “*so there is a whole visual language around the actual skills of creating these things and some people specialise specifically in these things*”.

In this sense, LUCY-RUTH’s work as a food stylist involves heightening her bodily skills to sense and perceive food objects in various ways, such as seeing these objects to perceive their various visual forms and touching them to feel different sensations. Then, using visual means, she prepares, assembles and dresses the food to heighten such perceptions and sensations, so that later such features can be captured photographically. Thus, her visceral approach to approaching food and depicting food defines her distinctive characteristics of her being a food stylist, which is also “*what I’m doing and like what I get up to*”.

LUCY-RUTH mentioned that she often regards her food styling work as “*playful kind of like being a grown-up child playing*”, and she likes playing with food since a very young age. Thus, although food styling defines what she does professionally, it also defines her personally, as feeling food and depicting food photographically form an overarching thread

throughout the different stages of her life. LUCY-RUTH mentioned that in her childhood, she used to play the game: Witches. In this game, she and her childhood friends used to mix different objects, such as soap and food to make “*a pretended pot of... disgusting cauldron*”. For now, she commented: “*sometimes I really feel like what I’m doing as a job, but also in my relationship with food is an adult sophisticated version of this type of play*”. For her, such a naïve and seemingly childish attitude towards experiencing food has allowed her to maintain her appreciation of food on its most basic material level.

When introducing her personal projects, LUCY-RUTH stated:

I also love being able to create images even in my personal work as well, I loved when. I went to Thailand recently and I take my own pictures of things I was observing. That trip was very important to me because it was an opportunity for my own visual language to really come through, I was just alone exploring what I. And I realised the kinds of pictures I was taking. What is it that really appeals to me about food: It’s this feeling that food is just irresistible, colourful, sensuous.
(LUCY-RUTH)

In my observation of LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagramms that she created all by herself, I can find visual cues that can demonstrate the “*irresistible*”, “*colourful*” and “*sensuous*” feelings that define her personal relationship with food.

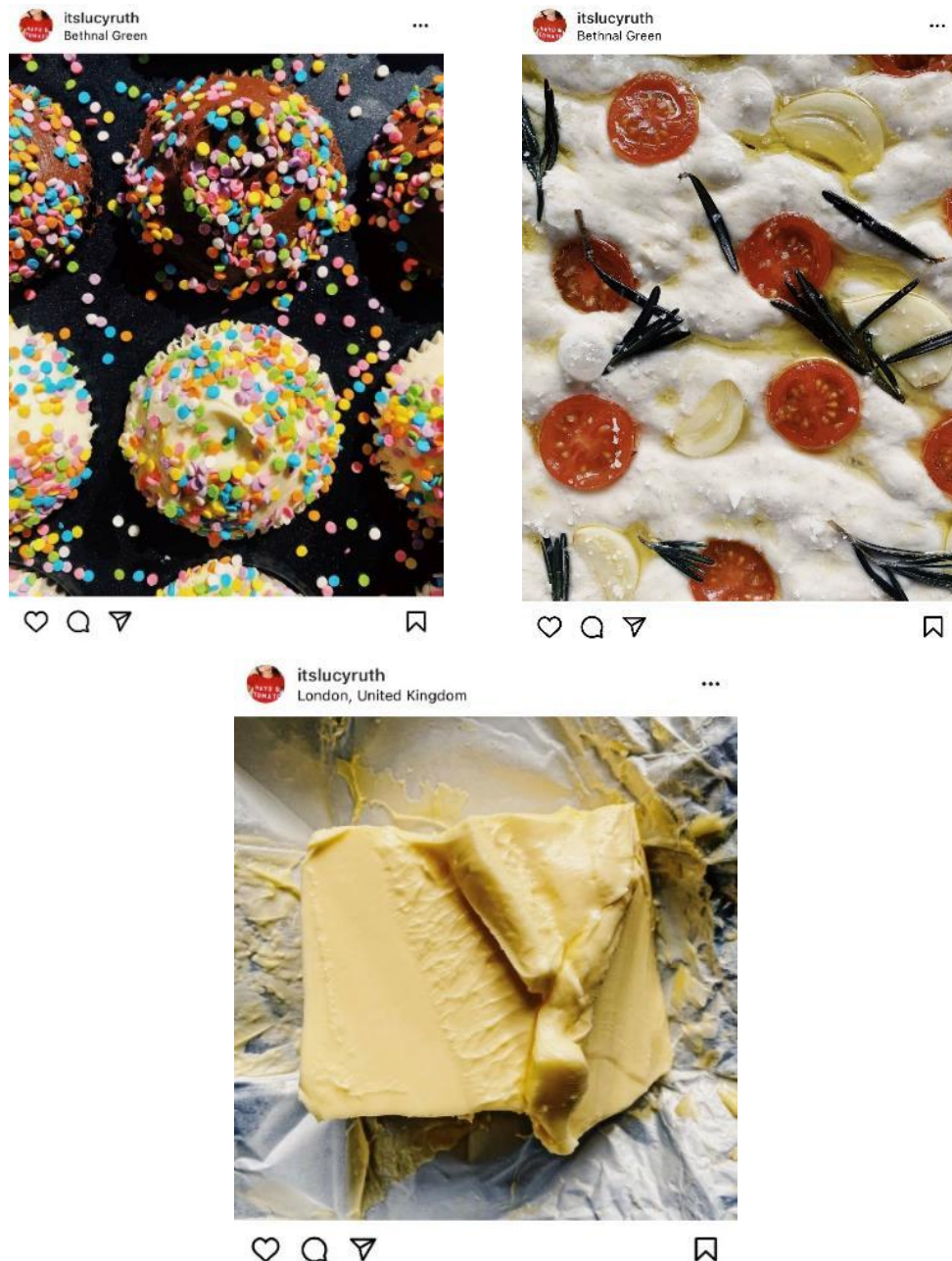


Figure 23 abc: Foodstagram styled and photographed by LUCY-RUTH - © LUCY-RUTH HATHAWAY (@itslucyruth)

As shown in Figure 23, in 23a, the overhead shot of cupcakes covered with funfetti highlights the “colourful” elements she likes. In 23b, the close-up shot of the focaccia dough can bring us very close to the oven-ready focaccia dough, so we are likely to generate an intimately “sensuous” feeling towards it. Similar to @matt_inwood’s butter shot in 22b, LUCY-RUTH’s butter shot in 23c also communicates the beautiful nature of this mundane object, which LUCY-RUTH captioned as “*Butter beauty shot 5 of 8 #unsalted supersoft*”. In this foodstagram, the slightly scrapped presentation of the butter can signal LUCY-RUTH’s engagement with it. If we refer to the caption, her engagement can be defined as “irresistible”,

as it is because of scrapping and folding the butter for some time (signalled by “*super soft*” in the hashtag), she can discover the “*beauty*” in its texture.

How do we understand the implication of LUCY-RUTH’s visual presentation of the “*irresistible*”, “*colourful*” and “*sensuous*” feelings she generated from the food objects? As previously mentioned, the gastronomic appeal that “food porn” pictures focus on about food diverges from LUCY-RUTH’s focus on food being appealing for its material quality. However, they both centre on the feature of food regarding “*how food appeals to our innate animal senses and instincts of desire*”. Again, if we refer to the literature introduced in chapter 2 about food porn (such as McDonnell, 2016; David and Allard, 2022), we can understand LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagramms being shared with other people on Instagram as tools or currencies she uses to attract attention. Indeed, she confirmed in the interview that it is important for her to do this, as she needs to use her Instagram as a business tool to promote herself and her work in order to win commissioned work. However, while such an argument can capture the instrumental purpose, it lacks accounts of the personal meanings sharing these photos has on LUCY-RUTH.

As I mentioned in the above paragraphs, LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagramms visually represent her personal experiences with and her appreciation of food. Thus, like in @matt_inwood’s case, for LUCY-RUTH, we can also regard sharing her foodstagramms with other people on Instagram as her expressions of her aesthetic feelings and values concerning the material world that especially focuses on food. Although as she mentioned, the various aesthetic feelings can bring sensual pleasure to her, such pleasure is not merely hedonistic that emphasises only self-indulgence. From her words, I discovered that there is also a moral implication to her aesthetic feelings and values. It relates to how she thinks of the right way to treat food that represents people with different backgrounds and from different cultures.

LUCY-RUTH mentioned her observation that the food culture today tends to focus on “*this kind of puritanical, worthy, moralising about food*”, but as she declared, “*my interest visually but also personally in food are the reverse of that.*” From the above demonstrations, we can find that LUCY-RUTH valorises an exploratory and appreciative attitude towards different types of food. She mentioned that one of her “*favourite things to eat in Asia*” is pot noodles, as she finds their tastes “*amazing*”. She stressed that “*I’m not saying people should eat that every day*”. However, she regards that the people who eat it should not be judged negatively. What she considers as “*the most positive and affirming way to view food as an experience*” is to approach food in a more naïve way without any presumptions, such as by

being inquisitive about answers to questions: “*What other people feel is their favourite food? What is people’s favourite thing to eat? Why do you like it? What did they love about it?*” Therefore, we can regard her exploratory and appreciative attitude towards food as the moral attitude she holds as important to treat other people. Thus, except for the widely discussed instrumental reasons for gaining attention, in LUCY-RUTH’s example, we can also discover other reasons that motivate foodstagrammers like her to share food photos that arouse the most basic and distinctive feelings of other people: 1. to express the aesthetic importance of recognising and appreciating the material qualities of food, and 2. to express the importance of being respectful and appreciative of people who eat food that is different from our preferences.

5.2.3 Discussion

In @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s portraits, we observed a less disinterested attitude towards food compared to AARON and SANDY’s, as @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagramms concern more about their experiences with food situated in familiar everyday settings. By engaging with food materials via examining and appreciating their materiality, as reported by both participants, they have both learned to appreciate food as something aesthetically interesting in its own right, rather than merely a functional material that satiates our appetite or provides nutrition for our body-functioning. Just as Saito (2017, pp. 54-56) suggests, there are various other ways we can experience and build an aesthetic relationship with food beyond just the sense of our taste. @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s cases directly address Saito’s argument and suggest that besides our taste, we can also generate an aesthetic relationship with food through our senses of vision and touch by attentively exploring their material qualities and experiencing enjoyment through such explorations.

In their foodstagramms, @matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH used various visual techniques to express such feelings. Although we can regard both participants’ foodstagramms as records of the interesting food objects in their everyday life, these photos were not created to simply reserve memory as in @superbritishgirl’s case. For @superbritishgirl, her foodstagramms mainly serve as an archive to preserve her different food-tasting experiences, so she does not pay too much attention to the visual appearances of her photos, as she considers them mainly as records. However, for @matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH, while the food presented in their foodstagramms can also be memorable subjects, both participants were not simply recording these subjects when photographing them. As I demonstrated in the interpretations of the foodstagramms they created, @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s photos also represent “visual relationships” (Barnbaum, 2021, p.67), regarding the relationships of

different forms in the photos. Using various “visual tropes” (Taylor and Keating, 2018) offered by food photography they equipped in their study and work, as demonstrated in my interpretation of their foodstagram and interview accounts, both participants managed to accentuate the material features of food. By doing this, they also managed to express their feelings and values about the subjects pictured. Thus, borrowing terms used in Barnbaum’s (2017, p.341) discussion of expressive photography, we should regard @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagram as visual expressions of their feelings and values, as such foodstagram serve as representations of both participants’ “heightened sensitivity” of the material qualities of food that can indicate to their audience their “deeper insights and understanding” of food and the material world which deserves our aesthetic attention.

We can regard @matt_inwood’s and LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagramming practices as means for them to explore and represent the various aesthetic experiences they can have in everyday life. When illustrating both participants’ portraits, I often used the word “aesthetically interesting” (instead of “beautiful”) to describe the nature of the feelings that they generated from food as visually depicted in their foodstagram. By doing this, I emphasise that the aesthetic feelings people can generate from food do not only include beautiful, because beauty is a feeling that is often used to describe people’s aesthetic experiences of artwork which can provide profound experiences to people, such as feeling our soul gets elevated, but worldview also gets enlightened, or existence gets awakened, as Saito (2017, p.41) argues. Whereas, “aesthetically interesting” stands for a more encompassing reservoir of feelings people can generate beyond beautiful in everyday life. In @matt_inwood’s case, we encountered the feeling of “pretty”, which is an aesthetic register that belongs to the “minor league” aesthetic qualities that are often associated with simple and surface-oriented affirming feelings one can generate in everyday life experiences (Leddy, 2012a; Saito, 2017), such as @matt_inwood discovered the “prettiest” washing-up in the kitchen sink shown in 22a (Figure 22). Also, in LUCY-RUTH’s case, we encountered feelings of “sensuous”, “irresistible”, “playful” and even “unsettling”. These might not all be positive feelings, but they are all felt as interesting in LUCY-RUTH’s case.

In general, the diverse feelings we discovered in both participants’ foodstagramming practices demonstrated the importance both participants wanted to stress about their experiences of food, which is to feel food. In a similar vein as Tuan (1995, p.1) stressed, it is not to feel in a random sense, but to shape one’s feelings and sensory perceptions in an “attuned” way. Only by doing this, as illustrated by the examples of both participants, we can “come to

life and take joy in it” (ibid). This is because as exemplified in both participants’ cases, only by sharpening their senses and perceptions, can they generate various enjoyable feelings from engaging with food and the material world. As Saito (2017) argues, we take most everyday things in life for granted, so we normally pay “little attention” (p.17) to them. However, foodstagramming, as a visual practice, provides both participants with occasions to sharpen their senses of vision and touch to observe food and play with food like a child, so that they can “attend to familiar things in a different way” (ibid). By mobilising various visual tropes to represent their personal experiences of food in their everyday life, we can find that both participants were expressing their valuations of “everyday aesthetics” (Light and Smith, 2005; Liu and Carter, 2014; Saito, 2017), which stands for that our experiences with the mundane objects (such as food) in ordinary everyday life settings can bring us as much aesthetically interesting feelings as our experiences of art. Similarly, for other participants who reported that they have generated different understandings and feelings about food objects, as well as used various photographic styles to represent them, we can also interpret their foodstagramming practices as means for them to express their valuations of everyday aesthetics.

5.3 Imaginative and Playful Look at Food

Like the above four participants, there are two other participants: @mylegoman2 and Helga whose foodstagrams can demonstrate to us the aesthetic importance to appreciate the material dimension of food. For @mylegoman2 and Helga, they chose food as their image subjects especially because of its topical importance: being something representative of our everyday life. According to both participants, our everyday life, in general, might appear ordinary to us. However, as we can see in both participants’ words and foodstagrams I present next, if we channel our imaginations and play with the mundane objects that are widely available in our daily lives in a serious way, we can also create extraordinary aesthetic experiences. By doing this, the potential implication is that we can develop a more appreciative attitude towards everyday life. In this section, I illustrate the details captured in @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s approaches to looking at food, which I call an imaginative and playful look.

Concerning their foodstagramming styles, in a similar vein as LUCY-RUTH, both @mylegoman2 and Helga adopt a naïve and childlike attitude when they approach food in their foodstagramming practices. However, while the food in LUCY-RUTH’s foodstagrams as shown in Figure 23 was captured during her cooking processes, the food shown in @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s foodstagrams often looks like children’s food plays in a more

literal sense. Like the four participants introduced in the previous sections, for @mylegoman2 and Helga, foodstagramming also serves as a means for them to articulate their aesthetic feelings and values. However, there is an evident participatory layer to @mylegoman2's and Helga's foodstagramming practices, as in addition to expressing their feelings and values, @mylegoman2 and Helga also use their foodstagram posts to encourage their audiences to actively reflect on their relationships with the mundane objects they have in everyday lives and reimagine their understandings about everyday life.

The comical and cartoonish visual styles used in @mylegoman2's and Helga's foodstagrams can appear very distinctive if we compare them with other participants' foodstagrams. However, their emphasis on appreciating the material qualities of food resonates with AARON, SANDY, @matt_inwood, LUCY-RUTH and other participants. Also, how they play with food and reimagine food can be found in a few other participants' foodstagramming practices, such as another participant @rbnichol whom I will introduce in the next chapter. Similar to section 5.1, the difference is that while @mylegoman2 and Helga heighten such playfulness and reimagination as the key messages of their foodstagrams, other participants only use these elements as a technique to represent other messages. Therefore, @mylegoman2's and Helga's foodstagramming experiences also serve as examples which can explain what such an imaginative and playful look means in detail.

5.3.1 Reimagining Food by Playing with It

@mylegoman2 (woman, 40-50) is a food blogger who updates every day with at least one foodstagram with Lego figures playing with different food subjects. She regards herself as someone who has a “quirky personality” that is “very sciency”, but also “quite arty”, as she studied both art and biology for her degree. @mylegoman2 mentioned that she used to be a science teacher in a secondary school for many years, but a few years ago, after knowing that she wanted to have a career transition, she then chose to “try something different”. @mylegoman2 started an experimental project for which she decided to “put a picture of Lego up on Twitter every day and see where it got me”. In the beginning, her photos normally featured Lego figures engaging with different everyday subjects. In 2016, she produced content about two of her beloved food programmes on TV, which became popular among chefs and their followers. @mylegoman2 then decided to focus her content on Lego figures mainly engaging with food. She started her Instagram account a few years ago when she discovered that Instagram became “the place where you need to be at the moment”.

For @mylegoman2, the use of Lego figures in every picture is her definitive style. In the interview, I invited her to reflect on the reason for choosing to use such an element. She said she considers her connection with Lego built in her photography as “*an accident*”, for which “*it could’ve been anything*”. She mentioned an anecdote:

So, it started years and years ago. My mum basically said: “Don’t take a photograph unless it’s got somebody in it. Because they’re really boring, if you don’t have somebody in it.” I don’t have anyone in it to take a photo of, so I took a photograph of a Viking Lego figure on Brighton beach and then I took 8 of them around Europe. And then it kind of took off... For me, it [Lego] was a means to get into photography. It wasn’t that I was obsessed with Lego. (@mylegoman2)

Thus, the Lego figures mainly serve as proxies of the “*somebody*” that her mother referred to as the inseparable element for making a photograph that is not “*boring*”.

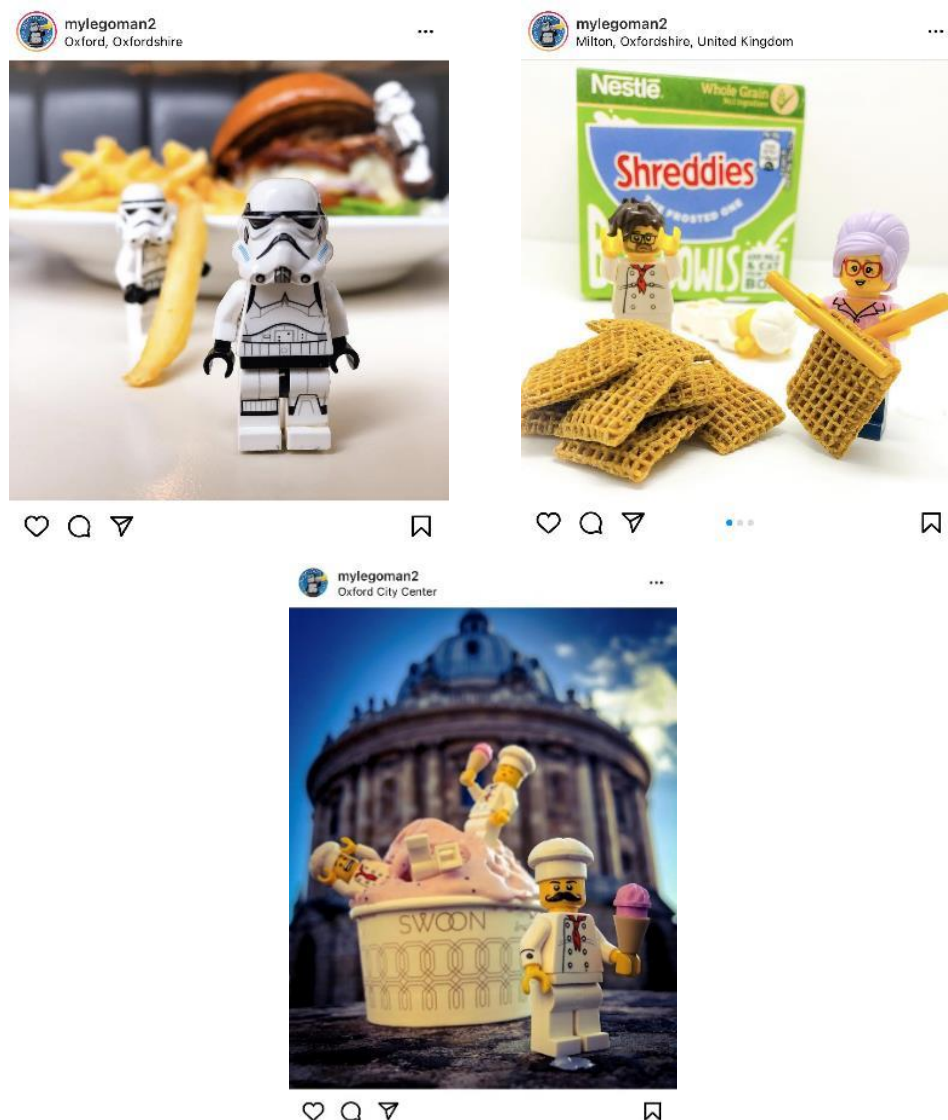


Figure 24 abc: Foodstagram from @mylegoman2 - © @mylegoman2

For another reference to the Lego figure in our interview, @mylegoman2 also related her use of the Lego figures with land art:

When I was at university, I had one lecture and it was about a guy called Christo... Christo is a land artist and him and his wife used to wrap up buildings... [and] islands... And the concept was that basically, if you draw attention, or you cover up, or you make something different in the landscape, you actually draw attention to the detail... That's rolled around my head for years. And it's a bit like that. If you stick a Lego figure into it, people look at the Lego figure, but they also then start to look at the surroundings around it. (@mylegoman2)

Indeed, as we can notice from Figure 24, her foodstagramms often feature Lego figures engaging with the food subjects with amusing postures. In 24a, we can observe one stormtrooper climbing onto the burger while the other one holding a chip. In 24b, we can see the figure on the right knitting, with a shreddies piece appearing as her knits. Also, in 24c, we can discover several chef figures either jumping into or sticking out of the ice cream. These all appear as amusing and comical, as the small-sized Lego figures make the food items appear much larger. Also, how the figures engage with the food items is very different from how we normally do with food. As she stated, when we try to find out what the Lego figures are doing, our attention might be drawn to the chips and burgers in 24a, the shreddies piece in 24b and the ice cream in 24c without noticing it.

We can understand such techniques @mylegoman2 used as a form of “creative disruption” (Waldman, 2012), where she adopted unusual visual representational techniques to challenge her audience’s expectations. In @mylegoman2’s case, such a visual strategy is her use of the Lego figures in amusing poses engaging with certain elements of the pictured food. By using such a strategy, as she mentioned in the above quote, the audience is likely to be directed to pay special attention to the ordinary food objects in our daily lives.

Why is attending to ordinary food objects important? On the one hand, at the initial stage when @mylegoman2 started her experimental project, she mentioned that she had a plan of making the project “*become self-financing*”, which means she would “*get money in from advertising*”, such as “*place products with Lego and the companies would pay for advertising*”. She mentioned that she did make money from doing this, but “*it's not enough to pay the bills*”. However, she gained more followers and like @yasgoesto, @mylegoman2 said she was “*provided a lifestyle I would, never would've had access to, as a teacher*”. She provided me with several examples, such as 1. being invited to the kitchen of a two Michelin-star restaurant

to cook with renowned chefs such as Raymond Blanc and Benoit Blin, 2. being at the backstage of a large event and seeing how the pastry chefs sorting out dessert for the TV stars and 3. being at the backstage of the Chelsea Flower Show. She said she had been to “*all sorts of places that you could not get into, even if you had all the money in the world*”. Thus, similar to what I argued in AARON’s portrait, relating to Bourdieu’s (1984) theory, we can regard @mylegoman2’s foodstagramming practice as a means for her to perform her cultural capital in exchange for economic capital, symbolic capital and social capital. Although she expressed that “*none of it was planned*”, we still need to acknowledge the instrumental benefits she has gained from expressing the artistic side of herself via creating her foodstagramms. As she realised herself, she has gained a lifestyle upgrade with “*all the perks that come with it*”.

However, according to her accounts, we cannot understand her enthusiasm for creating and sharing these foodstagramms as merely for gaining socio-economic benefits. First, she stressed: “*I don’t wanna be endorsing something that I don’t like*”. She sticks to certain “*morals*”: “*if I personally don’t like it, I’m not gonna post about it. No matter even if somebody offers me loads of money, I wouldn’t do it.*” Therefore, similar to Lamont (1992, 2009), people not only prioritise worldly value (relating to socio-economic success) but also valorise moral values. For @mylegoman2, her moral value of honesty outweighs the need for her to gain socio-economic benefits.

Second, observing the foodstagramms @mylegoman2 shared on her Instagram, I discovered a common theme, which is finding joy in various types of small things related to food. On the one hand, it reflects @mylegoman2’s prioritisation in appreciating artworks. She mentioned an experience of seeing artworks at an exhibition for an extended period. By doing that, she reflected that she was “*not interested*” in artworks that make her “*depressed*”. Thus, the upbeat tone in her foodstagramms represents herself in terms of her aesthetic preference. On the other hand, she also mentioned that the theme she set for her project since the beginning was “*something which is amusing, which brightens up someone’s day, makes them smile*”. She added:

My whole sort of point is, it’s something which will raise somebody’s mood just a little bit... The whole thing is about promoting people, promoting food, promoting enjoyment, promoting a bit of fun. There’s no kind of massive great big message of, I don’t know, political. Something about that or whatever. (@mylegoman2)

Thus, we can regard her foodstagramms as tools to stimulate amusement, smile and good moods from her audience.



Figure 25 abc: 2021 “MOSTLY FOODIE DAYS” calendar made by @mylegoman2 - © @mylegoman2

For her selection of food subjects, @mylegoman2 often refers to the “MOSTLY FOODIE DAYS”. In Figure 25, we can see it is a calendar that is consisted of blocks of her hand-drawn graphics which mark the different occasions relating to different food, such as burgers, biscuits, potatoes and pizza. These are ordinary food items that most people in the UK can relate to and they are not necessarily special or expensive. As @mylegoman2 explained, she hopes to use food as a topic to bring “positivity” and her content as a device to “transport” her audience to a relevant memory that can make them smile. An example can be her post featuring rhubarb and custard sweets on Rhubarb day on the day we had the interview. @mylegoman2 commented the reaction she hoped to elicit from her audience could be as small as “somebody somewhere” going out and seeing the sweets on the shelf that day and suddenly putting a smile on his/her face. Thus, the reason why @mylegoman2 elevates ordinary food objects is that she wants to elevate their aesthetic value and remind her audience of the opportunities they can have of generating small but joyous emotions from these objects.

5.3.2 Creating Aesthetic Experiences via Everyday Surrealism

Another participant Helga Stentzel (@helga.stentzel, woman, 30-40) has a similar preference as @mylegoman2 concerning choosing subjects for her foodstagram. Helga’s foodstagram also often feature ordinary food objects, such as corn, lettuce and bread. Her photos bear a similar playful and “quick-witted” (@mylegoman2) nature as @mylegoman2. In a similar vein, Helga also uses her photos as devices to bring positivity to her audience regarding the simple joy they can discover in the often unnoticed objects in our everyday lives and find their marvellousness and beauty through channelling imagination. In addition to posting the final product of her foodstagram, in contrast to @mylegoman2, Helga also often

shares photos and videos about the processes of creating her foodstagramms in stories. Thus, as I present next, in addition to exhibiting her artworks, Helga also provides her audience with the creative means they can borrow to develop joy and aesthetic experiences from playing with the ordinary objects taken from their own lives.

Helga is a visual artist/blogger who likes using photography to present her visual ideas (although she does not consider herself a professional photographer). She uses her Instagram partly as a blog and partly to promote her artwork. The photos and videos in her feed often depict comical and cartoonish visual sculptures that were made using ordinary objects, such as food, clothes and sockets. In her bio section, Helga wrote: “👁️ Household Surrealism”, which she defined on her website as “*finding magic in the mundane, seeing beauty in imperfections and connecting to our reality in a new way*”. In another line, she also wrote: “📷 Documenting the brighter side of the mundane”. Thus, we can regard Instagram as a space for Helga to express how she experiences the world using her eyes with the aid of photography. In addition, we can also treat it as a space where she both advocates the importance of “*finding magic*” in the ordinary and demonstrates how to achieve this by using photography.

Helga mentioned she often gains ideas for her image creation by carefully observing everyday subjects. We met in a café for our interview. When explaining how she observes food, Helga pointed at the coffee in front of her and described:

I like staring at things... for example this coffee: it has so many granules in it and like the traces of coffee around the cup, I can see a dog. I can see a forest... I can stare at a slice of bread for hours if I see, like the air bubbles in the bread form some sort of structures... You know, it's a visual meditation. I look. I don't think about anything but this cup and I try to see whether there's anything interesting in it.
(Helga)

Therefore, like all the previous five participants discussed in this chapter, Helga also focused on looking very closely at the various material qualities when she observes food. Also, like @mylegoman2, Helga's observation emphasises child-like imagination.

Helga referred to her observation as “*meditation*”. From her description, we can find that such an observation has an aesthetic nature. Berleant (2005, p.32) mentions that when we approach small children, we tend to “often take on an aesthetic character when our judgement is suspended and perception becomes heightened”. According to Berleant (2005, p.35), such an emphasis on perception suggests that when judging the worth of any entity, the criteria will be based on “the immediacy of the experience” that the entity can lead, which is on “their

empirical manifestations and not on rules, principles or other substitutes for experience”. Helga’s meditative observations of food echoes this argument. In Helga’s description about the coffee and bread, we can find a same aesthetic character, as she also suspended her judgement by putting aside thinking about their extraneous qualities, such as cultural, social and historical connotations the food has, but to emphasise on “*being in the moment*” and find “*interesting*” material qualities of the food, no matter what it is.

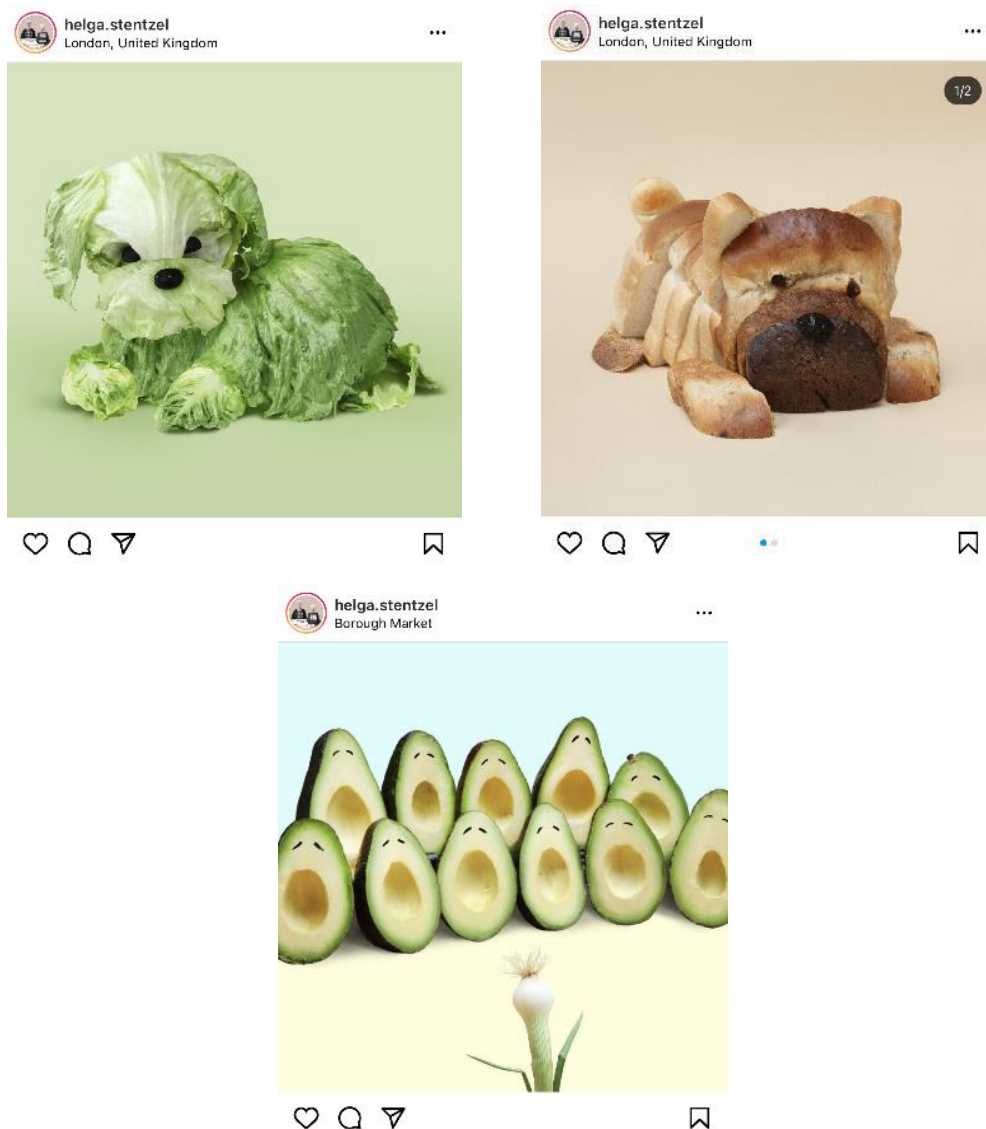


Figure 26 abc: Foodstagram from Helga - © Helga Stentzel (@helga.stentzel)

As we can observe from the foodstagram shown in Figure 26, the food items are all very typical food we can find in supermarkets or at home. Helga’s representational approach is very similar to Arcimboldo’s (3b, Figure 3). Similar to how the painter used vegetables and fruits to form a human figure, Helga also created a dog out of lettuce in 26a (called Crunchy), another dog out of bread in 26b (called Brad Pet), and a choir out of avocados and spring onion

in 26c. These were all created based on her meditative and imaginative look at the mundane food in her daily life. Helga showed me the notebook she carries everywhere with her. She said whenever she encounters any interesting ideas that she is “*hoping to execute someday*”, she would draw them down in her notebook. When she flipped through the notebook, I could find the original ideas she had that aided her to hatch the final photos shown in Figure 26. Building on these ideas, she mentioned, she then obtained suitable food to test the ideas, conducted the shooting and used photoshop to add eyes or animated effects until the results can communicate the messages in her mind.



Figure 27 abcd: Stories collection about Brad Pet - © Helga Stentzel (@helga.stentzel)

After the interview, from my observation, I discovered that increasingly, Helga started to share her creative processes in her Stories and encouraged the audience to create with her. For instance, when making Brad Pet, in her Stories, she first showed a line of sliced bread on her table. She raised a question to ask her followers to guess what she was making and then she posted different guesses from her audience. Two days later, she revealed the result in her feed post shown in 26b. Also on the same day, in her stories shown in Figure 27, she introduced Brad Pet with a created story: Brad loves long naps by the radiator (27a), trips to the fridge and sniffs bin bags with Crunchy (27b). He is afraid of the toaster (paired with an image of a metal toaster with a ghost figure), so Helga’s house only uses the toaster in 27c. Brad is already getting slippers (27d) and baking non-stop (bone-shaped biscuits) for the family on his arrival day. After the story, she invited the audience to imagine what Brad should learn next. Then she showed their answers such as “*bark*”, “*cleaning*”, “*fetch*” and “*make a chocolate poo*” (paired with a photo showing a cupcake with chocolate icing).

In this sense, through sharing her foodstagram-creation processes and inviting her audience to guess and provide ideas, Helga was not only expressing her own aesthetic experiences but also encouraging her audience to find the “*everyday surrealism*” in their own life. As she demystified in her other stories series about her creative process, the “*secret ingredient*” in her creative process is to “*practice active looking*” of everyday objects “*without judgement*” and try to see them beyond their original functionality. Helga showed we can turn a cucumber into a banana by peeling its upper half skin. By doing such a small “*experiment*”, we can feel “*fun*” and “*step out of the box and take a fresh look on the mundane*”. Therefore, the message Helga tried to convey through these demystifying processes was that if we actively equip ourselves with a surrealist mindset by taking defamiliarising and non-judgemental looks at everyday objects, we could generate various interesting experiences by engaging with these objects.

Like in @mylegoman2’s case, Helga expressed that her foodstagramms often do not communicate any grand messages: “*A lot of my images are just for fun. It’s pure joy of existence. Pure joy of watching things around us very carefully, finding little delights in everyday objects.*” She also emphasised:

Particularly little things, because you know when you enter a beautiful room with... beautiful wallpaper, it’s very easy to notice. And you go: “Wow, that’s fascinating!” But, when you look at a socket and notice a little face there, it’s also fascinating, but in a different way. It’s YOU who make it art. It’s your eyes that make it into a little face. It’s small, but it brings you an equal amount of joy as a room covered in beautiful wallpaper. (Helga)

Thus, Helga’s account echoes Dewey’s (1958) emphasis on the need to engage our senses and perceptions in deriving aesthetic experiences. While Dewey’s argument refers to aesthetic experiences that are generated from appreciating artwork, Helga’s examples instead concern mundane objects in our lives. Whichever the objects are, as Helga argued, as long as we heighten our senses and perceptions, as well as use our imaginations, we can create aesthetically interesting experiences.

5.3.3 Discussion

Looking through @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s portraits, we can find that both participants attempt to use their foodstagramms to invite their audiences to reimagine their relationships with ordinary objects in their everyday lives. The food objects such as shreddies and sweets in @mylegoman2’s portrait, together with the lettuce and bread in Helga’s portrait

are all objects that are very familiar to us that we might often overlook, so they might be considered as objects that are with a “relative invisibility and background-like nature” (Saito, 2017, p.27). As Highmore (2001, p.1) defines, when the “everyday” is understood as a value and quality, as “everydayness”, it can be experienced as heightened positive or negative feelings, but it can also be experienced as “lack of qualities”, as being “unnoticed”, “inconspicuous” and “unobtrusive”. @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s chosen food objects mostly represent the latter understanding of everydayness. However, by featuring these food objects as the central subjects of their foodstagramms, both participants were using poeticised ways to make these invisible objects visible, as well as to bring them from the background to the foreground. Their foodstagramming practices thus both incarnate “the aesthetics of everyday life” (Leddy, 2012b) or “everyday aesthetics” (Saito, 2017), which both emphasise the importance of changing our habits of perception in order to take a defamiliarised look at our familiar surroundings and find aesthetic qualities through such engagements.

In both @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s cases, the aesthetic qualities of the ordinary food objects they depicted in foodstagramms, according to both participants’ interpretations, might not be grand. However, the aesthetic qualities are still regarded by both participants as, borrowing Leddy’s (2014a, p.35) words, “meaningful in small ways”. This is because as both participants expressed, the active and imaginative engagements with these objects can still bring affirmative emotions and feelings, although such emotions and feelings might not be as intense as the more grand or profound feelings. Their words and foodstagramms both reflect that “something does not have to be at the highest level of aesthetic experience to be aesthetic” (ibid) and “the more attuned we are to the beauties of the world, the more we come to life and take joy in it” (Tuan, 1995, p.1). Thus, in addition to elevating the status of the ordinary food objects, we can also interpret both participants’ foodstagramming practices as their means to express their valuations of the aesthetic feelings with “lesser intensity” (ibid) in everyday life.

Another aspect we need to note is the comical and cartoonish visual styles in @mylegoman2’s and Helga’s foodstagramms. The comical and cartoonish appearances make these foodstagramms resemble the meme photos we often encounter on the Internet. As Shifman (2014, p.351) suggests, photo fad memes, such as images showing people sticking their heads in freezers, do not convey a certain meaningful message about the pictured image subjects at all. However, the medium itself, such as the head-sticking pose, while appears nonsensical, is actually an accessible and common way of connecting people and allowing them to express their creativity (Goriunova, 2013; Shifman, 2014, p.351). Similarly, in @mylegoman2 and

Helga's cases, although their photo subjects do convey messages about both participants' aesthetic values, the way how the Lego figures engaged with the food (@mylegoman2) and how the seemingly mundane food was made into cartoon-like animal characters (Helga) all appear as achievable creative expressions that even small children can engage (Helga mentioned many followers told her their children like her work).

Visually, @mylegoman2 and Helga's foodstagramms look more refined than many fad photo meme pictures we see online and the messages they communicate via their foodstagramms are also much more serious than in many meme photos. However, the commonly seen food objects and the comical and cartoonish forms they are in all make both participants' foodstagramms relatable and inviting to their audiences. Thus, it is in this sense that their foodstagramms are comparable to the fad photo memes. Therefore, like how Goriunova (2013) and Shifman (2014, p.351) interpret the visual styles of the fad photo memes, we also need to recognise the comical and cartoonish visual styles as a defining characteristic of both participants' foodstagramming practices. Such visual styles can encourage their audiences in a fun way to notice the messages conveyed through both participants' foodstagramms: the importance of taking joy from appreciating the mundane objects in everyday life. Moreover, the visual styles are also a part of the messages themselves, as both participants' own experiences can suggest, it is through playing with ordinary food objects like a child without adding extraneous judgements that people can discover joy in mundane everyday life.

5.4 Summary and Discussion

Looking through the six portraits, following the lead of the 6 participants, we have experienced three ways of looking at food which all accentuate its aesthetically interesting material qualities: 1. the abstract and disinterested look (section 5.1), 2. the exploratory and appreciative look (section 5.2) and 3. the imaginative and playful look (section 5.3). Via these different ways of looking at food, we learned how we can develop alternative relationships with food beyond treating it merely as something to eat. Such relationships include appreciating food for its own sake, finding aesthetically interesting qualities in the most ordinary food objects and recognising the everyday as a field for us to derive as varied interesting aesthetic experiences as we would do for appreciating artworks. Through participants' words and foodstagramms I introduced in the above portraits, we learned different ways to channel the inquisitive and naïve sides of ourselves, which means to hold our judgements but heighten our senses (Berleant, 2005, p.35), to closely examine, feel, appreciate and reimagine food. We also

learned how we can use foodstagramming to express our understandings photographically and share such insights with other people.

The above 6 portraits also heighten the photography dimension of foodstagramming. As I mentioned at the beginning, some of the foodstagrams that I demonstrated in this chapter have a documenting nature as they record certain memorable moments in participants' everyday lives (@matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH). However, as I argued earlier, we should regard these foodstagrams more as the 6 participants' expressions of their "visions and thoughts" (Barnbaum, 2017, p.2). In their interpretations of their foodstagrams, what the participants emphasised more were their feelings and values towards food and everyday life in general, but less on the pictured food as special. As SANDY and Helga's cases suggest, the concepts and messages that they need to represent often come first, while their choices of food subjects come second. Borrowing AARON's words, SANDY and Helga were **making** photographs, rather than taking photographs, as the "visual relationships" (Barnbaum, 2021, p.67) these participants construct by using various "visual tropes" (Taylor and Keating, 2018) heighten the feelings and values that they intend to express. Using Leddy's (2014b, p.57) words, each of all the above participants "takes the quotidian and, through framing, lighting and other manipulations transform it into something with a unique 'visual charge'". Similar to Manovich's (2017a, pp.39-40) and Goldman and Papon's (1996) suggestions that the medium can become part of the message people communicate via images, the visual tropes that the six participants used in their foodstagramming practices also make a part of the messages that their foodstagrams communicate.

All six portraits to a certain extent exemplify the role foodstagramming plays in enacting everyday aesthetics (Saito, 2017; Leddy, 2012b; Tuan, 1995), which centres on taking a defamiliarised look at ordinary objects in everyday life and using our senses and imaginations to find the poetic elements that are often hidden by its seemingly prosaic ordinary look. As summarised in @matt_inwood's and Helga's cases, such an engaging and creative look we cast on everyday life can help us sharpen our senses to notice the marvels and extraordinariness in our seemingly ordinary everyday life. Also, we can gain as much aesthetic **pleasure** through our engagements with the ordinary objects that permeate our everyday lives as we would do with objects with pre-defined attractive looks or the so-called artworks. In this sense, through presenting their aesthetic feelings, the participants were also expressing their aesthetic values, which all centre on the importance of taking joy in appreciating the "everydayness" (Highmore, 2001, p.1) of our mundane life.

One thing to note is that the participants introduced in the above portraits all have educational backgrounds related to art and/or design and most of them are now still working as image-making professionals in the creative industry. Also, these participants all regard the majority of foodstagramms they post on their Instagram accounts as expressive visual creations with food in them, instead of just documents of food that one made or ate (like in @superbritishgirl's and Phoebe's cases). However, this does not mean that participants who do not have the same educational backgrounds or occupations cannot produce similar foodstagramms as these six participants do. Nor does it mean that foodstagramms which are documents of food one made or ate cannot be expressive visual creations at the same time. For example, as introduced in chapter 4, Nancy neither has degrees related to art and/or design nor worked as an image-making professional. However, she managed to use the visual knowledge and techniques she learned in her cultural consumptions to craft foodstagramms she considers both as documents of the food she made and visual creations that have aesthetically interesting visual qualities. Also, all types of participants mentioned that taking pictures of food has encouraged them to notice the material qualities of food they used to pay little attention to. Many of them reported their acknowledgement of this as an unexpected reward from foodstagramming. Thus, this theme reflects the experiences of all types of foodstagrammers.

Concerning the implications, relating to LUCY-RUTH's argument, we can find that the pleasure we gain from appreciating the aesthetic qualities of everyday objects does not lean towards mere hedonistic self-indulgence. Such appreciation also has **moral and social implications**, which emphasises the importance of being appreciative of the material environment we are situated in and the people who are associated with the various material objects within the environment. This is in line with Saito's (2017), Leddy's (2012b) and Berleant's (2005) shared argument on the moral implications of everyday aesthetics on its affordance to heighten our senses for generating various feelings that make us recognise and appreciate the material surroundings we are situated within. This is also in line with Olcese and Savage's (2015) and Nettleton's (2013) shared argument of the social implications of aesthetics in general in heightening our bodies to feel with others and generate empathy with other people who live in the same social world.

Although all the participants introduced in this chapter focused mostly on explicating the aesthetic implications of their foodstagramms, we should recognise their potential moral and social implications. Another portrait I present in the next chapter of @matt_inwood can illustrate this. From a ration challenge he conducted for raising funds for the Syrian refugees,

@matt_inwood reflected that there are people who are experiencing a version of everyday life without the ordinary food objects that are widely available in his life, which later motivated him to continue taking actions aiming at changing this situation. On the other hand, as I mentioned constantly that the participants do use their foodstagramming activities to promote themselves and their businesses to gain economic, social and symbolic capitals. However, I also stressed that we should neither disregard the multiple axiological dimensions regarding both participants' aesthetic and moral values nor replace them with merely the self-benefiting worldly value. As we can summarise from both Lamont's (1992, 2009) and Skeggs' (1997) research that I mentioned in chapter 1, people valorise not only value (the worldly value concerning socio-economic gains) but also values (multiple types of values such as moral and political ones). Therefore, in the case of this chapter, for the participants I presented, we should also recognise the aesthetic, moral and social values that are evident in their foodstagramming experiences, and avoid reducing these values to only the worldly value.

In the next chapter, I turn to discuss the third theme: linking the self to wider communities through foodstagramming.

CHAPTER 6 LINKING THE SELF TO WIDER COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOODSTAGRAMMING

This chapter discusses the third theme: linking the self to wider communities through foodstagramming. While the last chapter focused on human-to-material relationships, this chapter concentrates on human-to-human relationships. As situated on Instagram, a social networking platform, foodstagramming affords people to create and share their content with people from extended social circles, as well as generate engagements and connections with those people on the platform.

Following Delanty (2010, pp.xi-xiii), the community I refer to in this chapter takes varied shapes. It can be a form of social organisation that is based on small groups that are spatially bound by certain localities, such as participants' local neighbourhoods. It can also stand for cosmopolitanised new relations that are based on virtual proximity and distance, such as people who are living in different parts of the world but who share the common ground of living in the same world. More commonly, it refers to, as Cohen (1985) defines, a "symbolic structure" that is imagined by the participants that exist in a virtual sense (Instagram for this research), instead of something concrete based on certain localities. Echoing Delanty (2010, p.157), although communities in this research can exist in physical and imagined forms, according to participants' accounts, the communities are all felt as real. The participants can not only generate strong feelings towards the communities they refer to but also conduct actions for such communities. Also, in line with the author's argument, a community is not a settled entity but often needs to be expressed in social communications and enacted on the basis of social recognition of the other (p.xiii). As this chapter presents, foodstagramming can be regarded as a means for achieving this, as the practice serves as a system of communication about belonging: the core element that is shared by all forms of communities mentioned by participants.

As illustrated in chapter 5, people use their foodstagrams to not only document food-related memories but also express feelings and values. The examples in this chapter also show this tendency. However, regarding feelings and values, while chapter 5 focused on how they are related to the material dimension of food, this chapter focuses on material, nutritional, gastronomic, cultural, social and political dimensions. It is through expressing such feelings and values resonating with these dimensions of food via their foodstagrams that the participants managed to establish social links with other people and create communities. Section 6.1 introduces portraits of two participants who use foodstagramming to cultivate affective

relations between themselves and their audiences. Both participants have strong affective relationships with food, so by representing and sharing foodstagramms, both participants expressed intentions to cultivate social relations with others that are based on affective connections. Section 6.2 presents portraits of two participants who use their foodstagramming practices to share experiences of making and tasting food. They both maintained close engagements with the food culture and discovered very important aspects that are felt important to them but are often overlooked by the mainstream food culture. Thus, using their cooking and dining experiences as examples, the participants expressed intentions to cultivate a more inclusive food culture. Section 6.3 shifts to discuss portraits of two participants who use their foodstagramming practices as tools to make direct political actions in addressing the issues that the participants are concerned about. In one participant's case, such political action takes the form of sharing his experiences of conducting food ration challenges for raising funds for the Syrian refugees, while in another case, the action takes the form of offering free live cookalong sessions for binding people together during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The last section provides a summary and discusses the implications of the importance of using foodstagramming to link individuals to wider communities.

6.1 The Cultivation of Affective Interpersonal Relationships

This section introduces the portraits of two participants: @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol. Both participants expressed their intentions to use the foodstagramms they share with other people on Instagram to cultivate interpersonal relationships which accentuates the exchanges of affects. As we can observe in both portraits, the appearances of both participants' foodstagramms are highly composed and styled. However, similar to what I argued for @matt_inwood's and LUCY-RUTH's foodstagramms, @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's foodstagramms should be regarded not only as records of their food experiences in their everyday lives but also as their visual expressions of their affirmative aesthetic feelings, which especially concerns their strong affects or emotions related to food. @matt_inwood's and LUCY-RUTH's foodstagramms introduced in the last chapter mainly emphasise expressing their aesthetic values. However, in addition to expressing the affirmative aesthetic feelings generated from their food experiences, @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol also reported their intention of using their foodstagramms to build interpersonal relations based on such feelings.

Among the sample, regardless of what visual styles the participants use to create their foodstagramms, for the participants who share their cooking and eating experiences with their audiences via foodstagramms, to varied extents, they share with @gizem.kumbaraci and

@rbnichol regarding one intention of foodstagramming: using food to cultivate affective interpersonal relationships. It is just that in @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's interviews, their verbal accounts repeatedly revolved around this theme. Thus, @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's portraits serve as examples to illustrate the details concerning how related participants use their foodstagramming practices to cultivate affective interpersonal relationships with others.

6.1.1 Foodstagramming for Sharing Affirmative Aesthetic Feelings

@gizem.kumbaraci (woman, 20-30) is a professional food photographer/photographic assistant who enjoys sharing the foodstagramms she created in her work and life on her Instagram. Although as a professional photographer, she does use her Instagram as a portfolio for showcasing her work, as she defined, her account is a “*semi-professional environment*”. Like Aaron's case introduced in chapter 5, @gizem.kumbaraci also regards photography, especially food photography, as a medium for her to express herself through the angle of “*how I see the world and how I put food in it*”. In this sense, instead of being casual snapshots that demonstrate what she ate (like @superbritishgirl's ones introduced in chapter 4), as @gizem.kumbaraci defined, her foodstagramms are “*aesthetic*” representations of food and food moments that visually express her worldviews (like how AARON uses his photos to express himself). As we can see later, by using such an aestheticised manner to present her personal self on Instagram, @gizem.kumbaraci shows the intention of inviting her audience to share the affirmative aesthetic feelings she generated from food and the world. Through such invitations, she also expressed hopes to establish emotionally connected and hospitable social connections with other people.

Through her articulation about why she chose food as the subject matter to focus on for her photographic career, I learned that @gizem.kumbaraci had built a strong relationship with food since a very young age living in Cyprus. She explained that food plays an important role in Cypriot culture, so growing up in such a culture made her realise the communal and personal functions of food. From @gizem.kumbaraci's words, I learned that on a communal level, when associated with community gatherings, rituals and celebrations, food is, on the one hand, a welcoming symbol that incarnates the hospitality of hosts to guests and on the other hand a material that is often associated with positive feelings derived through the bonds of kinship and friendship. On a personal level, for @gizem.kumbaraci, food can be “*an art form*” that “*helps you to create... lovely moments with your family or friends or even for yourself*”. Therefore, through the proxy of food photos she creates, @gizem.kumbaraci said she hopes to represent

the positive qualities of food to her audience and allow them to distil similar positive emotions towards food as she did. As Figure 28 shows, the food and food moments themselves might not appear special but as presented with specific visual styles, the objects and the setting together form aesthetically and emotionally evocative pictures. Therefore, as I demonstrate in the following examples, we can regard her choices of making food as the image subject matter and using certain visual aesthetics as her actions of building aesthetically and emotionally connected relations with her audience.



Figure 28 ab: Typical foodstagram from @gizem.kumbaraci's feed - © @gizem.kumbaraci

In Figure 28, 28a showcases a “quiet” moment @gizem.kumbaraci detected in life which she captioned as “coffee light & pastry crumbs” accompanied by hashtags such as “#artofslowliving”, “#chasinglight”, “#summeraesthetic” and “#quietmoments”. Signalled by “#artofslowliving”, we can detect a similar valuation of everyday aesthetics in @gizem.kumbaraci’s image as in Helga’s case. Using such an image and its caption, @gizem.kumbaraci exemplified the joy one could gain by slowing down and attentively sensing the beauty in unnoticeable details in life, even though they are just “coffee light & pastry crumbs”. 28b presents @gizem.kumbaraci’s experience in a café on an early summer morning. She paired the photo with hashtags such as “#artofslowliving”, “#aslowmoment” and “#amoment”, which again work as invitations for the audience to sit on the bench and slow down to enjoy the moment.

To convincingly communicate the aesthetic feelings that she intended to communicate through her foodstagram to her audience, in addition to choosing the relevant subjects, @gizem.kumbaraci also carefully chose the image styles that “*work harmoniously*” with the narratives. As she commented: “*Your narrative wouldn’t work if your aesthetic is not like that.*” Like @yasgoesto, before taking a snap, @gizem.kumbaraci often firstly considers the strongest elements she physically and emotionally responds to the settings and then composes images that can express such feelings photographically. Afterwards, she then spends ten to thirty minutes retouching the photos. @gizem.kumbaraci considers that “*each image deserves a different kind of retouching*”, so for each foodstagram, she would “*play*” and “*experiment*” with the colour balance, brightness, saturation, shadow and other features until they complement the narratives she intends to communicate. We can thus consider it as a dressing-up process in which she tries to create “make-ups” to set the mood and tone to prompt the audience to mobilise their feelings to understand the narratives in the pictures. This is shown in 28a, where the bright look of the photo and the contrasting elements of the light and shade can send us visual cues to form a summary feeling that can prompt us to understand the feelings she wants to communicate. Similarly, in 28b, the toned-down appearance of the photo also shows the author’s intention to prompt us with a harmoniously calm and cosy feeling and be transposed to the scene imaginatively.

In my observation of audience responses, I often discovered comments from the audience expressing their reactions to @gizem.kumbaraci’s foodstagram, such as they like her photos because they either found the photos to be “peaceful” or “lovely”, which made them want to do something, such as go out and sit in a café. Therefore, the peaceful feeling and the going-out drive elicited by these recipients exemplify to us the effectiveness of @gizem.kumbaraci’s exchanges of her aesthetic feelings about everyday food encounters with her audience. In this way, we can find that via her foodstagram, @gizem.kumbaraci managed to conduct affective communications with her audience. As we can observe above, her choices of food and food scenes play an important role in constituting the moments she considers worthy to be communicated to her audience. However, in most cases, it is her image visual style that plays a definitive role in making the communications aesthetic and affective. Also, her aesthetic feelings are often the key messages communicated through her foodstagram, so sometimes, to efficiently transmit such feelings, @gizem.kumbaraci would deliberately construct a scene based on the elements she has on hand. As I introduced in chapter 2, for commercial food photography and food porn shared on social media, constructed food scenes

are often interpreted as inauthentic elements of the photos produced (Barthes, 1972; McDonnell, 2016). However, as we will see in @gizem.kumbaraci's interpretations, constructing food scenes, in contrast, is her approach to doing justice to the successful communication to the audience of the core message: her affective feelings (rather than the food she ate).

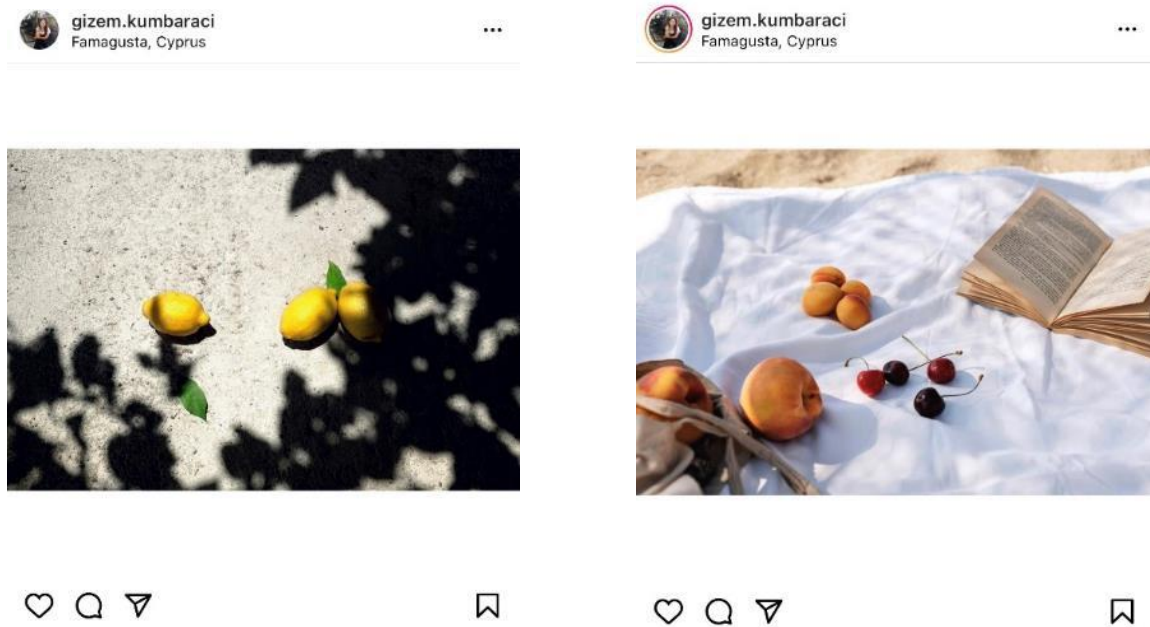


Figure 29 ab: Film-like foodstagramms constructed by @gizem.kumbaraci - © @gizem.kumbaraci

For example, for Figure 29, when we discuss 29a, @gizem.kumbaraci mentioned that the lemons were originally lying on the ground sporadically, but she deliberately put them in their specific positions. She said she did this to construct an aesthetic composition to make sure the sunlight was hitting the right place on the lemons so that it could create the light and dark shapes that she deemed as beautiful. @gizem.kumbaraci explained: “*I do get stuff from real life, but I also like reconstruct that bit to make it aesthetic looking.*” Also, for 29b, @gizem.kumbaraci indicated that it was a reconstructed scene that she titled “*Picnics with Myself*”. She explained:

It's inspired by my real life. I do like reading on the beach and I do love, like fruits, on the beach. But no one would have their fruits like that. They would put them in a bowl or something, usually. So, it is kind of constructed and it is to give that feeling that you're having a cosy picnic by yourself on the beach, and you have your fruits, and it's summer and you're just having time with yourself... I wasn't doing that at that time. I reconstructed it. So, it's art, rather than what I'm going through. But then, it is inspired by my daily life in Cyprus. (@gizem.kumbaraci)

Thus, although this photo is not a direct projection of a moment as per how @gizem.kumbaraci experienced it, as she specified, it still represents her authentic expression of the cosy feelings she personally had in her picnic experiences in Cyprus in the past. This is comparable to Tillmans' example (5b, Figure 5), where he intentionally constructed a random-looking everyday scene to represent his evaluations of the meanings of mundane. Also, just as @gizem.kumbaraci emphasised for both 29a and 29b, while there are constructed elements in both scenes, the aesthetic feelings were truly felt by her at the moment when she created the photos.

After hearing @gizem.kumbaraci's explanations about how she created 29a and 29b, I expressed to her that both photos reminded me of frames from artistic films situated in Europe in summer that had given me happy and cosy feelings. @gizem.kumbaraci responded: *"I'm so happy that you felt that, because that's why I take photos basically, because I see something and I'm like this is giving me joy and I want to share it with other people."* Likewise, in the comment section of 29b, one audience wrote that the picture allowed him/her to run through his/her "imagination", as the photo made him/her feel like it was a shot from "an indie movie" that is "very artsy very romantic". This person then described the scene by summarising that he/she could "come up with a movie" by just looking at @gizem.kumbaraci's photo. Similar to how @gizem.kumbaraci responded to my reception, @gizem.kumbaraci replied: *"Thank you so much for all the love, support and feedback. I am so glad that I made you think all of this thoughts just by looking at my photography, this is the biggest compliment! 😊"*

As @gizem.kumbaraci explained, she appreciates images that are emotionally evocative because they can make her "relate to" the moments and generate "nice and cosy" feelings even though she had never been to the settings herself. Via her photos, she said she also wants to achieve the same effect. Therefore, this was why after finding out that I and the audience member could sense the aesthetic feelings she originally tried to communicate and generate similar feelings, @gizem.kumbaraci reacted with contentment to our comments. In this sense, through mobilising certain food scenes and relevant image styles as introduced above, we can sense @gizem.kumbaraci's intention of using her foodstagram as resources and devices to communicate her inner aesthetic feelings with the audience.

For her photography career, communicating such messages creates opportunities for @gizem.kumbaraci to demonstrate (Bourdieu, 1984) her photographic ability as a skilled photographer who can conduct effective photography that can evoke affective responses from

the audience. As an individual, the communication of such messages allows her to demarcate (ibid) a boundary to separate herself from people who share foodstagramms to solely maximise the visibility of their work for personal benefits. However, on the other hand, visualising her aesthetic feelings and invoking such feelings in her audience can also allow her to establish herself as someone who values sincerity and hospitality in interpersonal communications. As an individual sharing her worldview with an online community, such a mode of communication can allow her to formulate close relationships, while not being the same but still resembling the relationships she used to have with her local community members in Cyprus. Therefore, @gizem.kumbaraci's foodstagramming practice can also be interpreted as a means through which she cultivates the sociality she values.

6.1.2 Foodstagramming For Making Social Links with Others

In a similar vein, we can observe a comparable example of using foodstagramming to create close interpersonal relationships like in @rbnichol's case. @rbnichol (woman, 50-60) regards herself as a "*maker*" of food who is "*very very keen*" on food. She enjoys reading books about food culture and science, watching food programmes and experimenting with different recipes. For @rbnichol, food is "*sensual*" and pleasurable, but it is also "*sustenance*" and "*nutrition*" which makes people grow strong and healthy. Additionally, food is social because it is an inseparable element of "*community*" and "*family*". Moreover, food is emotional, because, when cooking for someone, it is a way to "*express your love to them*". Generally, @rbnichol considers food a subject that holds a very important space in her everyday life.

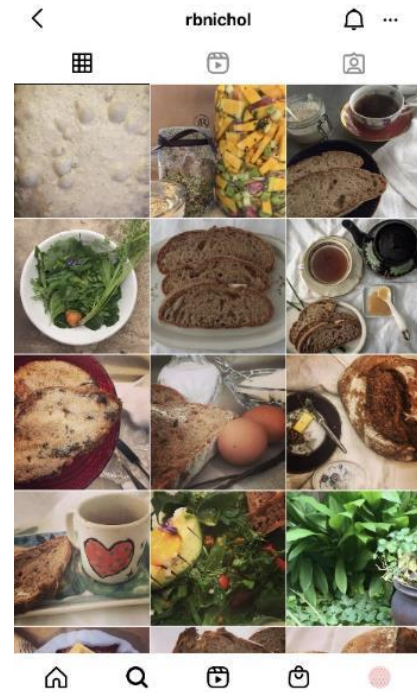


Figure 30 a: @rbnichol's photo of her food board; b: @rbnichol's Instagram feed at an early stage - © @rbnichol

As someone passionate about food and food-making, @rbnichol has been photographing her homemade food for a long time. Before starting her Instagram account, @rbnichol used to print out “the best pictures” of the food she made and stuck them on a wooden “food board” in her kitchen, as shown in 30a (Figure 30). We can regard the food board as a pre-Instagram version of her food image collection, which she used mainly as personal records of her cherished food creations. For her food photographic practice to transform from a private “home mode” (Chalfen, 1987) to a digital and public “social mode” (Manovich, 2017a), @rbnichol mentioned an anecdote:

I was sitting with a friend, and she was looking at this wall of food and she said: “It’s almost selfish for you to have all of these pictures just for yourself. So much nice stuff and the pictures are beautiful, and your bread is beautiful. Why don’t you share those pictures?” And I thought: “Well you know, who would want to see my pictures of food I make?” ... And she said: “Well, you’ll be surprised, how many people I think would like to see your pictures.” ... I’m a loner in a certain way. I don’t dislike people; I just live a very quiet life. And this friend said: “Look, you might even find your tribe on social media, you know people who like the same things as you.” And I said: “Maybe.” So, I had a go. (@rbnichol)

By opening herself up and sharing her private food experiences on Instagram, @rbnichol indeed found her “tribe” and became close friends with many like-minded bakers. @rbnichol mentioned sometimes other people asked her questions about her bread and through

such leads, they became close friends even though they have age differences, stay in different countries and live very different lives. Also, in the captions for many of her posts, @rbnichol often wrote words such as “*shall I put the kettle on*”. In the comment section, I often observed words from her audience members expressing their wishes to join @rbnichol, such as by writing “tea for me please”. @rbnichol then responded with words such as “*thank you*” and “*I will bring you some, put the kettle on!* 🍷 🍵 🍪”. As @rbnichol mentioned in our interview, after receiving such audience comments, if it is during the day, for her female followers who are living in the same city, @rbnichol sometimes responded “*well, just come around*”. In some cases, they managed to meet face to face, enjoyed the food @rbnichol made and stayed in touch ever since. Thus, both @rbnichol’s food and her foodstagrams serve as proxies for her to express friendliness to her image audience, establish bonds with them and find belongings in a virtual community formed of people who have an interest in baking.

As @rbnichol reflected,

It’s become a part of my life... I mean it’s horribly vain to say it that there’s almost a feeling that I have to be there for my people. I mean they’re my friends and they expect. I haven’t been posting for a bit... I get messages every day: “Are you okay? Is everything OK? Where’s the bread?” So, I think people who make bread specifically, it’s very easy to form a community. I think maybe I was similar in nature [with] people who bake. (@rbnichol)

Also, as @rbnichol expresses in a post one year after joining Instagram, by being urged to put herself, her ideas and food out there, she had found “*inspiration*”, “*knowledge*” and “*precious friendship*” more than she originally thought possible. She is grateful for such gains, so she wrote: “*Thank you from the bottom of my heart.* 🌹” Thus, through foodstagramming, @rbnichol both gave and received support from her audience members, as well as built affective connections with many unexpected people “*beyond borders of age [and] nationality*”. In this sense, for @rbnichol, foodstagramming is a practice that provides her with an opportunity “*to be close to people*” and to feel a “*sense of community*”: belonging to a virtual tribe with like-minded “*friends*”.

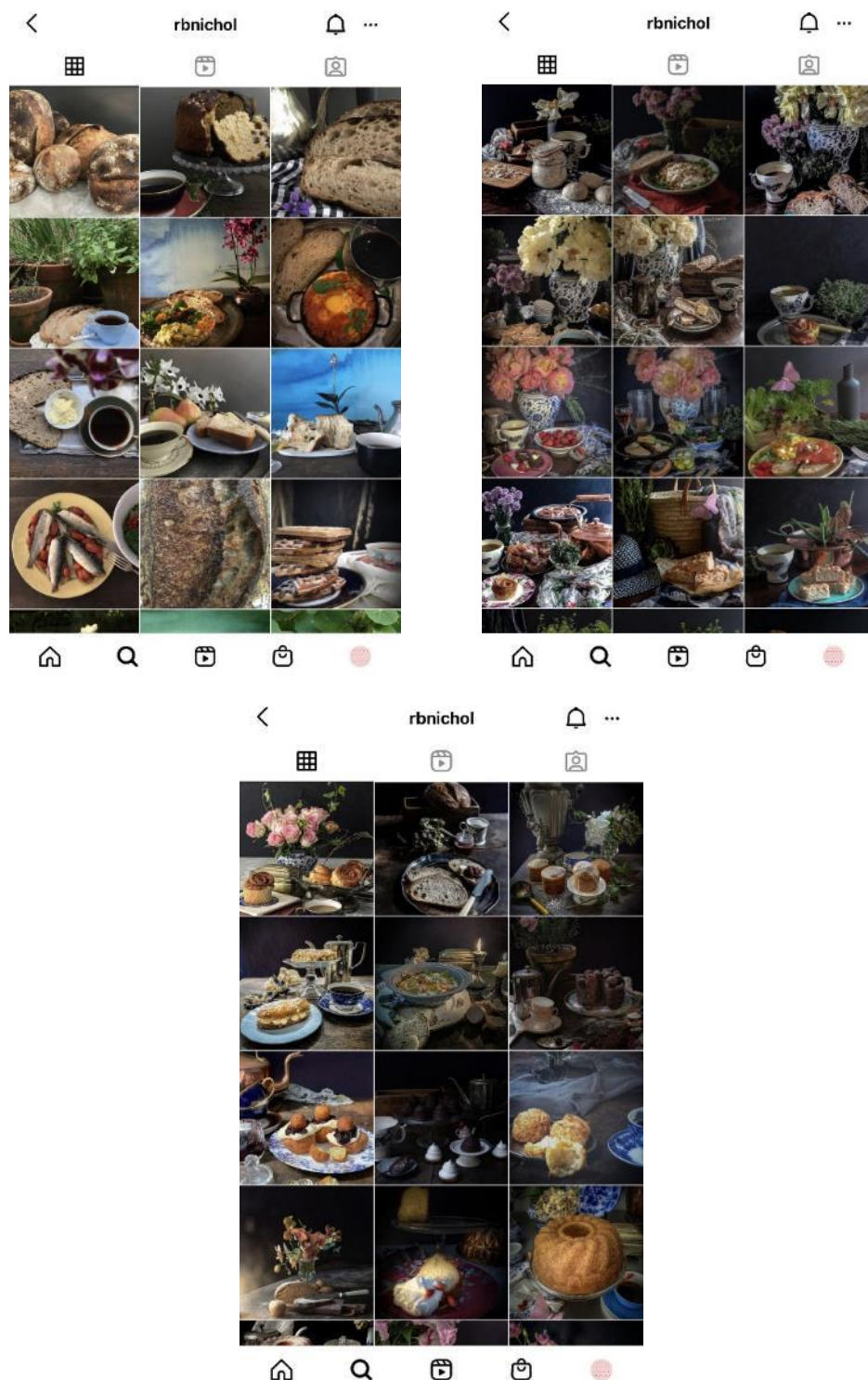


Figure 31 abc: @rbnichol's foodstagram collection in autumn 2017, summer 2019 and spring 2021

When observing @rbnichol's feed, I discovered a gradual change in her visual style. @rbnichol perceives such change as a result of the inspirations she generated from interacting with other foodstagrammers. 30b (Figure 30) shows her Instagram feed when she started her account in the spring of 2017. At this stage, her foodstagramms appear more as close-up snapshots featuring mainly food, which she said illustrate "*this is what I made*". In Figure 31,

we can sense a change. For several foodstagramms in 31a, @rbnichol started to include flowers and backdrops (see images with blue or dark grey backgrounds in 31a). Later, realising she has “loads” of chinaware left by her family, she stated: “*I would sort of take out my grandmother’s china to have my coffee and take a picture, so it became more than the food*”. As we can see in 31b and 31c, her later foodstagramms included more “props” such as baskets, vases, pots, candles and cloth butterflies. All the objects shown in 31b and 31c are intricately orchestrated into harmonious compositions. Also, both the contrasting effect created by the dark background versus the colourful objects and the theatrical lighting in each image transformed the food scenes into elaborate poeticised tablescapes we normally find in still-life paintings and photos, such as Claesz’s (3a, Figure 3) plus Cézanne’s (Figure 4) paintings and Fenton’s (5a, Figure 5) photo. In this sense, the nature of her foodstagramms shifted from photos about her food experiences to sophisticated food scenes she created using the materials coming from her everyday life.

After formulating her still-life image style, we can observe the consistency in all images listed in 31b and 31c. From @rbnichol’s explanation, I realised that such a style was a co-creation between her and her audience, as argued in Goffman’s (1959) presentation of the self as introduced in chapter 1. For her foodstagram comments, I often observed words from her audience saying that her photos look like “paintings”, her styling is “gorgeous”, or she has a “stunning gallery”. @rbnichol expressed that she appreciates such acknowledgements. On the other hand, she also mentioned that she perceived that she is “*expected*” by her audience to use her style to tell stories. Therefore, she would post casual snaps such as air bubbles developed from her bread in stories but keep all still-life-looking foodstagramms for her feed. As @rbnichol expressed, she felt she is expected to post still-life photos on her feed. Therefore, we can regard her activities of carefully curating and maintaining such a visual consistency as actions to sustain her creative self to maintain the expected impressions (Goffman, 1959; Hogan, 2010) that her community “*friends*” generated about her.

On the one hand, meeting the expectations of her audience allows @rbnichol to sustain the social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) she managed to accrue on Instagram and continue to receive predictable social affirmation from her audience that can elevate her emotional well-being. However, on the other hand, we can also understand such a choice as @rbnichol’s action of showing respect to her audience, whom she considers as “*friends*”. This version is closer to @rbnichol’s own interpretation. When reflecting on why she maintained style consistency, @rbnichol stressed that she only spent a few minutes setting the scene and snapping her photos

using her phone. After that, she could still enjoy the dishes when they were still hot. From such an interpretation, we can find that @rbnichol was trying to define her foodstagramming activities as something additional, which did not disrupt her food experiences. Also, as @rbnichol added, she is neither a chef nor a photographer and does not make money from foodstagramming. As she defined, she mainly treats foodstagramming as her “*hobby*”: something she would maintain doing if she finds it enjoyable or otherwise abandons if she ceases gaining pleasure. However, as a very “*intense person*” who tends to want to excel in everything she does, she said she does regard her foodstagramming as a hobby that she takes “*very seriously*” so she would put effort into creating her foodstagrams. Therefore, although there was competitiveness in her foodstagramming activities, from her interpretation, we can see that she was trying to frame the competitiveness within herself rather than towards others.

As @rbnichol stressed, she is “*a person who cultivates relationships in small ways*”, who lives “*a very little life*” and just wants to share her “*little story of come here and have a coffee with me*” with her audience. Thus, we can regard @rbnichol’s perseverance in keeping her style consistent as a “*small*” gesture through which she cultivates affective and hospitable bonds with her audience, even though as she said, “*I’m not sure they’re bothered, but this is my feeling*”. Via creating these foodstagrams, she managed to use her foodstagrams to poeticise her “*little life*” and “*little story*” and share her aesthetic experiences with her community members just as she would do using food in a face-to-face context. The consistency in @rbnichol’s style thus bears the meaning of respect from her to her audience’s expectations and appreciation of her food, her foodstagrams and herself.

In this sense, all these aspects suggest that she was trying to distance herself from foodstagrammers who only use food as props to produce visual content to promote themselves, compete with others using their content, seek attention or even make money. Such distance allowed her to establish herself as someone who respects the affective bonds that she managed to establish with her community friends on Instagram. From her words, we can also find that the respect was to the extent that she would spend, while not much time, but much effort, in creating the foodstagrams that can visually incarnate the culinary joy she derived from everyday food experiences and the aesthetic feelings one could gain from looking at her photos.

6.1.3 Discussion

From both participants’ foodstagramming experiences, we can see that they performed different forms of cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1984) to build and maintain their social capitals

meaning the rather “durable network[s]” of “relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.14) that both participants managed to accrue from Instagram. In @gizem.kumbaraci’s case, the cultural capitals are in the forms of her critical knowledge of the cultural meanings of food in bringing people together plus her “visual aesthetic capital” (term adapted from Manovich, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) concerning using emotionally evocative visual styles to both poeticise her feelings into visual representations and touch her audience. In @rbnichol’s case, the cultural capitals are in the forms of her “culinary capital” (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012) regarding her capability of hand-crafting a wide arrange of food plus visual aesthetic capital involving artistically representing her food and emotionally expressing her respect to her audience using visual means. Relating to the discussions introduced so far, while they are self-performances (Goffman, 1959) that both participants mobilised to perform their creative selves in exchange for personal gains referring to either more photography work (@gizem.kumbaraci) or social recognition and social capital (both cases), they are not necessarily signalling only distinction or privileged social positions that Bourdieu’s (1984) original interpretation of cultural capital emphasises.

The cultural capital we see in both @gizem.kumbaraci’s and @rbnichol’s cases have connections to what Nettleton (2013) calls “existential capital”, meaning the “phenomenological gains” about “shared passions” (p.209) maintained by pleasures people develop from embodied aesthetic engagements in an activity such as fell running. Since such pleasures are both personal and shared among people who all participate in such activities, as Nettleton suggests, it is a “novel form of sociality” (p.209) instead of separation. Similarly, in both @gizem.kumbaraci’s and @rbnichol’s instances, their photo subjects are about food and food moments, which are embodied aesthetic and affective experiences that can be very personal to them. However, since food is a common subject and food moments define the rhythms of our everyday lives, with our personal aesthetic feelings formed in our own food experiences, we as image recipients can easily echo with @gizem.kumbaraci’s and @rbnichol’s ones and develop sensory and affective connections with both of them by looking at their foodstagramms. In this sense, due to resonance formed in such common phenomenological responses, sociality is therefore formulated through both participants’ foodstagramming experiences and via exercising their cultural capitals.

By drawing analyses of both their words and content, we can discover that both participants used foodstagramming as a device to establish aesthetically and emotionally connected sociality, which means the social capitals they accrued should not be interpreted

only as the chips they can use to elevate their social status but should also be regarded as the source where they could gain friendship, community support, sense of belonging and social solidarity from an online community that resembles a physical one offline. Both participants hold strong emotions towards food, so by making their favourite topic their photo subjects, @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol were borrowing visual devices as materials to express hospitality to community members from the wider world in a virtual way, which they could have done physically using food. Relating to Ibrahim's (2015) argument introduced in chapter 2, we can regard foodstagramming as a "material objectification" (p.2) process. By inviting a "social gaze" (p.1) into their private food moments, both participants discovered ways to transform their private yet universal and sharable experiences into devices to invoke "social resonance" (p.1), which according to Ibrahim (2015), are new ways to "connect" and "frame social relations" (p.2), similar to what Nettleton (2013) argues. Additionally, since food can tap into "our emotional reservoir" and "nostalgic memories", as well as "trigger forms of affect" (Ibrahim, 2015a, p.2) as demonstrated in both participants' examples, objectifying such affect visually also potentiate both participants to invite their audiences to share the intimate and strong feelings.

As delineated above, both participants borrowed different image styles as their devices to visually showcase their hospitality and sincerity towards their audiences. While in @gizem.kumbaraci's case, it was in the form of the dedicated visual style she used for each image, for @rbnichol's case, it was in the form of formulating and maintaining her still-life visual style for almost every image on her feed. As articulated above, in their foodstagramms, both participants chose to portray their actual lived food experiences. However, compared to @superbritishgirl (chapter 4) who adopted a very casual documentary style to record her food experiences, in @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's cases, there were more selective, constructed and even staged elements in their image-making styles. These stylistic elements therefore visually flag up the expressive nature of @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's foodstagramms, for which we should treat the photos as poeticised expressions of the participants' aesthetic reactions to their lived experiences. Like cases introduced in chapter 5, @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol constructed and staged the scenes to better concretise and heighten their strongest feelings photographically (Barnbaum, 2017, p.11). As a result, the photos are not necessarily accurate projections of their life experiences but are visual tools the participants used to materialise their intimate aesthetic feelings that they wanted to share with their audiences to formulate close social bonds.

In this sense, while @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's foodstagramming practices allowed them to perform their cultural capitals and promote themselves as competent photographers, their practices also allowed them to produce visual materials that enabled them to formulate affective and close sociality in an online community. Via exercising their cultural capitals through foodstagramming, @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol showed attempts to transform the "bridging social capital", meaning loose connections with people without emotional support, into "bonding social capital", which are closely connected and emotionally supportive connections that people normally have with family or close friends (Putnam, 2000, pp.22–23; Leonard, 2004, pp.929–930). Through their foodstagramming practices, we can thus discover @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's intentions of using their Instagram accounts to formulate the "shared moral order" (Vaisey, 2007, p.851) of friendliness and togetherness that are needed to create online communities, sociality within the community, as well as a sense of belonging which resembles a face-to-face context.

6.2 The Cultivation of an Inclusive Food Culture

In addition to cultivating affective relationships on an interpersonal level, several food enthusiast participants also utilised foodstagramming to express their critical voices on food culture aiming to make changes to it. @jackycooksherbooks and @foodjunkie_uk are two participants who reported such intentions. These two participants are both enthusiastic consumers of food culture. While @jackycooksherbooks focuses more on the culinary side, @foodjunkie_uk focuses more on the dining side of food culture. They both identified that the food culture in the UK is not inclusive enough, as they both reported discoveries of many elements they often experience in their personal food experiences being underrepresented by mainstream media, such as practical culinary education and cultural diversity in the dining scene. Both participants defined themselves as food bloggers and they both regularly share foodstagrams related to their cooking and eating experiences. Through sharing these with other people, both participants expressed their intention of using their own food practices as examples to demonstrate the possibility of cultivating a more inclusive food culture. In this section, I present the details of how @jackycooksherbooks and @foodjunkie_uk used foodstagramming to achieve this.

Like @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol, the social element in most participants' foodstagramming practices emphasises mostly an interpersonal, instead of a cultural level. Within the sample, not many participants reported such an intention of using their foodstagramming practices to make changes to the food culture. However, among the twenty-

seven participants, there were still six participants who exhibited their intentions of using their foodstagram of personal experiences to cultivate changes to the food culture. Therefore, in this section, I use @jackycooksherbooks' and @foodjunkie_uk's portraits as two examples to illustrate how participants used their foodstagramming practices to cultivate changes in the food culture.

6.2.1 Foodstagramming for Advocating Practical Culinary Education

@jackycooksherbooks (woman, 60-70) is a food blogger who regards herself as a “*food bore*”, which according to her, is someone who has a strong interest in food to the extent that might bore other people. She has always enjoyed cooking and “*harboured a thwarted ambition*” to pursue a catering career but instead became a social worker. @jackycooksherbooks is now retired and lives by herself. @jackycooksherbooks has built a voluminous cookbook collection over the years. Almost every day, as her name suggests, she experiments with different recipes from these books for making her daily meals. Through her foodstagram, @jackycooksherbooks then shares her feelings and reflections from her cooking and tasting experiences with a wider audience.

On a personal level, @jackycooksherbooks said she shares her foodstagram as “*a way of social networking*” for “*connecting with people*” and making herself feel like a part of a “*virtual community*” formed by “*food bores*” like her. @jackycooksherbooks mentioned, “*it actually is nice to get some feedback*”, such as “*that looks nice*” or “*oh, that was a nice meal, Jacky.*” In this way, as someone cooking just for herself, getting positive feedback from her audience, as she described, is like gaining “*affirmation*” from other people, which often made her smile and felt “*jolly nice*”. Therefore, like @rnbichol, by sharing her food experiences and performing her foodbore self, on the receiving side, @jackycooksherbooks also managed to find belonging in her tribe formed of people with similar axiological values towards food like her and receive affirmation from the tribe members that work as support for mental well-being.

On a social level, by reviewing @jackycooksherbooks' account, I observed that she also shares her foodstagram to on the one hand raise awareness of issues she identified from food culture and on the other hand set her own food experiences as examples for a potential change. When discussing her views about food culture, @jackycooksherbooks mentioned that she “*got a bit tired*” of competition shows on TV. She thinks the saturation of these shows can make people “*feel even less confident*”. @jackycooksherbooks explained that “*there are too many restaurant chefs trying to explain to people how to cook*”. By watching the chefs being

skilled on TV, the audience could feel that *“I don’t have the obvious skills that therefore I will not try... I will just open this ready meal or put another pizza in the oven”* or order from Deliveroo.

She said that she is not against ready meals or food delivery per se but is mainly concerned about the effect of the underrepresentation of practical cooking demonstrations on TV. As she contrasted:

We used to have, years ago, programmes on the television which actually showed people how to cook. They don’t do that anymore, hardly. Well, it’s all a bit highfalutin for most people... You wouldn’t do cookery at school... Basics aren’t explained... Greg Wallace on Masterchef is not gonna explain to somebody how to make a white sauce. (@jackycooksherbooks)

Therefore, by showing her discontent towards the *“highfalutin”* or pretentious impression she gets from the food programmes and criticising the transformation of cooking as a basic skill into mere entertaining shows, she was distancing herself from the values of competition and pretentiousness that are often highlighted in the current food culture.

@jackycooksherbooks recalled: *“my family had no money when I was growing up, but my mother always had hot meals on a table”*. Being brought up in this way, she emphasised, after having children, while she and her husband both worked full time, *“we didn’t have a lot of money either... and certainly my kids can’t afford eating ready meals or having takeaway delivered all the time”*. She mentioned: *“there was pizza of course”*, but she would always try to cook *“something that wasn’t too expensive”* from scratch on Saturdays and put them in the freezer. @jackycooksherbooks considers that good food does not have to be *“restaurant”*, *“fussy”* or *“cheffy”* food, but just *“good ingredients prepared carefully”*. Linking what she mentioned earlier, we can observe that she again drew a boundary to bracket out professionalism and pretentiousness from her food value. Instead, drawing from her past, she established practicality (the opposite of pretentiousness) as the core value that she prioritises.

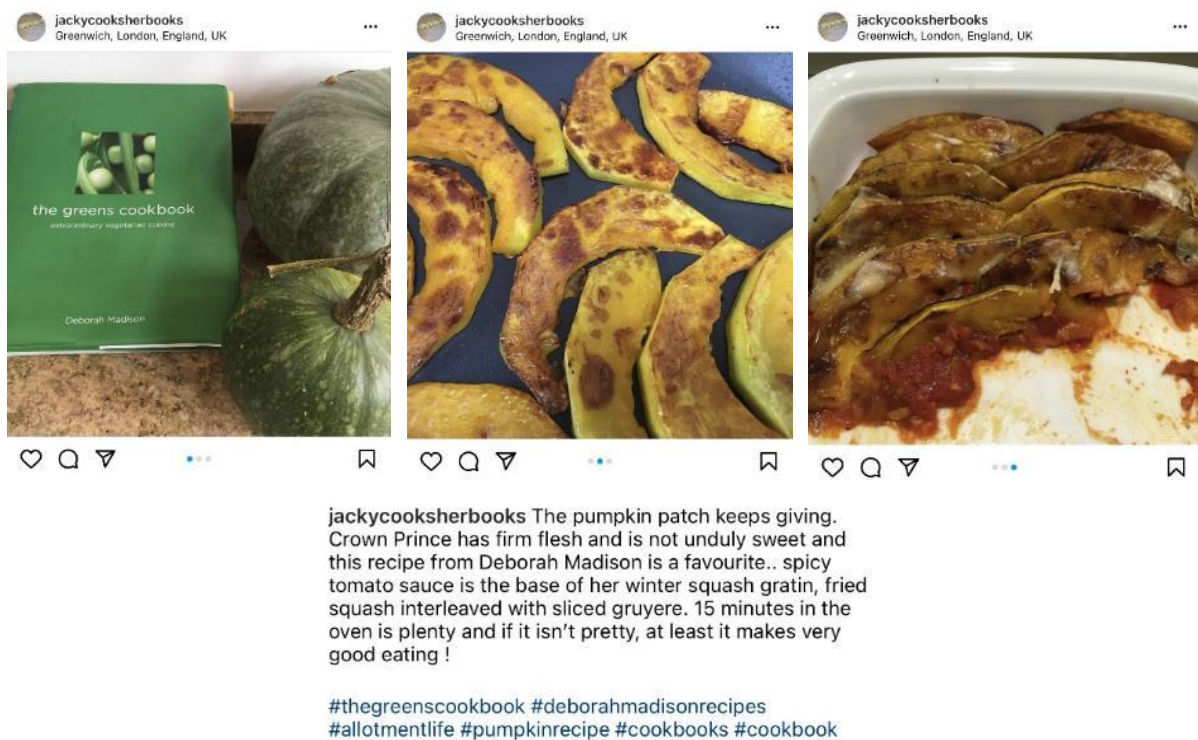


Figure 32 abcd: A typical foodstagram post from @jackycooksherbooks - © @jackycooksherbooks

With the networking affordance Instagram offers, @jackycooksherbooks can share her daily meals through her foodstagram as an action to communicate her food values to other people. On the one hand, it allows her to perform her moral self and on the other hand, it allows her to advocate and promote the values she thinks are important but underrepresented to a wider audience. Her foodstagram thus serve as the communicational devices to aid such actions. As she expressed, by sharing foodstagram about “*home-cooked food which isn't too complicated*”, she intends to send out a message to other people that cooking is not as difficult as it seems on TV. With such an intention, if we look at Figure 32, a typical carousel post from @jackycooksherbooks, we can find that she did not just feature the final pumpkin dish, but also included the source of the recipe, the ingredients and the cooking processes in her images. Also, in her captions, @jackycooksherbooks said she normally uses text to “*tell a story*”. Indeed, from 32d, we can find a story about her uses of Deborah Madison’s recipe to bake a pumpkin dish with the Crown Prince sourced from the allotment. We can also discover that she considers the recipe useful, and she enjoyed the taste of the final dish. The visual and textual content thus can guide the audience through the processes of her cooking and tasting experience.

Regarding @jackycooksherbooks’ visual style, she specified that she intentionally keeps a realistic style for all her foodstagram. She considers herself someone who has “*a quite strong visual sense*”, so she would make sure all the foodstagram look presentable to others.

For example, before taking photos, she would make sure the food is “*reasonably well-lit*” and does not have a cast on her hand or camera. She also would arrange the food to make the plate look “*nice*”, “*appetising*” and with the colours looking “*reasonably true*”. These stylistic choices communicate to us @jackycooksherbooks’ cultural capitals regarding visual aesthetics capital (Manovich, 2017a, 2020) (which she referred to as “*strong visual sense*”) and culinary capital (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012) (which she referred to as “*competence as a cook*”). As she acknowledged herself during the interview, there is a “*showing off*” element in the way she chose to present the food. However, we should not understand the function of her foodstagramms merely as presentations (Goffman, 1959) of her cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1984).

While @jackycooksherbooks said she does normally try to make sure her dish looks presentable, she stressed that she would intentionally avoid “*doing little swirls or blobs of coloured oils... on a plate like they do on MasterChef*”. Also, as we can observe from 32c, she does not style the food in the same way that chefs normally do in restaurants or on TV programmes. She explained: “*I don’t think you want people to be looking at food that is not achievable in an ordinary kitchen, so it’s about being true and real.*” Here she was trying to equate “*achievable*” and “*ordinary*” to “*true*” and “*real*”, so we can notice that the value of practicality has a layer of meaning of honesty or integrity. Therefore, the realistic style visually communicates practicality and integrity, which are two values she considers as the guiding principles that we should have in food culture. Also, since @jackycooksherbooks hopes to use her content to convince more people that cooking is not as difficult as presented on TV, we can understand her effort in maintaining her realistic visual style as her approach to visually convince her audience of such a message. We can thus consider @jackycooksherbooks’ action of sharing her foodstagramms as a small gesture she initiates to highlight and insert the values of practicality and integrity into the food culture.

Regarding audience engagement, the most common comments left for @jackycooksherbooks’ posts are compliments about the featured dish or her effort in cooking the dish, in addition to gratitude to her for sharing the dishes. Occasionally, I also observed discussions between @jackycooksherbooks and her audience on practical cooking topics, such as the uses of knives and modifications of portion sizes. For one post, I also observed an audience member’s comment indicating that he was planning to cook a dish as @jackycooksherbooks did but got distracted by other tasks. However, he added: “*will do something of that... over the next week or so*”. Thus, the two principles listed above can have the potential of making the food culture a more inclusive one because they can encourage more

people to pay attention to the practical side of cooking, and this can allow people to take care of themselves and their families, like what @jackycooksherbooks is now doing for herself and what she and her mom used to do in the past for their families.

6.2.2 Foodstagramming for Advocating Cultural Diversity

Like @jackycooksherbooks' case, we can also find similar attempts of using personal food experiences to introduce underrepresented food values in food culture in other blogging participants' experiences, such as @foodjunkie_uk's. While @jackycooksherbooks' experience emphasises the value of practicality and integrity, @foodjunkie_uk's experience stresses the value of authenticity and tolerance. @foodjunkie_uk (woman, 20-30) is a food blogger who enjoys cooking and eating food from different cultures. Similar to @superbritishgirl (chapter 3), @foodjunkie_uk also considers herself a dedicated foodie who is curious about trying different types of food, even if she thinks she might not like the tastes in the end. Due to her passion for food, @foodjunkie_uk started a food blog and a related Instagram account after she came to the UK two years before our interview.

When discussing her understanding of UK food culture, as someone who grew up in Asia, @foodjunkie_uk mentioned that she felt that for restaurants in the UK, "*there's quite a gap between Asian taste and western taste*". Regarding such a "*gap*", she explained:

Like a local food blogger, they don't really go to more, more authentic [Asian restaurants]. Also, because there's a barrier like those restaurants... they don't really have a website, or their menu is not in English, or those kinds of things. So, I think there's still kind of like a gap between those restaurant and people who wanna try... And then the translation on the menu probably is a bit misleading sometimes. It's just a lot of reasons. So that's why I guess there's less people talking about the good authentic Asian place compared to normal Western restaurant. (@foodjunkie_uk)

Therefore, the "*gap*" stands for both the representation of Asian restaurants and the authenticity of the taste of the restaurants. As a reaction to such a gap she discovered, @foodjunkie_uk started her blog to "*introduce some interesting Asian place*" to the UK audience both on her website and her Instagram. In this research, I mainly focus on her blogging practice on Instagram.

Like @jackycooksherbooks' case, the nature of @foodjunkie_uk's blogging practice is not entirely altruistic. As I introduce later, even if it was not deliberately intended by @foodjunkie_uk, by introducing "*authentic*" Asian restaurants to a UK audience, she can

establish and distinguish herself as an expert or connoisseur of authenticity who knows where to find dishes with the taste true to where it was originated. As Johnston and Baumann (2007) suggest, such an establishment can signal her rather privileged social position because of the high culinary cultural capital and sufficient economic capital she possesses for both being competent in distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic, as well as afford dining in different restaurants. On the other hand, having accumulated nearly 15,000 followers on Instagram, @foodjunkie_uk often received invites, PR gifts and marketing collaborations from different businesses. @foodjunkie_uk stressed that such rewards were not planned by her when she started her blog, so she only considers them as a “*bonus*”, rather than her pursuit. According to her, the main personal values she gained from her blogging practices were the opportunities to first nudge herself to taste diverse types of food and second accumulate hands-on experience (through trying out different methods when promoting her blog) that can be useful for her as a marketing professional. Therefore, in general, @foodjunkie_uk’s blog provides the platform for her to develop cultural, economic and social capitals (Bourdieu, 1984) for elevating her social position.

On the other hand, on a communal level, @foodjunkie_uk stressed that she does hope to become a “*bridge or middleman*” for “*closing that gap*” that she identified about Asian food in the UK. While becoming a “*bridge or middleman*” allows her to gain symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984): social prestige which again benefits her social position, but by reading through her interpretations, we can also discover that she uses her foodstagramming to exercise the social responsibility she felt as a community member living in the UK. By linking her words to her foodstagramming activities, we can find her tendency in using her foodstagramms to draw attention to underrepresented cuisines, such as Asian cuisines. Moreover, by looking through her feed, while @foodjunkie_uk generally focuses on introducing Asian cuisines, she also introduces cuisines from other cultures. Thus, this choice signals her tolerant attitude towards different food cultures. The choice also suggests her intention of elevating Asian cuisines for the cultivation of a more inclusive food culture and not at the sacrifice of assigning any cuisine a dominant position.

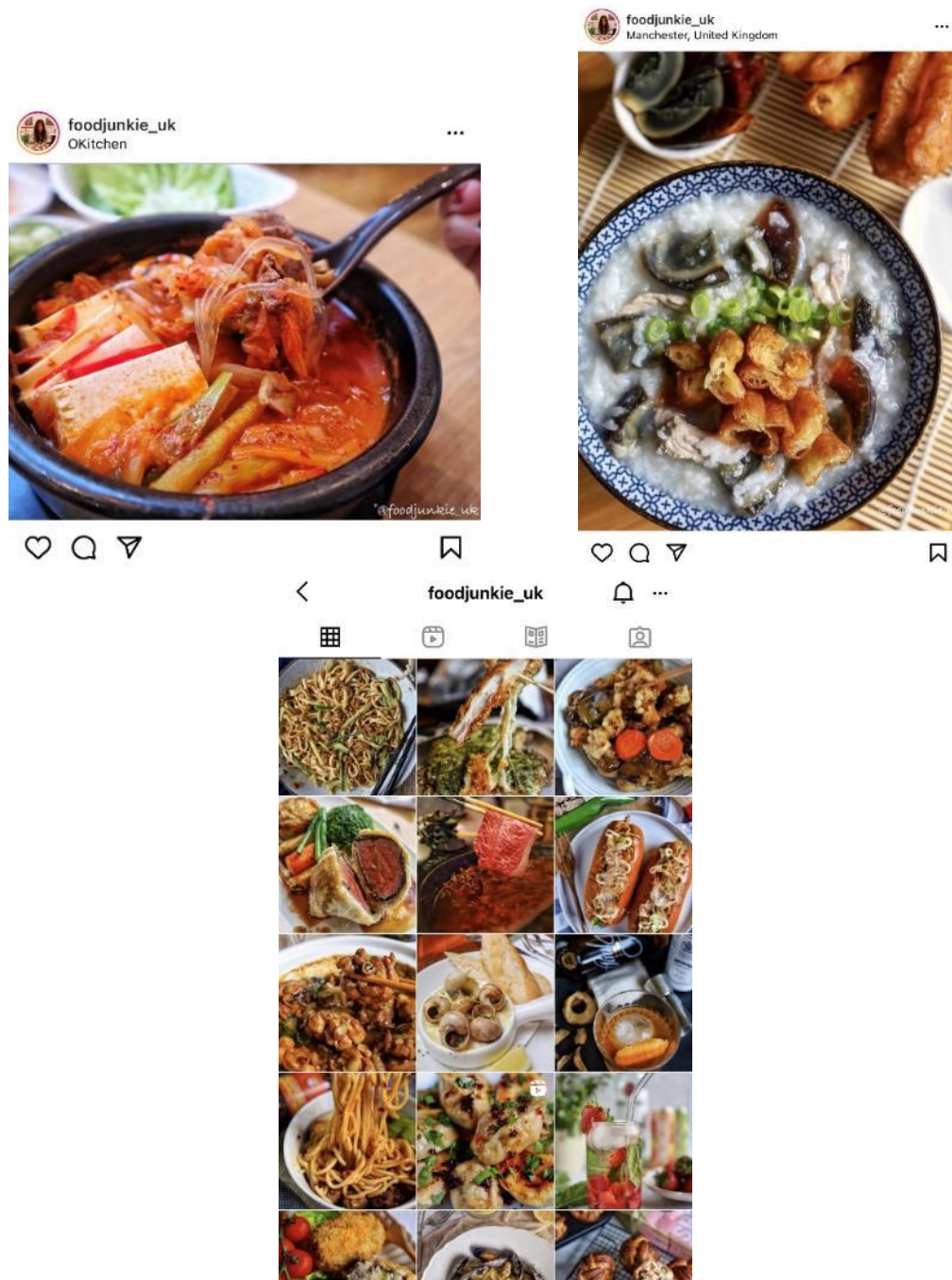


Figure 33 ab: Individual foodstagram of @foodjunkie_uk; c: Feed of @foodjunkie_uk - © @foodjunkie_uk

For dining experiences, while @foodjunkie_uk uses her blog to delineate contextual information to present comprehensive dining experiences, her relevant Instagram posts serve as teasers to guide her Instagram audience to her blog. With the establishment of the COVID-19 national lockdown, she started to share photos and videos of dishes (mostly Asian dishes) she cooked at home. We can thus regard these activities as another approach for @foodjunkie_uk to continue being the “bridge” to fill the “gap”. Regarding the food items she featured on her foodstagrams, they are normally food that provides @foodjunkie_uk with positive aesthetic feelings. In Figure 33, 33a shows a stew she had in a restaurant, while 33b

presents a bowl of congee she made at home. From the captions, she specified they are both dishes she thinks are “*perfect*” to beat the cold feeling of a “*chilly*” day. In most of the posts in her feed, I observed that @foodjunkie_uk mostly focused on the tastes of the dishes. As she emphasised in our interview, “*I’m not too bothered about the interior, [but] mostly the food, the dish*”. Also, she mentioned that she would avoid “*overrated*” food that wins the customer by being “*interesting-looking*” but not by taste itself. She used the word “*gimmick*” to describe her understanding of such food, meaning food “*just... for people to go take a picture*”. Thus, by avoiding such “*overrated*” “*gimmick[s]*”, she was distancing herself from the values of inauthenticity and pretentiousness. Thus, by avoiding what she considers as the inauthentic and pretentious elements when choosing the restaurants that she dines in and by making food the core theme of the foodstagrams she shares with her audience, @foodjunkie_uk was trying to express her understanding of the value of authenticity in food, which is food that is just tasty, regardless of its presentation or the ambience of the restaurant setting.

If we examine the visual styles of @foodjunkie_uk’s foodstagrams, we can also observe the embodiment of the value of authenticity as shown in her interpretations presented above. As exhibited in Figure 33, most of her foodstagrams feature close-up shots of the food with the background being blurred. Also, in 33a and some shots in 33c, we can find she especially focuses on presenting the moments that look like someone is picking up the food and is about to eat it. If we observe 33a and 33b, we can also find the photos have a hyper-realistic aesthetic with the textures and colours of the dishes being highlighted. From our interview, I discovered that these effects resulted from @foodjunkie_uk’s photographing and retouching choices. @foodjunkie_uk explained that she normally uses a camera, instead of her phone (the default device Instagram supports its users to use), to photograph food for higher image quality. Also, she described that she edits her photos using Snapseed (a separate application) to enhance, rather than change, the “*detail*”, “*colour*” and “*lighting*” of the food. According to her, the purpose of such enhancements is not just to make the foodstagrams “*look pretty*”. More importantly, she said she wants to use such visual renditions to highlight the dishes so that they can look “*more appetising*”.

By highlighting the food, @foodjunkie_uk said she wants her audience to “*feel hungry*” and “*want the food*” by looking at her foodstagrams so that they can generate a stronger drive to visit the Asian restaurants she recommended, which can help to support many underrepresented food businesses. On the other hand, as she mentioned in the interview, many “*hidden good*” Asian restaurants might not have elaborate interior designs. As someone who

thinks “*food is the base*”, by drawing her audience’s attention to food itself in her foodstagram, we can consider that she was encouraging her audience to try Asian food even though the restaurant might look humbler than many well-decorated western restaurants that the UK eaters are more familiar with. In this sense, by emphasising the food but not the non-food aspects using her visual style, it appears as if she was visually communicating to her audience the value of authenticity that she regards as important, in order to build her bridge between the Asian restaurants in the UK and the UK eaters.

@foodjunkie_uk’s blogging project thus shows a communal nature. To negotiate such a nature, @foodjunkie_uk told me that she had put a lot of emphasis on honesty and craft in producing her content. For her dining-out posts, she claimed, “*I just post what I eat*” and writes what she feels about the dish. For her recipe posts, she stated that she would spend more time, effort and sometimes money in planning her content because, in addition to the tasting experience, constructing the posts also includes getting cooking inspirations, testing recipes, shopping for groceries and producing the photos. Also, although @foodjunkie_uk started to get more freebies, invites and paid commercial collaborations, she expressed that while she appreciates such opportunities, she still tends to leave more room for the content she truly wants to share with her audience. As she emphasised in our multiple follow-up conversations after the interview, she still considers 1. the expression of support to small Asian food businesses in the UK and 2. the provision of inspiration regarding eating and cooking Asian food as the two key reasons that maintained her blogging enthusiasm.

In this sense, like @jackycooksherbooks’ case, we can also consider @foodjunkie_uk’s action of sharing foodstagram as a small gesture of inserting the values she considers as important in food culture, which in her case is authenticity, meaning an emphasis put on the taste of food instead of any extraneous factors. By promoting such a value, as mentioned in her interpretations, we can sense her intention of building the bridge to minimise the gap between Asian food in the UK and UK eaters. Also, we can regard her action of featuring food from other food cultures in her feed as a framing action that explains why she builds the bridge, which is to raise awareness of her audience to be more tolerant of different food cultures and support the underrepresented food businesses signifying these cultures. Her intention is partly achieved as I often observed comments from her audience members regarding the food looking “fabulous” or “gorgeous” accompanied by their eagerness to try the food. I sometimes also discovered comments saying “thank you” to @foodjunkie_uk for sharing the background stories related to the food posted. As we can envision, by embracing diversity on a large

communal scale, there is a potential for the community members to cultivate a more inclusive food culture.

6.2.3 Discussion

Through analysing both participants' rationales in choosing image subjects and styles, we can discover that both participants demonstrated the intention of building affective relationships with their audiences through their foodstagramming practices, similar to @gizem.kumbaraci's and @rbnichol's cases. However, in addition to cultivating affective interpersonal relationships, @jackycooksherbooks and @foodjunkie_uk also expressed intentions to use their foodstagramming practices as devices to engage with the food culture, such as by raising their audiences' awareness of multiple underrepresented elements in the food culture and encouraging them to make changes to address such issues. I established that both participants used such actions to express their values. In @jackycooksherbooks' case, we can find that she favours the value of practicality and integrity over competition and pretentiousness, while in @foodjunkie_uk, it is her praise of the values of authenticity and diversity over pretentiousness and exclusion.

Similar to what we have discussed in the last section, the performance of such moral selves can be understood as presentations of their cultural capitals, as it showcases both their knowledge about food culture, culinary skills and their critical ability. On the one hand, such performance can demonstrate their agency (Giddens, 1991) as competent persons who have the capacity to not be passive recipients of culture, but active individuals who can critically engage with culture. In the meantime, it also allows them to signal their rather privileged social position because as Savage (2000) suggests it is increasingly the people from the middle-class group who tend to have access to individualised reflexivity. On the other hand, similar to the establishment in the last section, the performance of such cultural capitals can help both participants to distinguish themselves and convert their cultural capitals into gains in numbers of followers (both participants), reputation (both participants) and economic benefit (@foodjunkie_uk), so an increase in social, symbolic and economic capitals, although as stressed by both participants they did not intend to deliberately pursue such benefits when starting their blogs.

While the above personal gains cannot be excluded, drawing clues from both @jackycooksherbooks' and @foodjunkie_uk's words and content, we can find that both participants' foodstagramming practices are also guided by their moral awareness and the

social responsibilities that they felt regarding cultivating inclusivity in our social world. Relating to Barassi's (2018, p.148) argument, taking advantage of the sharing affordance Instagram provides, by visualising the values they developed from their private food experiences, in addition to performing their senses of "agency", both participants also managed to create another layer of meanings for the foodstagramms they share. Instead of just being personal lived experiences, the pictured food moments in each participant's foodstagramms can also serve as resources to construct a "common we" (Barassi 2018, p.144) that is a part of the moral self. Also, aided by the means of visual styles in communicating and transmitting unspoken feelings and values, both participants managed to establish embodied connections with other people and convinced some audience members to act collectively to cultivate an inclusive food culture.

In this sense, in both participants' cases, the moral layer of their foodstagramming practices has transformed their self-expressions into something social and political. Therefore, by visualising and sharing private food experiences with a public audience, both participants were exercising a form of "everyday activism" (Vivienne and Burgess, 2013), namely "the sharing of personal stories in public spaces with the aim of challenging the status quo" (Vivienne, 2016, p.1) of food culture. Such everyday activism has been mentioned in research about people sharing photos on social media as a means to empower their expressions of personal identities, such as concerning sexuality (Vivienne and Burgess, 2013) and gender (Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2018). As the above portraits demonstrate, via foodstagramming, people can directly mobilise the corporeal and cultural engagements with food in their everyday lives as resources to raise awareness of social issues embedded in food culture by expressing their different feelings and values related to such feelings. Therefore, similar to Ibrahim's (2020, p.3) research about selfies with a political nature, we can regard both @jackycooksherbooks' and @foodjunkie_uk's visual representations of their food values and practices as "political tool[s]" that they used for the "enacting, organising and embodying resistance, political activism and solidarity".

6.3 The Cultivation of a Mutually Supportive Social World

Similarly, another two participants @matt_inwood and Ruth I introduce next also use foodstagramming to exercise their different forms of everyday activism. While @jackycooksherbooks' and @foodjunkie_uk's forms of everyday activism focus on food culture, @matt_inwood's and Ruth's activist activities centre more on pressing political topics. This means @matt_inwood's and Ruth's activist activities via their foodstagramming practices

directly aim at addressing pressing political themes related to food: such as world hunger and social relations in local communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This also means that, instead of just encouraging other people to act, these two participants also directly take action via their foodstagramming practices to make changes that support their political agendas.

As stated at the beginning of *The Care Manifesto*: “Our world is one in which carelessness reigns” (The Care Collective, 2020, p.8). Especially with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, such carelessness is further highlighted in many countries, including the UK (ibid). However, care is an important element for us to survive and thrive (Barnes, 2012, p.5). Therefore, while people can get less from the state, such a need has cultivated “carewashed markets” (The Care Collective, 2020, p.13), which according to The Care Collective, made care merely a topic for generating profits for private benefits with its communal and ethical elements being neglected. In contrast, @matt_inwood’s and Ruth’s cases I introduce next can present to us examples of how cultivating a caring economy through the materials of both food and foodstagramming can also lead to the cultivation of a caring social world.

This sub-theme was developed from my post-interview online participant observations, which was after the outbreak of the pandemic of COVID-19. Like the last sub-theme, within the sample, although the majority of participants do not use their foodstagramming practices to conduct activist activities with political implications, there are still four participants who constantly use food and/or foodstagramming as materials to take care of the communities that are both close to and far from them in a physical sense. I curated an exhibition (in a literal sense) for the conference *Food Matters and Materialities* in autumn 2021 to demonstrate via visual collages how the four participants used food and/or foodstagramming to take care of other people from communities near and afar. In this section, using textual means, I use @matt_inwood’s and Ruth’s related foodstagramming experiences as examples to represent this sub-theme.

6.3.1 Foodstagramming for Making Changes to Political Issues

In chapter 5, we learned that @matt_inwood is an art director/graphic designer/phone photographer/teacher who uses his Instagram as a “*marketing platform*” to promote his creative work and phone photography workshop. By analysing his foodstagramming practice, we also learned that Instagram is a place he uses his images to express his aesthetic values towards food and gain audience feedback that aids him to improve his craft. In addition to these uses, in this

chapter, I focus on delineating another side of how he uses the platform, which is to communicate his political and ethical values to both express his political and ethical selves, as well as to initiate civic actions to directly address political issues.

@matt_inwood mentioned to me that Instagram is a place where he does “*more than just post[ing] pretty pictures of food*”. As introduced, he presents both his professional and personal selves using the same account. Therefore, on @matt_inwood’s Instagram, in addition to the aesthetically interesting photos that I introduced in the last chapter, we can also find foodstagram posts where he shares private stories related to his childhood and political opinions, which are aspects concerning his private self. When reflecting on why he chose to do so in the interview, @matt_inwood explained:

I think it allows me to talk about a number of things that interest me and on the platform where a lot of people are just talking and don't really care or don't really want to connect... I don't connect with those accounts, so I think it makes me a bit more approachable and I think it makes me a bit more vulnerable. I use it also as a tool, when I write long and I write about things that I really truly care about... I think I'm testing something that might appear in my writing and later on at some point that might going to the book that I wish to produce or the, whatever it might be.... So sometimes it feels like a place where I can test certain things. I like it. I think that works, that balance. And if it's just work? I don't think it would interest me so much really. (@matt_inwood)

Thus, by posting content about “*things that I really truly care about*”, which are his personal stories and political opinions, he was trying to “*distance*” himself from Instagrammers he found are “*just talking and don't really care or don't really want to connect*”. In contrast, here @matt_inwood was positioning himself as someone who stands on the opposite side and is willing to share his private self to create affective interpersonal relationships with his audience like @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol did. By doing so, as he mentioned in the interview, on the one hand, he can “*test certain things*” for the literary work he hopes to publish in the future and on the other hand, it can make him appear “*more approachable*” to his audience. However, as we can see from the findings I present next, sharing content about his private self also allows @matt_inwood to perform both his moral self: a person who values respectful sociality plus community-building, and a political self: someone who carries social responsibility that attends to the rights and well-being of people he might not know in person.

We can understand the mobilisation of morality and politics as @matt_inwood’s approach to distinguishing himself from other Instagrammers. As a creative professional who

needs to promote himself to get more work, such distinction allows him to create an edge to stand out from the crowd on the platform, so that he can potentially attract more traffic or attention to his account to achieve that task. However, as he mentioned in the above quote and as we can see in the following examples, as a social actor who cares about the rights and well-being of others, the mobilisation of morality and politics in expressing himself on Instagram provides resources to let him exercise the social responsibility he felt personally and conduct actions to not only raise awareness but also directly make changes to address social and political issues.

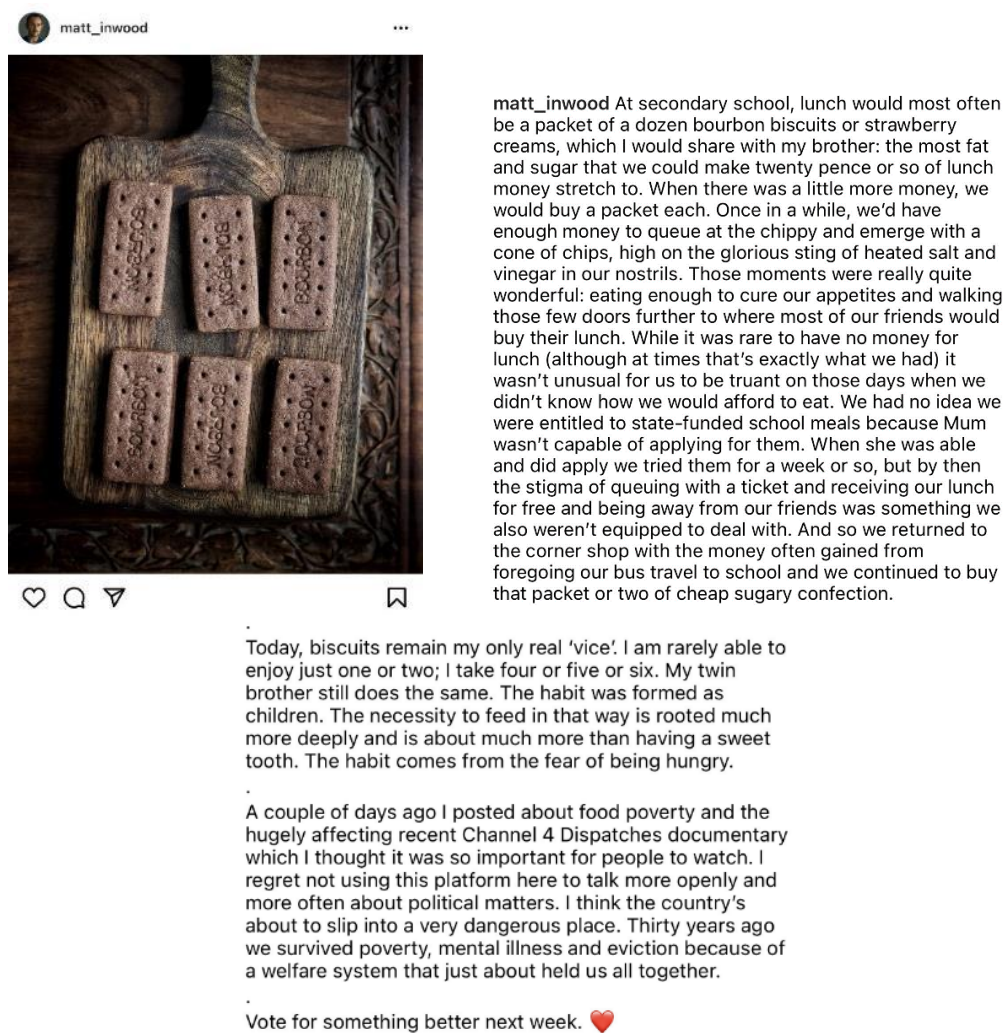


Figure 34 abc: A personal and political foodstagram post from @matt_inwood - © @matt_inwood

Figure 34 shows such an example. In 34a, we can see the main image subject: six bourbon biscuits sitting on a wooden board resting on a wooden surface. The photo has a very dark tone, with the light focusing on the middle part that draws our attention directly onto the biscuits. At first sight, like the photos presented in the last chapter, 34a can give us a moody and aesthetically interesting impression. While as introduced in chapter 5, when making a

foodstagram, @matt_inwood would firstly objectify food subjects by turning them into shapes before considering the story he wants to tell with the food, in this picture, he mentioned that he was doing the opposite.

As the post demonstrates, the main purpose of creating and sharing this foodstagram is to share an intimate story about his childhood. By reading his caption in 34b and 34c, we can find that the biscuit collection serves as an emotional symbol to him which is far from being beautiful but instead stands for austerity, hunger and fear that he constantly experienced in his childhood. As he mentioned in an earlier related post, for his brother and him: *“We routinely went hungry, were without warmth, chose food over electricity, chose a small amount of lunch money over a bus fare to school... We revised and sat exams hungry and in worry.”* As we can also read from 34b and 34c, @matt_inwood wrote in great detail about his physical and affective feelings associated with having the biscuits for lunch when he was young due to the very tight daily allowance he and his brother had at the time. Paired with the detailed illustration of his childhood experiences with the text, the toned-down visual style of the foodstagram made the post appear with a moody tone. This moody tone was indeed felt by his audience, as I observed that this post incited empathy from his audience. In the comment section, I discovered that many people expressed their appreciation for @matt_inwood’s honesty and generosity in sharing his past food stories. Some people also shared similar childhood experiences about living with austerity, such as living on a tight budget with parents not paying attention to their physical and mental well-being. Therefore, sharing such personal posts allowed @matt_inwood to elicit strong feelings from his audience and thus create affective bonds with them.

As someone who wants to promote himself and his business, a high engagement rate can make a positive contribution to achieving such a goal. However, as @matt_inwood specified in our interview, he does not share these two posts only for the sake of driving engagements. To support himself, he said he could have *“simply finish with ‘tell me your favourite cream biscuits’”* in this caption, which he had done in his other posts which also attracted wide audience engagement. As we can read from 34c, by showing instances of fear and helplessness from his childhood stories, he said he was expressing his political views. By doing this, on the one hand, he managed to perform (Goffman, 1959) his ethical and political selves. On the other hand, he also raised awareness from his audience of the importance of a caring welfare system for families like what he used to have. To achieve this, it is clear that the text served as a powerful tool to provide details about his stories. However, the image also

played a critical role in setting a tone for people to understand his stories and use the aesthetically interesting appearance, as @matt_inwood disclosed, to “stop you” to “read the story”. In this example, like participants introduced in the last section, @matt_inwood used his own food experiences and stories incarnated via his foodstagramms to exercise “everyday activism” to encourage other people to make collective efforts to help to make changes to the political system. Similar to what Fenton and Barassi (2011) and Bennett and Segerberg (2012) suggest, we can regard such everyday activism as @matt_inwood’s personalisation of political participation on social media, through which he both performed his personal self that is related to political issues and utilised the personal networks he built on Instagram to raise social awareness of such issues.

In contrast to the cases in the last section, in addition to raising awareness from his audience about social issues he identified, @matt_inwood also took action by himself to make changes. In the summers of 2020 and 2021, @matt_inwood took part in one-week-long ration challenges in which he only made and ate food using ingredients from a “ration pack” from *Concern Worldwide* which contains the same content and quantity of ingredients that Syrian refugees in Jordan receive weekly. In a series of posts, he addressed that he conducted such a challenge to raise funds to be spent on food, medicine and education for the refugees. As he mentioned on Day 1 of his challenge in 2020, his drive of starting such a challenge originated from his “political conscience” generated in reaction to the sufferings of the Syrian refugees:

These are people who once led lives of prosperity and dignity, who had health and happiness. Conflict made them confront the most brutal of choices: stay with the daily fear of death or flee their homeland and cross borders to a life which for so many is only marginally less worse. Their suffering is not our problem, but it should never have been theirs either. If you can donate or share, you can help to make a difference however small. (@matt_inwood)

From the above text, by trying to empathise with the Syrian refugees about the hunger problems and by advocating for the audience to take action, he was attempting to promote the values of benevolence and cosmopolitanism. Like the last example, the promotion of such values allowed him to use his moral self to distinguish himself from other people. However, more importantly, as he addressed in our follow-up conversation after the interview,

The motivation for the Challenge is easy once you reach my age and become aware of your privilege. I truly think the ‘mile walked in someone else’s shoes’ is the best way towards thinking about a

problem rather than just 'feeling' towards a problem. It's been a valuable experience both years I've attempted it. (@matt_inwood)

Therefore, as we can find in the text, through his bodily experiments with sustaining himself using the same ingredients provided to the Syrian refugees, @matt_inwood hoped to generate embodied physical and mental experiences of their suffering. As he concluded in both 2020 and 2021, there was both “*happiness*” and “*uneasiness*” coming from such rationing experiences. Happiness refers to both the mental plus monetary (donation) support he received from other people throughout the process and the power of his action in inspiring other people to start their ration challenges. Uneasiness instead concerns the depletion of both his “*energy and mental faculties*” manifested in both a noticeable weight loss and the constant experience of “*sluggishness and a wavering attention span and aches from inside*” plus fear of “*lacking the stamina*” to complete normal tasks. He presumed such depletion resulted from the lack of normal calorie intake brought by the diet he had during the week. In this sense, we can regard his action of taking part in the ration challenge as his everyday activism: his personalised political actions to both raise awareness from his audience about the issue of world hunger and raise funds to directly contribute to the improvement of the well-being of people who are affected.

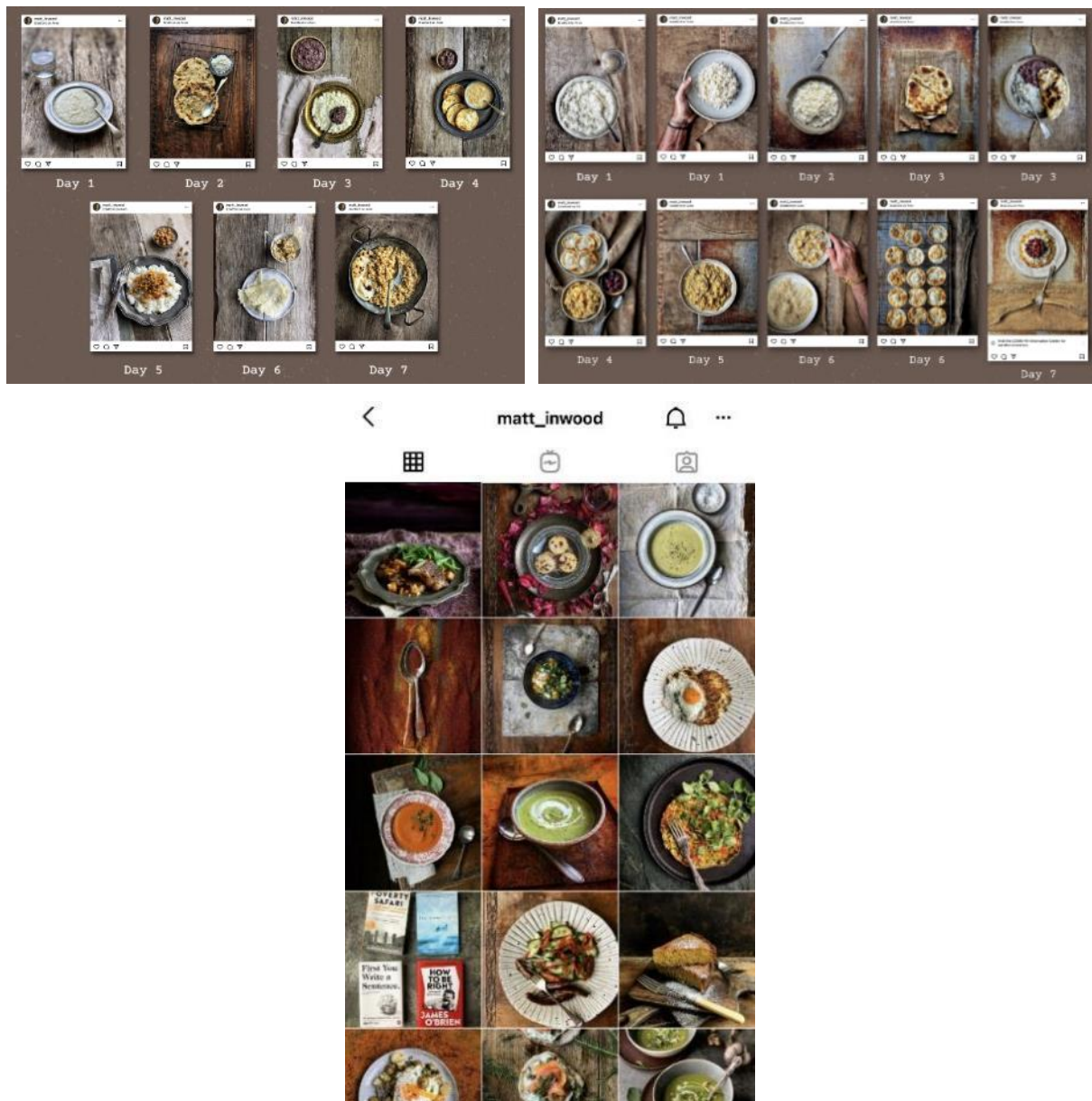


Figure 35 ab: @matt_inwood's ration challenges in 2020 and 2021; c: Food @matt_inwood normally eats and photographs - © @matt_inwood

If we examine Figure 35 about his ration challenge, by comparing 35a and 35b to 35c, it is very easy to understand why @matt_inwood found there was a depletion of both his “energy and mental faculties”. In 35c, we can see the normal meals he has are colourful and varied. They send us the signal of a nutritionally varied diet @matt_inwood normally keeps. However, in both 35a and 35b, since the dishes were mostly made of grains, the colours of the food are mainly white, yellow and dark red. There is an absence of green, the colour of fresh vegetables and red-ish brown, the colour of animal protein as shown in several dishes in 35c. Also, no matter whether it is intentional or achieved by accident, the backdrops of foodstagrams in 35a and 35b are all with similar colours to the food content, while the backdrops in

foodstagramms showing in 35c often have contrasting colours to the food content. As @matt_inwood mentioned in a few posts that there was an enduring “*lack of variety*” in his ration diet, which he found “*far harder to endure*” than “*the lack of calories*”. In this sense, we can understand the stylistic choice @matt_inwood made to control the variety of the colours shown in foodstagramms in 35a and 35b as his action to visually represent such a lack of variety he felt. Again, the general composition of each foodstagram in 35a and 35b bears similar traits to his other foodstagramms. As introduced in the last example, such stylistic choice also showcases @matt_inwood’s intention of making aesthetically interesting photos, which he called “*a stronger image*” to catch his audience’s attention to read the full story.

Therefore, by participating in such ration challenges, in addition to using food and his daily food practices to generate embodied and empathetic understanding of the issues of world hunger and global socio-economic inequality, he was also attempting to use the funds he raised to conduct care work to the Syrian refugees: the people being affected by these issues. Also, through updating foodstagramms about the dishes he had during the challenges and explaining the details of his physical and emotional changes each day, we can find that foodstagramming was used as a means to help @matt_inwood to visualise and disseminate his reflections of such experiences to a wide audience on Instagram (he has nearly 20,000 followers). Like the last example, foodstagramming also served as a medium through which he promoted the values that he considers as required for building a caring and mutually supportive world: a social world that he regards as needed by us. Additionally, the practice enabled him to take action by himself and nudge other people to take action to create political changes from the bottom up. His ration challenges had already shown some small impact, as I observed that such posts about the hunger experienced by the Syrian refugees impacted his audience emotionally and made them realise the acute need to take care of “those displaced by World events” (to quote one comment). Additionally, among people who expressed their intention to make donations for @matt_inwood’s challenge, multiple audience members also indicated that they were considering conducting one very soon.

Such everyday activism, as I introduced earlier, can help @matt_inwood attract more attention to his account so that he might receive more photographic commissions from clients and have more people signing up for his phone photography masterclasses. Therefore, it contributes to his personal benefit of gaining more symbolic capital, social capital and economic capital. On the other hand, @matt_inwood expressed in our interview that he inserted a lot of effort into crafting his posts for which he sometimes spent one to two hours creating

the content to make sure he had genuinely portrayed his thoughts. He said: “*I don’t do them lightly*”. Moreover, he said he values the “*power*” of his account which “*comes from caring about the things that I talk about*” and doing things in a way that stays within his principle of “*integrity*”. To maintain such an attitude, he explained, even though he often received product promotion invites, he only accepted a few because he genuinely likes the products and wants to support the business. In the meantime, he would bluntly “*say no*” to “*all*” work opportunities provided by the political party he opposes. Additionally, since the breakout of the pandemic, I observed that he also offered people dealing with economic difficulties his masterclass for free while donating 10% of the income he gained from the classes to *The Trussell Trust*, a charity working on stopping UK hunger and poverty.

In this sense, the performances of his moral and political selves contribute to the increase of various capitals, thus elevation of his social position. However, what we also need to consider is another side of such performances, which is his intention of taking social responsibility as a citizen of the world and contributing to bringing positive changes to cultivate a mutually supportive world among people who live in it. In the examples presented in Figure 34, as someone who experienced austerity in his childhood, @matt_inwood has generated embodied experiences of hunger that he still vividly remembers today. Also, as someone who has received support from the state and recognised the importance of such support in keeping him from “*poverty, mental illness and eviction*”, @matt_inwood is aware of the relational, interdependent and socially constituted nature of every individual. Such embodied experiences and reflections could be the reasons that motivated him to conduct the ration challenge in Figure 35 and donate part of his income to directly address the issue that was similarly experienced by him during his childhood.

6.3.2 Foodstagramming for Cultivating Social Solidarity

In the foodstagramming practice of another participant: Ruth’s Little Kitchen, we can also find similar forms of exercising “everyday activism” as a way to conduct political actions to cultivate a caring world. Ruth (woman, 50-60) is the owner and founder of her small business Ruth’s Little Kitchen. It is a micro-bakery where she makes bread and then sells it to her local community. It is also a cooking school where she provides cookery plus food photography courses for people of all ages. Other than her own business, she is also a Food Editor of *Yours Magazine* who regularly composes articles about cooking. Before becoming an entrepreneur, Ruth started her career being a PR professional after finishing her degree in photography. After having children, she became a Food and Nutrition teacher so that she had more time to take

care of her family. In 2019, with her children getting older and wanting to do something for herself, Ruth decided to start her own business based on her passion for food and food education.

Similar to @matt_inwood, Ruth also uses her Instagram to promote her own business. However, while @matt_inwood's work is not always closely linked to his personal self, from both her words in our interview and my observations of her foodstagram content, I discovered that Ruth intentionally embedded her personal values into her business value. Therefore, while the self that is presented in Ruth's account is more to do with her brand, it is still largely based on how she understands the world. Ruth's father used to run a boutique hotel in Scotland for over twenty-five years. Ruth told me that when growing up she often helped her father out in the hotel kitchen, so she had built a practical understanding of his father's insistence on buying the best local produce, having them "*cooked from scratch*" and "*supporting local community*". In multiple Instagram posts, she mentioned that this ethos had been deeply ingrained in her mind, so when she established her own business, Ruth made "*Cook, Teach, Share, Eat*" the ethos of Ruth's Little Kitchen to continue his father's passion. From both her father's ethos and her own business values, we can find an emphasis on the cultivation of community and mutual support via the means of making and enjoying food. In both our interview and my observations of her Instagram content, I discovered the recurrence of the theme of the cultivation of community and mutual support.

Why is such a theme important for Ruth? In our interview right before the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ruth mentioned her plans about writing reviews about local restaurants:

I'm gonna start writing reviews of restaurants when I go out that only if they are positive. Because I'm not gonna be negative. If I find something negative, I just won't review it... So I think that's kind of like I'm just trying to connect with my local community and publicise... good things that are going on in my local community... I think that's a nice thing to be able to do. (Ruth)

To do this, on a business level, as her friend working in marketing suggested, Ruth could make her Instagram more than an "*account with lots of pretty pictures of food*" but one with a personal character. Also, by introducing the neighbourhood she lives and runs her cooking workshops, she could use her reviewing as a promotional means to let her potential workshop-goers "*sort of buy into*" the "*very very pretty*" environment they would have the workshop. In this sense, on a business level, we can find that her reviewing activities can create opportunities

for her to insert a personality into her business brand so that it has the potential to stand out from other similar ones. On the other hand, it can also promote her business to potential customers and convince them to sign up for her workshops. Therefore, both aspects have the potential to contribute to creating economic value for her business.

On a communal level, like her father, as stated in the quote, by promoting her community, Ruth can also support local businesses and community members. As she mentioned, it is “*a nice thing to be able to do*”. By commenting on reviewing local restaurants as something “*nice*” to do, she then framed it as something with a moral nature. Especially, by stressing about writing reviews only about enjoyable dining experiences and not being “*negative*”, Ruth was trying to frame it as a communal bonding action with a supportive attitude but not a judgemental or discriminative one. In this way, by establishing solidarity rather than separation within the community using her reviews, we can thus determine here the word “*nice*” signals a moral implication of her activity. Therefore, by distancing herself from a food connoisseur who is trying to exhibit his/her culinary cultural capital through his/her judgements, Ruth was trying to emphasise her reviewing project as something that benefits more of the community, rather than just herself.

Through the above example, we have learned that although Ruth is a business owner who uses her foodstagrams to promote her business, she is also someone who values community and hopes to use her foodstagramming practice as a means to create solidarity and support within the community. Although the moral and political nature of her foodstagrams can also be viewed as a resource to help her business to stand out from others, as I introduce next, according to Ruth’s own interpretation, creating foodstagrams is also a means through which she expresses care and conducts care work to her community members. In this sense, similar to @matt_inwood’s case, it is an exercise of a form of everyday activism. Although with the breakout of the pandemic, Ruth did not manage to do exactly what she had planned, instead, she used similar activities to exercise her everyday activism via both food and foodstagramming to help create solidarity and support within her community.

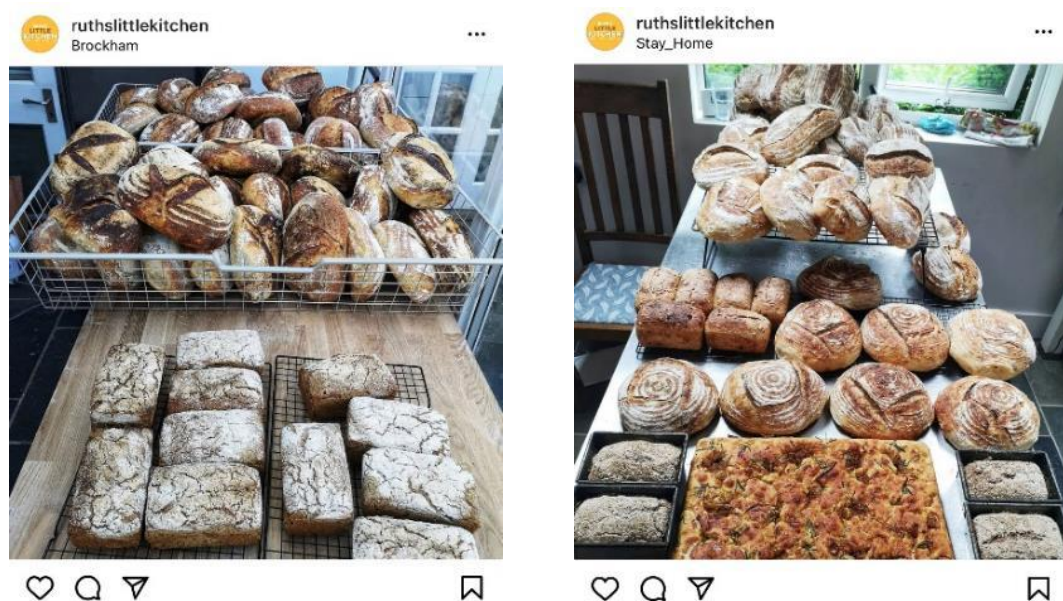


Figure 36 ab: Bread Ruth made to be sold to her local community and sent as gifts to key workers - © Ruth's Little Kitchen

When the first national lockdown was initiated in March 2020, from her Instagram posts, I discovered that she started to take action to show support for local and online communities. In Figure 36, each foodstagram presents the bread collection Ruth made on a regular day that she sold to the local community and sent as gifts to local key workers, such as NHS staff members, delivery agents, bin collecting agents and volunteers. In the captions for the foodstagrams shown in Figure 36 and a statement about Ruth winning the *World Bread Awards*⁶, she mentioned that she had increased her normal baking amount from twenty to seventy loaves of bread and often stayed up until 4 am to finish the whole work. In the captions of 36a and 36b, we can find her evaluations of such processes, such as: *“It was exhausting but I have been receiving such lovely comments today, it made it worthwhile”*; and *“Quite exhausting but SO good to be busy and positive ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️”*.

In our interview, Ruth compared her bread-making process to an art-making process, in which she spends a similar amount of time and effort to “craft” each loaf as she was making artwork. She stated that she does this by kneading them and scoring them using her hands with care. In this sense, by inserting craft into her bread and gifting them to key workers, Ruth has transformed the bread from just food to eat into food with love and care. In the context of the example shown in Figure 36, from my observation of similar posts, I found that such love and care can be considered to represent Ruth’s appreciation of key workers’ devotion in continue to take care of their community members during a very difficult time. Therefore, as Buse,

⁶ <https://www.worldbreadawards.com/south-east-bread-hero/>

Martin and Nettleton (2018) suggest, the food here becomes the material, meaning a physical entity serving as a proxy, for Ruth to embody her appreciation and support to her community members and to take care of key workers in return for their care for her and her family. Also, we can understand Ruth's related foodstagram posts as materials and proxies through which she used to raise awareness from her audience. From the above examples and analyses, we can find that the awareness concerns the importance of reciprocity in our social life, which is acknowledging the care we receive from other community members and returning the care to them using something we craft, such as homemade bread, as Ruth did. In this sense, we can therefore regard the above examples as a form of "everyday activism" where Ruth intended to use food as the material to cultivate a mutually supportive social world.

In addition to using food, Ruth also used her foodstagram as materials to express her care to an online community on Instagram. Ruth started to upload live cookalong workshops which she calls *Cook Together* on IGTV at the beginning of the March 2020 lockdown. For this programme, each session normally lasted from ten to forty minutes. For the workshop, she introduced in a post:

I teach basic skills not haute cuisine and each class will have something for little ones to be involved but may be of interest to everyone. There is also a bit about nutrition and food science. The recipes will be simple and adaptable for hopefully what is in your cupboards.

Therefore, in addition to providing culinary skills and knowledge, for Ruth, with a practical and down-to-earth format, the programme also attends to create activities for parents to bond with their children and people of all ages to engage with at home.

Cook Together

Easy Meat Sauce for Pasta



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

1. chop basic ingredients
2. fry meat
3. chop extra ingredients
4. mix all ingredients

5. season with sauce
6. season with salt
7. show oven-ready sauce mix
8. explain sauce consistency after further cooking

Cook Together

Halloween Spider Cupcakes



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

1. prepare cake ingredients
2. mix all ingredients
3. scoop in cake mix to tray
4. make icing

5. apply icing on cake
6. paint a web on icing
7. assemble the spider
8. show the completed cupcake

Figure 37 ab: Screenshots of recorded live Cook Together sessions from Ruth - © Ruth's Little Kitchen

Figure 37 shows two recorded examples of the cookalong sessions. 37a shows a typical recipe that Ruth demonstrates in *Cook Together*, which is an easy meat sauce that can be used in pasta dishes. In the video, after greeting the audience and simply introducing the dishes she would cook, Ruth started demonstrating her cooking process step by step as shown in 37a. Her general cooking style is very detailed, easy to follow and casual. For example, as each *Cook Together* session was conducted live, Ruth showed the whole process of chopping, frying and saucing the dish without any details being edited out. Also, while she had a recipe to follow, as step 3 in 37a shows, she improvised by adding in more ingredients and advised the audience to do so according to the ingredients they had at home, similar to what the above quote defines. The whole session is also interactive. For example, throughout the session, Ruth would greet every new audience by calling the person's name and saying hello. She also answered live questions generated by the audience. 37b instead shows an example of the unusual sessions Ruth conducted during special occasions within a year. Targeted for Halloween, to spice up the session, we can see that Ruth put on a costume and used a dark filter on Instagram to create an ambience for the special time. Also, the unusual appearance of the cupcakes she made added another layer of spookiness associated with the occasion. However, what remained unchanged was the same detailed easy-to-follow demonstration of how to make the food, as well as the casual teaching style and interactive relationship she kept with her audience.

Drawing from the previous discussion of food cooking shows on TV in @jackycooksherbooks' case, we can find that both the choice of featuring the non-haute cuisine homely dishes and detailed step-by-step instructions, Ruth was framing herself as a down-to-earth instructor rather than a chef who represents professionalism. Also, 37a shows how she normally dressed herself in the cookalong sessions. Choosing an ensemble of normal clothes covered by an apron instead of a chef's suit, we can sense the signalling of herself as a down-to-earth instructor who is like a family member or a neighbour close to the audience, instead of a culinary specialist. Therefore, the stylistic choices for both her dress and her programme helped to define the nature of her programme as something for sociality instead of competition.

To put such stylistic choices in association with the reason for starting her programme, from her posts, I discovered two reasons: “as a *qualified Food and Nutrition teacher I have worked in secondary and primary school, taught adults and I just want to do my bit*”; and “*if I am teaching and being busy I feel I am helping others and this also helps my mental health*”. Thus, phrases such as “*do my bit*”, “*helping others*” and “*helps my mental health*” signal to us a mesh of her social, professional and personal self. In combination with her gift-giving

initiative introduced in the last example, just as she declared in her statement for receiving the *World Bread Awards*, by acting out using both the bread she made and the cookalong sessions she delivered via her foodstagram, Ruth was using, what she called, the “*only resource and knowledge*” she has, which are her “*love of baking and cooking*”, to “*reach out and connect people*” in communities near and afar. Also, in a quote Ruth gave to *Essential Surrey & SW London*⁷, she said: “*During this time I just want to be able to bring people together and for us to collectively grow as one community.*” Thus, both examples suggest that for Ruth, by taking actions to exercise her social responsibility to support members on an online community and help them to bond with their family via the means of demonstrating how to cook practical dishes, she could find herself being useful to others, which as she stated, contributed to her mental well-being.

Ruth’s cookalong session also generated moderate social impact. From photos and videos that Ruth reposted from her audience members, I discovered that her sessions attracted the participation of people of different ages. In several posts, I observed small children engaging with certain ingredients on their hands while watching Ruth’s sessions. There were also adults participating in Ruth’s sessions. In one post, I noticed a screenshot of a text message sent from an audience member regarding gifting pancakes she made from a live session to her “neighbour who is elderly and on his own” and the neighbour “was very appreciative”. Ruth commented on this text: “*Small acts, small gestures bringing us together at this time. If you doing something...*” Thus, the cookalong session showed the potential of cultivating a supportive environment for communities near and far.

Again, similar to @matt_inwood’s case, while we can regard Ruth’s bread gifting and free food education initiatives as her civic actions towards cultivating positive effects for building a better society, we cannot regard them as purely altruistic. She does gain private benefits through such initiatives. In 2020, Ruth won the World Bread Award for the communal contribution she had made and throughout 2020 and 2021, she also received interviews and reports from various regional and national mass media, including the BBC. These can all elevate the popularity of her and her business. However, also similar to @matt_inwood’s case, we should not ignore the moral dimension of both her gift-giving and cookalong initiative. From my observation of her account throughout my research, I noticed that she continued to

⁷ <https://www.essentialsurrey.co.uk/food-drink/learn-to-cook-at-home/>

make contributions using food and foodstagramms to send care to community members online and offline after the lockdown.

For example, in 2021, she was diagnosed with cancer, while having her chemotherapy treatment, she sometimes made biscuits and gifted them to the people taking care of her at the medical centre. Also, she continued to offer cookalong sessions on Instagram, although not as frequently as she used to do. Additionally, she also organised several *Cook Together* events on Zoom to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Support “*to thank them for all their work and help them continue all the fantastic resources available to all cancer patients in the UK*”. In these events, like her live cookalong sessions on Instagram, she demonstrated how to cook different recipes she adapted from the guide Macmillan provides that are suitable for cancer patients who are suffering from various side effects from their treatments. Therefore, while doing such care work again helps to elevate herself and her brand with an ethical element, such continual dedication and contribution she made still render the food she gifted, as well as the foodstagramms she created as materials to express her care to other community members living near and far.

6.3.3 Discussion

Through both @matt_inwood’s and Ruth’s cases, we have seen two more forms of “everyday activism”, in which the participants used both everyday food and their foodstagramming practices as the means of expressing their ethical values and conducting direct political actions to make changes orienting towards improving the social world. In both participants’ cases, as they were using Instagram to promote their own businesses, the presentations of their ethical and political selves contribute to the accumulation of their symbolic, social and economic capitals. Additionally, the performances of their cultural capitals, such as @matt_inwood’s critical knowledge of the current political issues, awareness of the suffering of others and the ability to use both visual and textual content to initiate activism activities, as well as Ruth’s knowledge in food plus food making, awareness of the importance of community and the ability to use both food plus digital media to execute her activism actions can directly convert to the accumulation of the symbolic, social and economic capitals. Thus the performances (Goffman, 1959) of their moral and political selves all can potentially lead to the elevation of their social positions if we relate to Bourdieu’s (1984) theory.

On the other hand, similar to what Lamont (1992) suggests in her research about the principles people stick to and can define themselves in *Money, Morals and Manners*, in the

words and behaviours I represented above from both participants' various examples, we have seen their stresses put on the importance of morality in defining who they are and their definitions of themselves not just as people who only chase worldly value (socio-economic value benefiting self) but who cherish values (aimed at benefiting others in the society). However, being slightly different from Lamont's (1992) research, in which her participants often position moral values on the opposite side of worldly value, in my research, as demonstrated by @matt_inwood's and Ruth's cases, these values do not always have a contradictory relationship but oftentimes complement each other.

What we also discovered in both participants' cases is that community solidarity and the well-being of other people are also felt on an emotional level, which can often influence participants' mental well-being, as well as contribute to how they understand self-worth. Relating to Barassi's (2018) and della Porta and Diani's (1999) arguments, the exercise of everyday activism through the means of social media in both @matt_inwood's and Ruth's cases can be understood as individual processes of self-construction and the enactment of their senses of political and moral selves. According to Barassi (2018, p.144), in contrast to collective identity, which is "a collective process of negotiation in the construction and identification of a common 'we'", political identity as related to the self is a "negotiation which work towards a self-construction, adaptation and incorporation to a specific common 'we'", which emphasises the personal and active nature of the formation of the selves. We can use the same explanation to understand the moral self as enacted in both participants' cases. This thus strengthens the personal importance of the political and moral values expressed by @matt_inwood and Ruth in their activism actions. Also, because of such a close relationship between the common we and the participants' selves, we can thus understand why @matt_inwood and Ruth had strong drives to continue using their foodstagramming everyday activism to make small contributions to improving the well-being of other people, as well as cultivating a more caring and mutually supportive social world. Therefore, while we should not overlook the personal benefits that they can gain from initiating such everyday activism via their foodstagramming practices, we also should not disregard either the ethical plus political responsibilities they felt as citizens of the world or the devotions they contributed to conducting care works aiming at cultivating a caring society.

6.4 Summary and Discussion

Through demonstrating and analysing six portraits in the previous sections, I established a social layer of foodstagramming as manifested in interpersonal, cultural and

political levels. To note, in the whole sample, not all participants seek to use their foodstagramming practices to extend their social networks. For example, as I mentioned in chapter 3, all six casual users value exclusivity and privacy, for which they use their Instagram to only connect with people they know in person. As shown in chapter 4 in Phoebe's and Nancy's cases, most casual users set their Instagram accounts as private and only allow their close friends and family to follow them. Even for other casual users who set their Instagram as public, their imagined audience still mainly consisted of people they are close to in person. Thus, the theme I discussed in this chapter mainly concerns the rest of the sample including participants who are food enthusiasts, photography professionals and photography amateurs. Therefore, the sample discussed in this chapter only refers to participants from these three groups.

Through visually portraying sensorial, affective, perceptive and reflexive experiences derived from their everyday food practices, all participants managed to express different values that are important for them in order to link themselves to the wider communities. To understand such expressions of values, I established, on the one hand, we can consider them as performances (Goffman, 1959) of participants' moral and political selves. Through such performances, although often reported as not intended, participants were provided with an opportunity to exhibit their cultural capitals in various formats that can signal their rather privileged social positions (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, through the content created and shared, participants can also potentially convert their cultural capitals into personal gains in the accumulation of economic, social and symbolic capitals, which can give the further elevation of their social positions. Therefore, my analysis resonates partly with the discourse of competing for personal success, namely competing for distinction and maximisation of social positions as appeared in studies such as Bourdieu's (1984) field analysis, Leaver, Highfield and Abidin's (2020) analysis about Instagram influencers, and various previous studies (such as O'Neill, 2021; Feldman and Goodman, 2021; McDonnell, 2016) about foodstagramming that I mentioned in chapter 2.

On the other hand, while participants either potentially or have already received the personal benefits mentioned above, in many cases, according to their interpretations, such rewards were unintended. In Lamont's (2009) analysis of the judgements of academics, she argues against Bourdieu's (1984) view and indicates that academics are not motivated primarily by the competitive logic to maximise their positions in the field when conducting peer review work. They are also motivated by their senses of self, their emotions and the

maintenance of the collective academic community. My research indicates similar findings. As discussed, for many participants, the motivations for expressing their values through foodstagramms are also related to their moral and political awareness and the social responsibilities that they felt on an emotional level. As per their interpretations, oftentimes, being able to create awareness which has the potential to fuel social changes or directly make the changes to improve public well-being can make them feel happy and purposeful. This can be a direct contribution to the elevation of their emotional well-being, no matter it is on an interpersonal level as manifested in @gizem.kumbaraci and @rbnichol's cases, or a cultural and political level in @jackycooksherbooks's, @foodjunkie_uk's, @matt_inwood's and Ruth's cases. Also, as directly pointed out by some participants such as @matt_inwood and Ruth, making contributions using their foodstagramms can oftentimes contribute to the personal understanding of their self-worth, which resonates with Lamont's analysis.

In all participants' cases, the promotion of values in their foodstagramming practices can be viewed as their actions towards showing resistance to the structural elements they are dissatisfied with, which as we can infer from the values plotted above, the alienating and "uncaring by design" (The Care Collective, 2020, p.13) neoliberal capitalism, meaning "systematically prioritising the interests and flows of financial capital" at the sacrifice of "dismantling welfare state" (ibid), as well as other communal social elements of our society. Additionally, their foodstagramms, which bear their values, can also be regarded as devices which are accessible to the participants in everyday life that they can use to exercise their agency and conduct political activism for cultivating community, sociality and solidarity on a humble scale. While as Ibrahim (2020, p.12) suggests, the presentation of the self as a political and "virtuous" entity can "dilute" the altruistic nature of the activism, as participants emphasised both in their posts and our interviews, the political and moral nature should not be scrapped off from the discussion. Therefore, we should give the moral and political layers of foodstagramming their deserved recognition.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of the Previous Chapters

Four years ago, I initiated this research to study foodstagramming: a practice through which people create and share food photos on social media, with Instagram being the most typical platform. At that time, foodstagramming was an emerging popular cultural practice that many people living in the UK had started to engage with in their everyday lives. Regardless of the widespread discussions on popular media about the social influence of the practice, social researchers paid little attention to foodstagramming. In addition, existing discussions about foodstagramming often reduced the practice to food or Instagram. However, by reviewing the historical development of food imaging, I realised that foodstagramming is first and foremost a photographic image-making practice. Thus, I defined foodstagramming as a photographic practice that centres on the subject matter of food that is largely based on the digital context of Instagram. In my research, I planned to study the practice to generate insights into the relationship between individuals and the social world.

As demonstrated in chapter 1 and chapter 2, foodstagramming was (and still is) predominantly framed as a selfish practice (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; O'Neill, 2021) that people use to mainly show off their social wellness and gain extra resources for achieving higher social status. Many researchers also cast concerns over the exploitative nature of foodstagramming (such as Contois and Kish, 2022, p.7), as the metadata and content generated by foodstagrammers provide a range of commercial value that largely benefits Instagram and commercial organisations, but not every foodstagrammer. Such interpretations were often generated via deductive analysis, for which the authors related the phenomenon with existing social theory to deconstruct the unseen social relations behind foodstagramming. Foodstagramming was often regarded as an instrument for enacting social structures instead of being important in its own right. Foodstagrammers were also often viewed as being passive because the practice was largely interpreted as an instrumental means for its practitioners to represent, permeate and intensify social inequalities. While such analyses help us understand the contextual factors, they lack examinations of the practice itself and its practitioners.

Such a deductive approach especially lacks consideration of the aesthetic dimension of foodstagramming, concerning how its practitioners generate sensations, affects and perceptions by engaging in different food photographic image making and sharing activities in the practice. As both de la Fuente (2007) and Nettleton (2013) argue, the aesthetic elements in cultural practices can form social relations, so deductive analyses of foodstagramming

underappreciated the constructive nature of the practice. Also, although there are different types of foodstagrammers, these analyses often focused on minority special cases, such as young female food influencers. Thus, the analyses could not capture the complexity and diversity of different foodstagrammers' practices which all contribute to defining the different sides of foodstagramming.

Intending to fill such gaps, I decided to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation that captures the complexity, multidimensionality and diversity of foodstagramming. By doing this, I aimed to generate interpretations beyond viewing it merely as an instrumental practice for restabilising existing social inequalities and its practitioners merely as competitors who only use the practice to gain benefits at the sacrifice of other people. I decided to study foodstagramming itself by closely examining the lived experiences of foodstagrammers because this could allow me to understand the active side of the practitioners and the generative side of the practice. To study lived experiences, I chose to focus on understanding participants' actions (Goffman, 1959), feelings (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) and thoughts (Mead, 1934) to capture not only the behavioural but also the experiential and axiological dimensions that previous research often neglected.

I raised three research questions concerning why people produce and share foodstagrams, how they create their foodstagrams, as well as why they adopt the styles that they do for making their foodstagrams. As these questions investigate participants' lived experiences, to answer them, I adopted a more inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach. Chapter 3 detailed this method. I conducted semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty-seven participants living in the UK who produce and share foodstagrams with different purposes and styles. The sample consisted of six casual users, eight food enthusiasts, eight photography professionals and five photography amateurs. The categories are by no means exhaustive of the whole foodstagramming population, but these are among the most typical foodstagrammers on Instagram. While casual users and food enthusiasts focus more on food-related elements (subject matter), photography professionals and photography amateurs instead emphasise photographic elements (visual style) in their foodstagrams. Although overrepresented by highly educated individuals with relatively privileged occupations, the sample still shows variability in age, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location. Such a varied sample indeed allowed me to understand the complexity, multidimensionality and diversity of foodstagramming.

Throughout my research, I also conducted online participant observations paired with a few offline ones. I started my research by observing various foodstagramms and food-related accounts on Instagram to both explore the diversity of the foodstagramming field and identify different types of potential participants to recruit. After conducting interviews, I continuously observed my participants' Instagram accounts to observe their activities, content and changes. I also kept in contact with my participants by liking and commenting on their content (as their other followers would do) to minimise my role as a researcher. I sometimes also exchanged conversations with the participants regarding changes I discovered to gain updated insights. Such online participant observations helped me to both situate the interview data in their contexts and capture details that interviews alone could not catch, especially on changes.

For the offline participant observations, I attended several events including 1. a food photography exhibition, 2. a food photography and Instagram using workshop, 3. a food photography and publishing workshop and 4. a food photography course. Such experiences allowed me to gain knowledge, embodied experiences and techniques related to foodstagramming which were beyond my own foodstagramming experiences. The knowledge and embodied experiences I gained helped me to better empathise with my participants (as Nettleton, 2013; Wacquant, 2004; Douglas, Rasmussen and Flanagan, 1977 did for their research). As a researcher who is a foodstagrammer and who chose to empathise with her participants, my research interpretation might be accused of being partial. However, such empathy played a key role in helping me understand the aesthetic dimensions of my participants' different foodstagramming experiences. It allowed me to be more sensitive to notice, capture and understand various important feelings that were mentioned by participants in their interviews and shown in their foodstagramms. Also, when doing interpretations, as shown in the eighteen portraits, I often read the data from different perspectives, and this still allowed me to maintain a critical distance. Thus, the benefits of making my observations participatory still largely outweighed its limitations.

To analyse the interview and observational data, I used thematic analysis. It generated three themes: **1. being an artist of the self through foodstagramming**, **2. exploring alternative relationships with the material world through foodstagramming** and **3. linking the self to wider communities through foodstagramming**. These themes together describe the different dimensions of foodstagramming, for which we can understand how the practice helps people to craft self-definitions from the available social roles and formulate social

relationships with both the material objects in our social environment plus people living in the social world.

Chapter 4 introduced the first theme regarding the different ways people use foodstagramming to craft self-definitions. By introducing six foodstagramming portraits as representatives of the sample, I argued that the activities such as making/tasting food, creating food photos, archiving them, curating the archive and engaging with the audience can allow people to exercise their agency. As individuals, people are offered and ascribed to different social roles. Engaging in different foodstagramming activities can allow them to both strengthen existing roles and explore new roles that are not provided to them at birth to define themselves via their interactions with other people on Instagram. Moreover, engaging in such activities can also allow people to formulate embodied reflections of themselves that engage not only their thoughts but also their feelings. Such an embodied self-development approach can allow people to have a better understanding of their preferences so that they can have better control over their self-definitions. Although such self-definitions still consist of social roles that are provided by society, within their limited freedom, people can still choose to maintain, develop and juggle different social roles to craft the compositions of their self-definitions at different times, as people's selves are in an incessant becoming mode. Therefore, I argued that foodstagramming serves as a means for people to craft their senses of themselves and self-definitions, which is through their reflections (Mead, 1934), actions (Goffman, 1959) and feelings (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984) that are generated from creating and sharing foodstagrams, as well as engaging with other people on Instagram.

Chapter 5 presented the second theme about different ways people use foodstagramming to explore alternative relationships with the material world. As established, foodstagramming is first and foremost a photographic image-making practice. Thus, like all other photographic practices, foodstagramming affords occasions and justifications for photographers to see food closely and examine its material and formal characteristics. By appreciating such characteristics in their own right, the six portraits exemplified that people could explore alternative aesthetic relationships with food beyond treating it merely as fuel for our body, a delicacy to enjoy or a tool for representing symbolic meanings. As a visual process, making photographs of food often requires the photographers to pay more attention to its visual qualities. Through such a process, participants are encouraged to return to a more naïve child-like mode, for which they are prepared to suspend their judgements but heighten perceptions (Berleant, 2005, p.32) by mindfully paying attention to the visual sensory qualities of food as

a purely material object that is important in its own right. Such explorations include being prepared to be amazed at the aesthetically interesting visual qualities that food has to offer, as well as playing with food as a material object which can be used to create new visual forms (sculptures and photos) that are also aesthetically interesting. Via observing, being amazed at, and playing with food, as well as creating and sharing photos with other people, participants can develop with food and similar everyday objects, as illustrated in multiple portraits, a more appreciative and respectful relationship. Such a relationship people have with the material world also has the moral implication of the same relationship being developed towards other people who are associated with different material objects. An example can be the appreciation of various aesthetic qualities of different food from different cultures can lead to a respectful and non-judgemental attitude towards people from those cultures, as shown in LUCY-RUTH's case.

In chapter 6, I discussed the third theme regarding the various ways people use foodstagramming to link themselves to wider communities. While the connection in Chapter 5 centres on the human-to-material relationship, the link in chapter 6 instead concentrates on a human-to-human relationship. Foodstagramming is situated in the context which affords people to share content with others who are beyond their immediate physical social circles. With such an affordance, as exemplified in the six portraits, foodstagramming becomes a means people use to actively extend their networks to formulate new social links with other individuals. Via food and photography, people can express the different values they cherish concerning morality, culture and politics. Thus, via exchanging foodstagrams on Instagram, people who share similar values can gather as communities. As several portraits suggest, the generation of such social links can indeed bring socio-economic benefits to the participants. However, as suggested by the words and content I introduced in the portraits of six participants, gaining socio-economic benefits should not be treated as people's mere goal for sustaining their foodstagramming activities. Instead, as reported by the participants, the main reasons are more likely to be their intentions of developing sincere interpersonal relationships, cultivating an inclusive culture and building a supportive social world which values various feelings generated by individuals. We can regard such activities as humble world-making actions individuals can conduct using everyday materials and media that are widely available to them. By doing so, people can use food, photography and Instagramming as devices to act on their intentions of cultivating supportive social relations.

7.2 Research Questions

7.2.1 Question 1. Why do people create foodstagramms and why do they share them on Instagram?

The three themes in combination outlined above provide a detailed answer to this question. In summary, foodstagramming provides people with a tool to exercise their agency using resources widely available in their everyday lives: food, photography and Instagram. By exercising their agency, as the portraits exemplified, people can have more control over their relationships with society. As chapter 4 presented, such control can be how people use foodstagramming to strive to craft their self-definitions that valorise their personal preferences. Such personal preferences are directly related to people's sensory, affective and perceptive feelings, which are all private and subjective elements that directly concern their existential beings. Thus, foodstagramming provides a platform for people to insert their subjective experiences into crafting the definitions of who they are, even though such self-definitions might only be important for the foodstagrammers themselves and a small group of their audiences on Instagram. As showcased in chapter 5 and chapter 6, we can also find such control in how people use foodstagramming to strive to cultivate alternative relationships with both inanimate material objects and humans in the social world. Again, cultivating such alternative relationships often needs the engagement of the foodstagrammers' and their audiences' subjective experiences, or feelings. From participants' reflections, such aesthetic elements are the ingredients that our current relationships with both material objects and humans lack. Thus, using foodstagramming, they can on the one hand remind their audiences of the importance of inserting such aesthetic elements in cultivating social relationships (human-to-material plus human-to-human) and on the other hand also take actions to bring in small changes, as exemplified by @matt_inwood's and Ruth's cases.

In this sense, foodstagramming affords people to insert their subjective experiences, which largely concern their sensory and affective feelings, into defining their relationships with themselves and society. The practice also enables people to exercise their agency by engaging not only their thoughts (Mead, 1934) and actions (Goffman, 1959) but also their subjectivities (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984). As these elements are often connected and influence each other, foodstagramming thus can serve as a platform for people to combine their minds and bodies when crafting self-definitions that are influenced and inspired by the resources in the social world, such as in @sharoncosgrovephotography's case where she used her feelings generated from engaging with other people on Instagram to reflect

on and juggle different roles for defining herself. Foodstagramming can also serve as a platform for people to reflect on how they can be related to both inanimate and human subjects in the social world, such as exhibited in @matt_inwood's portrait in chapter 5 where he used his foodstagram depicting the most mundane objects (such as butter) in everyday life to elevate their aesthetic value, and in another portrait in chapter 6 where he represented his ration challenges to reflect on his embodied understandings of the sufferings experienced by the Syrian refugees.

7.2.2 Question 2: How do people create their foodstagram? and 3. Why do people choose to create their foodstagram in the ways that they do?

After conducting interviews, I realised that these two questions are tightly connected. Without having to ask why they use the styles that they do to create foodstagram, participants often started to account for the reasons that motivated their stylistic choices. Thus, although I recognise that these two questions capture different sides related to the creation of foodstagram, for ease of illustration, I answer them together in this sub-section.

In general, the answers to the second and third research questions are directly related to the answer to the first question. For question 2, the efforts, times and activities involved in different participants' foodstagramming practices can vary significantly. My research generally focused on exploring how people create foodstagram for their Instagram feed. Regarding the creation of these foodstagram, people generally used various styles, which can be condensed into three categories: the food-centric, the photography-centric and the hybrid style. While the first and second styles stress either the food or the photography element, the third style emphasises both two elements in foodstagramming. For question 3, the reasons for the generation of such style variations can be condensed into three aspects: 1. the diverse roles food and photography play in participants' everyday lives, 2. the varied natures different participants define their foodstagram and 3. the different purposes participants intend to use their foodstagramming practices to achieve. Most participants predominantly adopted one of the three foodstagramming styles throughout their foodstagramming history. However, some participants adopted a mixture of these styles at different times or on different occasions, as their relationships with food, photography and foodstagramming were not fixed.

Overall, looking closely at the styles foodstagrammers adopt in making their food photos and the detailed justifications they provide for such style choices is essential to better understand the varied and complex natures of foodstagramming. As I established in chapter 1,

foodstagramming cannot be reduced to food, as it is first a photographic image-making practice. Depending on participants' different emphases, the meaning of a foodstagram can directly derive from the food portrayed, but it can also diverge a long way from it. This is because participants can use photography as a tool to not only record food subjects but also conduct visual creations with food serving as an important medium or tool. While photography does not take an important role in the former situation, in the latter situation, the image-making practice plays an equally or more important role than the food subjects portrayed. Nevertheless, however small the role photography plays in making a foodstagram, the visual execution choice a foodstagrammer makes in producing a foodstagram contributes to defining its final meaning. Even when a participant simply uses a phone to quickly snap a dish and immediately upload the photo to his/her Instagram account without editing it, he/she still would ensure the dish is placed in the middle of the photo with no visible camera shakes or a large section of shades blocking the dish itself.

Thus, by examining both the interview and observational data, I discovered that for all participants, while the visual appearances of their foodstagramms do not need to elevate the food portrayed, they need to at least do justice to complement the food portrayed. This is because, as all participants mentioned, the very reason that motivated them to create food photos was that they observed certain qualities in food that they perceived as valuable to them. They said they wanted to visually incarnate such observations and share them with other people on Instagram. In this sense, whichever style a participant chooses to make a foodstagram, such a choice is not random but involves an action to define the meaning the foodstagram communicates at the end. Therefore, both what food subjects are portrayed and how they are portrayed are important for us to understand both the meanings participants' foodstagramms communicate and the meanings their foodstagramming practices bring to their lives.

To give a more detailed summary of the three styles, regarding the **food-centric style**, for some participants (such as @superbritishgirl and @jackycooksherbooks) who regard food as the defining element of foodstagramms they make, photography plays a more basic role, as it is regarded mainly as a functional device that serves a purpose of visually representing the key subject matter: food. These participants regard food as an important subject to represent certain aspects of selves because either the social relations behind the food have emotional importance to the participants, or the participants regard the sensory experiences of making and/or tasting food as valuable components of their everyday lives. Therefore, foodstagramming becomes the device for the participants to visually represent their aesthetic experiences with food. Such

experiences archived on Instagram then form a record of the development of participants' food-related selves. To participants themselves, the foodstagrams can serve as devices for future reflections. As the foodstagrams are also shared with other people on Instagram, these photos also serve as devices for the participants to on the one hand express themselves to the wider social world and on the other hand receive feedback and engagement from other people.

The activities that are involved in this foodstagramming style include 1. selecting food subjects (such as meals or food items) directly from everyday life to be visually recorded, 2. using mobile phones to quickly snap photos of the food items without paying too much attention on the visual appearances of the photos and 3. posting the photos on Instagram without editing them in most cases. This style emphasises the food (instead of the photography) element in foodstagramming, and it demands minimal time and effort from the participants. The photos created by these participants mostly appear as casually taken snapshots. As the participants emphasise, this is because they do not tend to pay too much attention to the visual styles of their photos. Their key focus is to make the photos look acceptable without any camera shakes and the food appears in the centre without being blocked by certain shades. To a certain extent, the participants reject spending more time and effort on the visual appearances of their foodstagrams, as they neither are especially interested in such features in photography nor consider such features as relevant to the meanings of their foodstagrams. In this sense, it is the food and food moments, rather than the food photos, which are the most important elements for the participants.

Considering the **photography-centric style**, for a group of participants (such as @aarongraubart and Helga Stentzel), in contrast, photography adopts a more dominant role in their foodstagramming practices. These participants are often professionals or enthusiasts of photography. By applying a visual way to understand food, these participants often disassociate food from its mere functional purposes but instead treat it as an aesthetic object with interesting visual features that deserve to be explored, appreciated and played with. Such alternative and largely aesthetic engagements with food are often allowed by the practice of photography. For these photography amateurs or professionals, creating aesthetic photos of certain objects often entails them channelling their photographer's eyes: paying close attention to the aesthetic qualities of the objects. As the participants sometimes use food as an example to represent similar mundane objects that are widely available in our everyday lives, many times, the meanings of the foodstagrams might not be directly related to the food portrayed at all. Thus, how the food and food moments are portrayed (the photography element) is a more important

criterion to define the meanings of such foodstagramms. In this sense, these participants understand their food photos as visual incarnations of the aesthetic relationships they have with food. As these photos are also shared via Instagram, these participants regard foodstagramming as a device to explore alternative relationships with food, a medium to share such discoveries to wider audiences, as well as a tool to receive audience feedback and engagement.

With such a photography-centric purpose, the activities involved in the second foodstagramming style include 1. making plans of what topics to shoot, how to turn the topics into food-formulated visual forms and what visual aesthetics to use to portray the visual forms, 2. composing the visual forms for the shoots and assembling photoshoot settings with the desirable lightings and sets, 3. using cameras to shoot the visual forms with various compositional experimentations, 4. uploading the photos onto computers, selecting satisfactory shots and editing their visual specifications, 5. transferring the edited photo files from computers to mobile phones and 6. posting the most favourable photos on Instagram. In contrast with the previous style, the second style costs the participants much more time and effort to create each foodstagram, as the whole foodstagramming process can take a few days. As the food subjects portrayed in the photos in many cases are composed, rather than directly taken from everyday life, we should regard foodstagramms created with this style as visual creations with their meanings partly related to the food portrayed in it, rather than visual documents that communicate meanings directly concern the food we see. Therefore, it is the food photos, rather than the food or food moments, which are the most important elements for the participants.

Concerning the **hybrid style**, for a third of the participants (such as Nancy[^] and @rbnichol), both food and photography are important elements in their foodstagramming practices. Thus, we should regard their foodstagramms both as visual documents and visual creations. The foodstagramming activities under the hybrid style often include 1. identifying food subjects directly from everyday life that deserve to be visually recorded, 2. carefully dressing or arranging the food subjects, 3. arranging an aesthetically interesting scene formed of the food subjects and potentially also props (such as cutlery or cloth) available at hand, 4. shooting the scenes with different compositional experimentations via mobile phones or cameras with or without extra lighting facilities, 5. conducting post-production of the photos using either application on mobile phones or software on computers to edit their visual characteristics, and 6. either directly posting the photos from the mobile phones, or first transferring the photos from computers to phones and then uploading the photos to Instagram.

Like the photography-centric style, this hybrid style also demands much time and effort from participants. For participants using this style, the food subjects, such as dishes or food objects often directly come from meals they had or items they bought. Like in the food-centric style, participants using the hybrid style choose to feature food subjects directly from their everyday life because either the social relations behind the food have emotional importance to the participants or their sensory experiences of making and/or tasting the food are valuable components that form parts of the participants' selves. For this reason, we should regard their foodstagramms first as visual documents. On the other hand, like in the photography-centric style, participants adopting the hybrid style are also either photography professionals or enthusiasts. Thus, by paying special attention to crafting the visual aesthetics of their foodstagramms, participants on the one hand are creating visual creations that incarnate their explorations of the material natures of food. On the other hand, as the food subjects portrayed were reported to be equally important to the participants, the creative visual aesthetics these participants used also serve the role of poeticising the food subjects so that the audience can focus their attention on certain accentuated aspects of the food subjects portrayed. Therefore, both the food and the photos are important elements for the participants.

7.3 General Arguments of the Research

7.3.1 Argument 1: The Irreducible Nature of Foodstagramming

Combining the answers to the three research questions, first, I argue that foodstagramming cannot be reduced to food but should be regarded as **a photographic image-making practice that is situated on Instagram which focuses on the subject matter of food.** With the visual representational means provided by photography, foodstagramming offers its practitioners an aesthetic and creative means to reflect on, portray and express their personal and social relations with food and everyday life. With the public nature and the networking affordance Instagram offers, foodstagramming also provides a means for foodstagrammers to share their aestheticised representations of their relations with food and everyday life with their audiences, receive feedback and make connections with them. All three components: food, photography and Instagram are important components of foodstagramming, as each of these components plays a role in forming the practice. Also, it is by combining the three components that we can discover that a foodstagram can be a simple record of food, but it can also be an aesthetically interesting visual creation about food, an interface where different people can interact, or a mixture of all these natures.

7.3.2 Argument 2: Foodstagramming as an Empowering Practice

Second, I argue that foodstagramming is an **empowering practice** that foodstagrammers can use to exercise their agency, although only to a limited extent. Resonating with Tiidenberg's (2018, p.93) use of the word to describe selfie-making, by empowering, I refer to 1. the power and control that a foodstagrammer has to both act and act in a way according to his/her preferences, as well as 2. a sense of inner strength a foodstagrammer feels. As shown in various portraits in the three analysis chapters, foodstagrammers cannot do anything they want, as the digital infrastructure of Instagram, such as its algorithms and the design of the application, both afford and restrict its users' actions. However, with the affordances they are provided with, foodstagrammers can use their foodstagrams to express in a public setting their subjective personal thoughts and feelings.

People's personal and social relations with food and everyday life often are related to their private feelings, thoughts and practices, as well as how these private elements are informed by or in tension with social structures. Thus, foodstagramming affords its practitioners the occasions and means to use the materials: food, photography and Instagram that are widely available in their everyday lives to exercise their agency by engaging their feeling (Douglas and Johnson, 1977; Kotarba and Fontana, 1984), reflections (Mead, 1934) and actions (Goffman, 1959). An example can be @matt_inwood's case where he used a visual style carefully planned by him to portray his ration challenge experiences to express his voice in critiquing the political environment which he perceived as lacking care. Many audience members commented on such posts and donated money for his fundraisings, and such support made him generate positive feelings about what he stuck to politically. Thus, although foodstagrammers cannot reach full control over how they are related to the social world, via producing and sharing food photos to reflect, express and share their feelings and thoughts, they can use the limited resources and power they possess to have more control over how they present their engagements with food, and by extension, their feelings and values more generally.

On the one hand, as illustrated in chapter 4, people are provided with and ascribed to various self-creating resources such as social roles to define themselves, but via expressing their private and social relations with food through foodstagrams, they can craft their own versions of self-definitions which valorise their subjective feelings and values. Even though such self-definitions might only be valid to a limited extent, it still allows the foodstagrammers to exercise their limited freedom in deciding who they are and who they can be. On the other hand, as demonstrated in both chapter 5 and chapter 6, again, within the limited capacity they

have, via expressing their private and social relations with food, foodstagrammers can also conduct their humble versions of world-making projects. From the participants' words and foodstagram posts that I introduced in previous chapters, we can know that such world-making projects often refer to cultivating a social world that valorises aesthetic, moral, environmental, social and political values in addition to worldly value (Lamont, 1992) that centre on competition and maximising individuals' socio-economic success. The alternative values that the participants advocate often aim at compensating for the wider social problems that they identified: 1. the dominant instrumental relations people have with material objects that are like food, for which humans treat these objects merely as tools (chapter 5) and 2. the predominantly individualistic and competitive relations individuals have with other people (chapter 6). However small the final impact of the world-making projects has, with the limited resources foodstagrammers have, through foodstagramming, as mentioned in the portraits, they can still participate in forming and shaping the social world that they live in.

7.3.3 Argument 3: Foodstagramming as an Aesthetic Practice

Third, I argue that foodstagramming is also an **aesthetic practice**. This is an aspect that is very important but is often neglected by previous research. Returning to the definition of aesthetics introduced in chapter 1, the standard understanding of aesthetics in sociology often emphasises its instrumental quality in being a resource: a type of cultural capital, so aesthetics is often reduced to a product of social relationships, such as class relationships (Olcese and Savage, 2015, p.735). However, aesthetics in this research stands for "sensation, affect and perception" concerning "a world of sensual contact with things – a world of bodies perceiving themselves and other bodies, a world thick with emotion and sentiment" (Highmore, 2010, p.155). It defines the "whole of our sensate life together", or the "most gross and palpable dimension of the human" that form our "creaturely life" (Eagleton, 1990, p.13). Such sensation, affect and perception permeate people's everyday experiences, decisions and actions, so it has the power to shape the contour and composition of society (Saito, 2017; Nettleton, 2013).

In this argument, there are three dimensions to the aesthetic nature that foodstagramming bears. The first dimension encompasses the sensations, affects and perceptions (the aesthetic elements) involved in foodstagrammers' engagements with the food subjects that they portray. The second dimension consists of the aesthetic elements involved in foodstagrammers' photographic activities in portraying the food subjects with various visual styles they desire. The third dimension relates the aesthetic elements in the social relations

foodstagrammers intend to generate and maintain via foodstagramming on and beyond Instagram.

Considering the first dimension, people's relationship with food can go far beyond treating it merely as fuel to maintain the functions of people's bodies or as symbols for representing people's status and prestige. Food is much more than merely a functional tool that is at the service of people. As the eighteen portraits suggested, concerning food in its own right, by making, tasting, touching, playing with and sharing food, participants can derive aesthetic relationships with food, because such engagements with the food materials can bring various sensorial, affective and perceptive feelings to them. Also, participants' food-related activities such as making and eating food often accompany interactions between themselves and their family, friends or communities. Concerning such interactions, they also often bring affective feelings to the participants. Therefore, food can both act on people with their material qualities in influencing people's aesthetic feelings and be acted upon by people to create aesthetic experiences, which resonates with DeNora's (2000) and Hennion's (2005) research which suggests that cultural forms such as music and wine both act on people and are themselves acted upon by people in forming aesthetic cultural experiences. The social relations surrounding food also remind us that food can serve as an active player to cultivate or maintain human relations via the ingredients of aesthetic elements, especially affects.

Regarding the second dimension, being a photographic image-making practice, as Barnbaum (2017) advocates, foodstagramming encourages foodstagrammers to see food from different angles and perspectives so that they can generate different understandings of food. Whether using the simplistic food-centric style or the more elaborate photography-centric and hybrid styles, foodstagrammers do not make such decisions randomly. By using different visual techniques to highlight certain features of the food that they see and avoid unnecessary distractions, foodstagrammers can use their foodstagrams to express and share with their audiences the sensory, affective and perceptive qualities that they felt by viewing food from different angles and perspectives. Thus, even when the appearances of foodstagrams made with the more elaborate styles, such as the hybrid style (such as from @yasgoesto and @foodjunkie_uk), often resemble the ones in food commercials and food editorials, we should not merely regard the visual style simply as indications of the foodstagrammers' aspiring ambitions (McDonnell, 2016) or badges of their class identities (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu et al., 1990). This is because the visual styles foodstagrammers use to portray certain food subjects can be intended to act to insert the foodstagrammers' private but important aesthetic

feelings into the meanings that their foodstagramms communicate, although the visual techniques are often borrowed from representations of food in consumer culture.

In addition, the visual styles one uses to portray food are interesting in their own right. In my explanation of the two more elaborate visual styles: photography-centric and hybrid styles, as I emphasised, foodstagramming can be a means for people to exercise their visual creativity. Such visual creativity also forms an important part of the foodstagrammers' selves (such as Nancy[^] and @jimboiuk). In most cases, the participants who choose these two styles either had professional training in art, design and photography or have always been enthusiastic about these subjects since a very young age. Thus, on the one hand, similar to arguments by Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu et al. (1990), we can partly interpret the attention that these participants put into making their foodstagramms using elaborate visual styles as signals of their relatively high cultural capitals in visual art and design. Also, such high cultural capitals can serve as an indicator of their relatively high social status. However, on the other hand, we should not ignore the aesthetic relationships these participants have with the visual styles. Throughout chapter 4 to chapter 6, I pointed out the various aesthetic feelings many participants generated by creating foodstagramms via experimenting with different visual styles. These include 1. the intimate visceral feelings one can get when taking a zoomed-in shot of the surface of food objects (@matt_inwood and LUCY-RUTH), 2. the fun and healing feelings one can get when playing with food to create humorous images (@mylegoman2 and Helga), 3. the strange and affective feelings one can get when composing unusual looking scenes using the food and utensils that are available in everyday life (AARON and @rbnichol), and 4. the relaxing and beautiful feelings one can get when re-arranging certain food scenes available in everyday life to create poeticised representations of certain life moments (Nancy[^], @yasgoesto and @gizem.kumbaraci). These are all the aesthetic feelings people can directly gain from the visual manipulations they do with both the food subjects they portray and the appearances of the final food photos they create.

Concerning the third dimension, the food subjects portrayed and the visual styles of their foodstagramms were often reported by the foodstagrammers to directly speak their selves and their understandings about how they relate to the social world. The foodstagramms made in this sense thus can stress the important roles that sensations, affects and perceptions play in defining individuals' selves and the subjectively felt relations that these individuals have with both material objects and humans. Also, on Instagram, foodstagrammers attempt to make direct social connections and form communities with their audiences via the foodstagramms they create.

As presented in different portraits in chapter 4 to chapter 6, the social connections and communities participants managed to form often derived from the mutual sensations, affects and perceptions they shared with their audiences that are generated via the foodstagramms being posted on Instagram. Many times, such mutual aesthetic feelings can act as a force to form social connections, despite the foodstagrammers having very different socio-economic backgrounds compared to their audiences. For example, according to @rbnichol, she made a lot of “*friends*” on Instagram based purely on the common passion and pleasure she and her friends have in baking and photography, beyond the borders of age, gender and ethnicity. This then suggests that shared aesthetic feelings can give rise to the formation of sociality that goes beyond the commonly known social categories (such as age, gender, and occupation) that are used to define the social beings of people. Therefore, we should recognise the generative potential of the aesthetic element in foodstagramming in potentiating the formation of the social world and generation of social changes, as Highmore (2010), Olcese and Savage (2015), Nettleton (2015) and Saito (2017) have all reminded us.

7.3.4 Summative Argument: Foodstagramming as a Generative Practice

In conclusion, I argue that rather than considering it merely an instrumental or passive practice in which people are nudged to participate to solidify and extenuate social stratifications (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; O’Neill, 2021), foodstagramming should also be recognised for its **generative potential** for allowing people to **channel their aesthetic skills and promote alternative values, in very sociable ways**. To address the puzzle that motivated me to conduct this research, by looking into foodstagrammers’ lived experiences of creating food photos and sharing them with other people on Instagram, I discovered that far from being merely an instrumental practice that re-enacts existing unequal social relations (McDonnell, 2016; Mull, 2017), foodstagramming provides the means for its practitioners to act on their intentions of generating new social relations and forming new forms of social world. Equally, far from simply re-enacting existing social structures and relations (ibid), foodstagrammers also use foodstagramming to actively reflect on their relations with the social world, explore alternative ways to relate to materials and humans, and then also take actions to cultivate such new forms of social relations to make social changes. In this sense, we can interpret foodstagramming as a means which can transform personal aesthetic feelings into forces that carry social significance.

To address another critique that I mentioned in chapter 2 about foodstagramming being a device for capitalists to harvest the free labour (Contois and Kish, 2022, p.7) of

foodstagrammers, it is also not entirely correct. Indeed, to a certain extent, the actions people conduct on Instagram (like creating and sharing foodstagram and interacting with other people regarding such photos) can create economic value for Instagram. The data generated from foodstagrammers' activities can be mined to generate business insights for not only Instagram but also other economic institutions (Lupton, 2018). The foodstagram shared and the engagements each foodstagram can generate are also content and traffic of the platform, which are two important elements that maintain the functioning of Instagram. Also, several participants, such as @sharoncosgrovephotography and @matt_inwood, reflected in the interview that they are aware of such nature of their foodstagramming practices. They both are dissatisfied with the situation, but they also consider they cannot change the situation by themselves if they need to use Instagram. However, the lived experiences of foodstagramming are mixed, as besides these negative sides, there are also positive sides that maintain these participants' enthusiasm.

According to the portraits I presented in the three analysis chapters, we can find that foodstagrammers do consider foodstagramming as a practice through which they can do crafts. Even if they have not been paid for the time and effort spent creating their foodstagram and maintaining their Instagram accounts, participants still are willing to continue their practices because they want to devote time and effort to craft aesthetically interesting and meaningful foodstagram for their own sake, similar to de Solier's (2013) research about food blogging. These foodstagrammers are bringing in their "skill, knowledge, judgement and passion" (Campbell, 2005, p.23) in food, photography and Instagramming that are gained from their cultural experiences in everyday life to "engage in creative acts of self-expression" (Sennett, 2008, p.24) of what they think and feel. Using foodstagramming, they are empowering their self-definition and self-expression, similar to what is argued by Tiidenberg (2018) about selfie-making. By sharing such experiences with other people, on the one hand, foodstagrammers then can expose themselves to the wider world to promote themselves and their businesses. On the other hand, foodstagrammers can also act on their intentions of cultivating a social world which valorises aesthetically informed definitions for describing individuals, interpersonal relations, material environment, culture and politics, as well as a "social aesthetic", borrowing Berleant's (2005) term, which highlights respect, tolerance, reciprocity and equality in social relations.

7.4 Contributions of the Research

7.4.1 A Nuanced and Comprehensive Understanding of Foodstagramming

The most direct contribution this research has made is that it provides a comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of the complexity, multidimensionality and diversity of foodstagramming. In contrast to many studies introduced in chapter 2, by casting attention to the lived foodstagramming experiences of individuals who produce and share foodstagrams in different styles and for varied purposes, I discovered the **generative** sides of foodstagramming and the **active** sides of foodstagrammers. Far from being a practice through which foodstagrammers are merely nudged to conduct actions to sustain existing social orders, foodstagramming is also a practice foodstagrammers can actively mobilise to aid them to act on their intentions of generating new social orders. Additionally, far from being mere victims of the exploitations of their free labour, foodstagrammers also shape foodstagramming according to their own preferences to achieve certain goals.

Such goals are both personal and social. By being both personal and social, indeed, regardless of whether being attentive or not, participants in this research do use the foodstagrams they create to signal the economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals they have, as well as gain more of such capitals to allow them to achieve higher social status. In this sense, social norms and structure indeed can influence how people think and act. However, the participants do not only stick to value which is only about self-benefiting worldly success. They also hold dear various types of **values** which have aesthetic, environmental, moral, social and political ramifications.

People are influenced by the norms and structures of the social world that they live in. However, they also reflect on and sometimes act against such restrictions. As Back (2015, p.832) addresses, if we attend to the lived everyday experiences of individuals closely (like how he did with his ethnographic study of the Christmas light project enacted yearly by a family living in a working-class estate for cheering up people living in the same neighbourhood), we can find that people can relate to each other via kindness, feeling and care, instead of merely social structures. Similarly, as Skeggs (2014, p.16) also argues, individuals' subjectivities and lives might be influenced by the market and capitalist logic in neoliberalism, but "moments of connection, of enchantment, of affective force" also propel people to "ethical generosity" and envisage "a better world" with people bond with each other by "affection". Also, as Lamont (2009, p.20) stresses that people are not only driven by the sole logic of "competition for distinction" (referencing Bourdieu, 1984) when they conduct certain activities but are also

motivated by emotional factors (such as pleasure) and the need for working on their self-concepts. Thus, as the findings in this research suggest, we can view foodstagramming as a tool for individuals to constantly craft their self-definitions and actively work on carving out a social world that they consider could provide them with the nourishment to both develop themselves and formulate sustainable relationships with the material and human entities living in it.

On the other hand, this research demonstrates the need to go beyond reducing foodstagramming into either its topic: food, or its context: Instagram. It raises the need for researchers to also pay attention to the **aesthetics** of foodstagramming that are embedded in the photography element of the practice. Such an aspect was often neglected or misread in previous studies of foodstagramming, but it is an inseparable part of the practice. To investigate the aesthetic side of foodstagramming, in this research, instead of using merely a deductive approach for which I only stood from afar to critique a cultural practice, I chose to adopt a more inductive, pragmatic and interpretive approach. This means that my research insights were generated mainly by looking closely into the lived experiences of foodstagramming from the foodstagrammers' own perspectives, although later I also referred to relevant literature to interpret the findings from different perspectives. To do this, I attended to the various photo-making techniques (including both shooting and editing photographs) foodstagrammers used and avoided using when they created foodstagrams. I also examined the reasons why the foodstagrammers chose to create their foodstagrams in the ways that they did.

It was through studying these aspects, I was able to study the aesthetic side, concerning the sensory, affective and perceptive feelings that are involved in foodstagramming. It was through studying these feelings, I was able to present the subjective side of foodstagramming to compensate for the overly objective critique of the practice. Also, it was through such a focus I was able to generate a nuanced interpretation of foodstagramming that acknowledges not only the power of structural restrictions but also individuals' agency to disrupt and make changes to such restrictions. Therefore, using foodstagramming as a representative of all other cultural practices, this research has presented an example to demonstrate that while unavoidably enacting and maintaining existing social relations and problems, cultural practices can promisingly generate new forms of social relations that can make changes to social problems. According to the findings of this research, the aesthetic element in cultural practices is the key for us to understanding what social relations are, how they are generated and how social problems can be solved.

7.4.2 A Move Towards Aesthetically Informed Sociology

For a more general implication of my research to social research, the most important contribution it has made is that it raises the importance for social researchers to move towards a more **aesthetically informed sociology**. This means social researchers need to insert aesthetics into not only the theorisation of the social world but also the design and execution of social research. Only by acknowledging the importance of aesthetics in its own right, social researchers can generate nuanced knowledge about the social world that recognises both structure and agency. Also, only by doing so, the communication of sociological knowledge can more comprehensively capture more diverse aspects of social life. By studying the lived experiences of foodstagramming, this research has exemplified why social researchers need to pay attention to the aesthetic elements when they study cultural practices to understand their relationships with the social world.

Aesthetic elements here stand for *senses*, *affects* and *perceptions*, which are the key elements I summarised from Miller (2008a) and Highmore (2010). This understanding of aesthetics is more in line with the original definition of aesthetics as introduced by the 18th German philosopher Baumgarten to emphasise the importance of human perception and sensation in cultural experiences as a form of knowing (Eagleton, 1990, p.13). Therefore, in my research, aesthetics emphasises the *sensual*, *bodily*, *visceral*, *emotional* and *existential* intensities people can gain via taking part in foodstagramming. Aesthetics in Western culture has long been colonised by the art world with criteria often striking on reason, judgement, disinterestedness and separation from everyday life (Saito, 2017; Liu, 2014). In Bourdieu's (1984) seminal work, his understanding of aesthetics also bears such a tendency. As Olcese and Savage (2015) point out, the standard sociological reading often reduced aesthetics into an instrument which hides social power that is used by actors who possess more social power to control the less privileged, as the criteria for aesthetic judgements are dependent on prior social organisation. Under such logic, aesthetics becomes largely passive, because it is regarded by many social researchers as socially dependent. Also, aesthetics become merely instrumental, as it is often regarded as a tool to reproduce existing social relations and enact social inequalities. However, as both Hanquinet and Savage (2015) and Olcese and Savage (2015) argue, such a tendency runs the risk of overlooking the generative nature of aesthetics. While the definition of aesthetics in my research does not disregard the influence social history and structure played on shaping individuals' perceptions (Hanquinet, Roose and Savage, 2014), it emphasises the **generative nature** of senses, affects and perceptions.

The very topic I study in this research is the lived experiences of foodstagramming and this topic directly addresses the senses, affects and perceptions people derive from creating and sharing food photos. To better understand such aesthetic elements, I adopted an inductive approach which focuses on capturing the aesthetic elements in various dimensions. This means that I did not directly apply existing social theory to see how people's lived experiences of foodstagramming are socially constructed, but instead chose to study the experiences in their own right (although I also accounted for social influences when I observed them in my findings).

Especially for understanding the aesthetic elements in different participants' experiences, I also participated in various activities, such as attending various exhibitions, workshops and courses. By doing this, I acquired different knowledge and types of techniques related to food photography and foodstagramming, which were previously beyond my understanding and skillset. I also experimented with the different techniques I learned by creating food photos with different styles and sharing them on my own Instagram. Such participatory and aesthetic experiences allowed me to better stand in the shoes of different participants so that later the aesthetic feelings that I generated from my own activities of making and sharing foodstagrams allowed me to generate empathy with different participants. Now to reflect, empathy was the key for me to capture and interpret the important role that aesthetic feelings play in constructing different participants' foodstagramming experiences. This is because via studying how participants create their foodstagrams and why they choose to use the styles that they do, I discovered that for foodstagrammers, no matter whether they choose to use simple or elaborative photographic styles (including both how a photograph is shot and edited) to create their foodstagrams, the styles themselves play important roles in defining the meanings of the foodstagrams, as the styles can directly highlight the aesthetic feelings the foodstagrammers want to express and communicate to their audiences.

The participants who favour using minimal time and effort to snap their food subjects reported that they do not pay much attention to the visual appearances of their foodstagrams. For these participants, while their lack of special interest in visual art and extensive knowledge of the techniques of image-making restricts their ability to make foodstagrams with more sophisticated visual styles, they are satisfied with the ordinary style they use to create their foodstagrams. For these participants, the most crucial criterium for making their foodstagrams is *visibility*, for which the food subjects should appear fully visible in the middle of the pictures without any significant blurs or shades. For them, the simplicity of such a visual style can very

sufficiently highlight their shared intention of creating simple food records of memorable food moments. In this sense, even though these participants paid minimal attention to the visual style of their foodstagram, the style still serves the role of highlighting the focus of the foodstagram: the food moments that have stirred up various memorable senses, affects and perceptions from the participants that they hope to record and share with their audiences.

On the other hand, the participants who instead reported spending much more time and effort in planning and creating their foodstagram often pay much more attention to the visual appearances of their foodstagram. The foodstagram these participants made are often carefully planned, staged and edited. These foodstagram often look very polished with their visual appearances resembling the photos we see in food-related consumer cultural content, such as food commercials and recipe books. If I adopted a deductive perspective, I could have simply interpreted the extra time and effort these foodstagrammers use to portray everyday food content (such as dishes someone cooked or meals someone had in restaurants) as indicators of their competitive ambition at winning their audiences' attention, as argued by McDonnell (2016) and Mull (2017). Also, as these foodstagram are often staged or edited and their visual appearances resemble how food is portrayed in consumer culture, in a deductive lens, I could have simply interpreted such foodstagram as indicators of the inauthentic aspirations these participants have for gaining a higher social status, as argued by McDonnell (2016) and O'Neill (2021). My findings indeed show the relevance and validity of such critiques. However, as I chose to hear how these participants explain the reasons why they chose to use a more elaborate style to create each foodstagram, I discovered various alternative interpretations of such style choices that were often neglected by deductive analyses.

The participants who adopt more elaborate visual styles to make their foodstagram are often active cultural participants who not only consume different forms of visual culture but also possess different levels of visual knowledge and techniques for making images. Concerning acquiring such knowledge and techniques, for some participants, this came from their education and work, whereas for others, it was from their leisure activities, such as watching YouTube videos, reading online tutorials, or simply just studying the food photography materials in recipe books or food blogs. For these participants, as a photographic image-making practice, foodstagramming provides them with an outlet to apply their visual knowledge and techniques in making images. We can thus regard foodstagramming as an accessible platform which allows these participants to exercise their visual creativity by using the most accessible materials in everyday life. In the meantime, the photographic nature of

foodstagramming has encouraged the participants to use their photographic eyes to see and feel food differently. Allowed by such a form of engagement, the participants can often generate new understandings of food that recognise its aesthetic, moral, environmental, social and political dimensions. Acknowledging that photography is not only a recording but also an aesthetic and expressive device, by mobilising the various visual techniques they acquired, these participants often use their foodstagrams to express what they feel and think. Thus, for the foodstagrams they made, even though the scenes were staged, and the photos were edited, the feelings and values these participants expressed are still true to how they generated them. Thus, we should regard such foodstagrams as *poeticised expressions* of these participants' selves, in the means of their feelings and values.

On the other hand, all participants, regardless of whether they adopt a minimalistic or elaborate foodstagramming style, all want to use their foodstagrams to attract the attention of their audiences, although to different extents. However, their purposes of attracting attention are not always simply gaining more privileged positions in the distinction game (Bourdieu, 1984). Gaining more attention can often accompany the acquisition of economic and social capitals (such as for participants who intend to use their Instagram to promote their businesses or participants who have become influencers) because their content has attracted a large following base. However, according to these participants, gaining such capitals has never been the end or mere goal for them. As the portraits presented in the analysis chapters indicate, for the participants, the more important drives for gaining attention for their foodstagrams include 1. the need for their creativity to be noticed and appreciated, 2. the need for their various personally important aesthetic feelings to be shared with others and echoed by others and 3. the need for their voices representing their values to be heard and acknowledged by others. By doing these, the participants often seek to create social connections, instead of boundaries, with other people who can resonate with them regarding passions, feelings and values. Therefore, through foodstagramming, the capital these participants intentionally amass is the “existential capital”, which as Nettleton (2013) defines as a capital stresses on using shared passion, visceral feelings and bodily engagements to cultivate **sociality and solidarity**, instead of competition and separation.

Thus, while aesthetics is being influenced by existing relations and structures in the social world, it can also actively produce new relations and structures, so aesthetics is also **generative** of the social world. In this sense, by studying aesthetics utilising a methodology that values this element, my research has exemplified why there is a need for social researchers

to move towards an aesthetically informed sociology. Therefore, it is only by valuing aesthetic elements in people's everyday social experiences and avoiding reducing such elements to the subjects or dependents of social structures that we can make room for a sociology that recognises the complex nature of our social world. The social world acts on its actors and shapes them, but also being acted upon and shaped by these actors.

7.5 Future Directions

By providing an in-depth and nuanced interpretation of foodstagramming focusing on foodstagrammers' lived experiences, this research presents the generative sides of foodstagramming and the active sides of foodstagrammers which is lacking in previous research. It emphasises the importance of paying attention to the aesthetic and axiological elements of the practice in understanding its social implication, especially concerning the relationship between individuals and the social world. It also raises awareness of the need to insert aesthetic elements in both the theorisation and representation of the social world. Future research which aims at generating insights into the relationships between individuals and the social world via studying cultural practices can also adopt a similar approach that I used. Regarding theorisation, this means that the researchers pay close attention to the sensory, affective and perceptive feelings, as well as the varied values (which are often linked to the feelings) involved in the practitioners' lived experiences of a certain cultural practice. It also means that researchers need to take into account the practitioners' interpretations of their actions. Concerning representation, the approach also suggests that researchers need to emphasise the aesthetic elements when presenting insights into cultural practices (that are largely formed by aesthetics). An example can be chapter 4 to chapter 6 in this thesis, where I used a visual way, in the form of an exhibition consisting of portraits, to present my findings about a visual practice.

On the other hand, this research has limitations. My research is a qualitative study of the lived experiences of a photographic practice focused on the subject matter of food situated in the context of Instagram. As a qualitative study, the result cannot be directly generalised to define the lived experiences of the whole foodstagramming population. Further quantitative research needs to be conducted to reach such generalisability. However, since my research insights show variety and multidimensionality in terms of both the types of foodstagrammers and their ways of conducting foodstagramming, the findings this research generated can be used to guide the development of quantitative studies, such as in composing survey questions. In addition, as mentioned, while the sample consists of foodstagrammers who produce and

share food photos in different styles and for varied purposes, and the socioeconomic characteristics do have variability, it is still overrepresented by highly-educated individuals with comparably privileged occupations. Therefore, the conclusion I addressed above might not directly apply to UK foodstagrammers with other educational and occupational backgrounds. We need to use further qualitative and quantitative studies to address this limitation.

Furthermore, my research is bound by a certain spatiotemporal context, for which I examined, from late 2019 to early 2023, the lived foodstagramming experiences on Instagram of foodstagrammers who live in the UK. I set Instagram as the context to focus, and I narrowed down the population scope to foodstagrammers in the UK. Thus, my research insights cannot be directly used to capture the lived experiences of foodstagrammers from other geographical locations that are situated on other digital platforms. Also, my longitudinal observations allowed my research to capture changes in foodstagrammers' lived experiences across the three years. However, since there will be changes in both the infrastructure of Instagram and people's foodstagramming practices and experiences in the future, my research necessarily offers a snapshot of foodstagramming at a particular moment in time. While my research findings might not predict how people will use Instagram at a given time in the future, the approach of how I conducted plus presented this research can still serve as a useful reference point for future researchers who intend to study similar topics. Additionally, my research insights can serve as a point of comparison for these researchers.

During the conduct of my research, I experimented with several visual ways to disseminate my findings. The activities include making collages for an academic conference attended by researchers from different disciplines, as well as composing a poster to present my findings to both academic and public audiences. Both activities generated wide engagements and they both received positive feedback. Therefore, in the future, I will consider collaborating with galleries, community centres and different media channels to organise both online and offline exhibitions. For such exhibitions, I aim to present visual and textual extracts of my participants' foodstagramming experiences accompanied by my interpretations. For these events, I also plan to offer workshops that provide the audiences with opportunities to create foodstagrams and discuss such experiences in groups. By doing these, I intend to use an engaging way to encourage audiences from diverse backgrounds to learn, reflect on and discuss the foodstagramming experiences of other people alongside their own.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Participant Information

To note:

1. The names ending with the symbol “^” are pseudonyms for participants who chose to be anonymised. For participants who chose to be identified, the names (and their formats) were selected by these individuals themselves.
2. Each cell with the symbol “*” stands for information the participant stated that he/she preferred not to be reported (although collected).

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Education	Occupation	Region	Type
Siyi^	20-30	Woman	Asian	Postgraduate degree	Student	Northern England	Casual user
Nancy^	30-40	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Research associate	Northern England	Casual user
Phoebe^	20-30	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Student	Northern England	Casual user
Nathan^	20-30	Man	Mixed	Undergraduate degree	Real-estate consultant	Southern England	Casual user
@superbritish girl	30-40	Woman	Asian	Postgraduate degree	Data entry professional	Southern England	Food enthusiast
@foodjunkie_uk	20-30	Woman	Asian	Postgraduate degree	Marketing account assistant	Northern England	Food enthusiast
@janeskitchenlondon	50-60	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Catering business runner	Southern England	Food enthusiast
@jackycooks herbooks	60-70	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Retired (was a social worker)	Southern England	Food enthusiast
@matt_inwood	40-50	Man	White	Undergraduate degree	Freelance designer, art director, photographer and teacher	Southern England	Photography professional
Cathy^	30-40	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Lecturer	Scotland	Casual user
@sharoncosgrovephotography	30-40	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree	Professional photographer	Northern Ireland	Photography professional

@mylegoman 2	40-50	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree and teaching qualification	Freelance teacher and consultant	Southern England	Photography amateur
@rbnichol	50-60	Woman	White	Postgraduate diploma	Translator	*	Photography amateur
@jimboiuk	40-50	Man	Asian	Undergraduate degree	Freelance photographer	Southern England	Photography amateur
QUOC HOA HUYNH	40-50	Man	Asian	Apprenticeship	Freelance photographer	Southern England	Photography professional
SANDY SUFFIELD	40-50	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Art director and set designer	Southern England	Photography professional
AARON GRAUBART @aarongraubart	50-60	Man	White	Undergraduate degree	Professional photographer	Southern England	Photography professional
LUCY-RUTH HATHAWAY @itslucyruth	30-40	Woman	Mixed	Undergraduate degree, national diploma and Cordon Bleu diploma	Food stylist	Southern England	Photography professional
Ruth's Little Kitchen	50-60	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Owner of a micro-bakery and cooking school	Southern England	Food enthusiast
@gizem.kumbaraci	20-30	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree	Freelancer food photographer and food photographic assistant	Southern England	Photography professional
@cookwithaconscience	40-50	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Setting up a food business	Southern England	Food enthusiast
Jason^	30-40	Man	White	Undergraduate degree	Undertaking teacher training	Northern England	Casual user
@neviepie	40-50	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree	Cake artist and owner of a cake-making company	Southern England	Food enthusiast
@gemmahitchon.pr	30-40	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree	Self-employed PR consultant	Southern England	Food enthusiast
Helga Stentzel @helga.stentzel	30-40	Woman	White	Undergraduate degree	Visual artist, food stylist, art director and photographer	Southern England	Photography amateur

@robson.media	30-40	Man	White	Dropped out of an undergraduate programme	Videographer, photographer and social media content creator	Southern England	Photography professional
@yasgoesto	20-30	Woman	White	Postgraduate degree	Communications manager	Southern England	Photography amateur

Appendix 2 Interview Guide

Introduction	
Participants	• Self-intro • Background
Use of Instagram (encourage participants to look through the content on their Instagram while answering the questions)	
General use	• How long have you used Instagram? • What do you use Instagram for? • What do you like and dislike about Instagram? Why?
Consumption habit	• What types of content do you normally browse? • Do you like browsing food photos? Why? • Do you normally read through the content carefully/swipe through rather quickly? Why?
Production habit	• What types of content do you normally share? • Do you want to become an influencer on Instagram? Why?
Understanding of food, visual culture and food in visual culture	
Food	• Do you consider yourself someone very interested in food? • What food means to you? (like food as sustenance/pleasure?) Why? • Do you think there are good & bad food/do you think there's no difference between different food? Why? How do you define what is good and bad food? • Do you avoid eating certain types of food? Why/why not? • Do you like to try different cuisines? Why/why not? • Do you like to read books and watch TV/online programmes about food? What type of content do you like? Who do you like? • What do you like to comment on today's food culture?
Visual culture & food in visual culture	• Are you interested in art, design, or photography? If yes, what (genre & style) do you like and why do you like it? Why? • What impression do you have on how food is represented in different media (on TV, food packages, social media etc.)?
Foodstagramming practices (relate to participant's foodstagram examples)	
Subject	• How do you relate your food photos with other people's food pictures you see on Instagram? • What kind of food do you normally feature and choose not to feature in your food photos? Why? • Do you think there is food that is and is not Instagrammable? Why? Do you apply such criteria when making your food photos? • What roles do different food play in your food photos?

Styles	• Do you pay any attention to the visual aesthetics/style (composition of the image, colour combination, saturation, tone, etc.) of the food photos? • Why do you think visual styles are/are not important? • Have you tried to learn techniques for shooting food photos? Why/why not? • Have you bought any gadgets to help you to enhance the visual effect of your food photos? • Do you use the editing features on Instagram? Why/why not? How do you use them? • Except for editing tools provided by Instagram, do you use other apps to edit your images? What kind of features do you use? Why do you take such extra steps? • How long do you normally spend editing your food photos?
Conclusion	• Has posting images of food on Instagram/social media brought any changes to how you understand food, photographing food and your use of Instagram?

Appendix 3 Reflections on My Experiences in the Food Photography and Styling Course

In the summer of 2022, I attended a three-day food photography and styling course at Le Cordon Bleu in London. I signed up for the course during the data collection stage in 2020 intending to gain practical knowledge of food photography and styling to help me better understand the foodstagramming experiences of my photography professional and photography amateur participants. However, due to delays caused by the pandemic of COVID-19, I eventually attended the course during my writing-up year. At that time, I had already examined the conversational and observational data I collected. I also drafted some sections of my analysis chapters to present my findings and arguments for which I empathised with the participants via the means of their words and content. However, at the course, in addition to instructions and demonstrations of food photography and styling techniques, the students were also provided with practical sessions, for which we were offered food materials, lighting facilities, plates, backdrops and various props and gears to conduct food photography tasks. As I have observed that several photography professional and enthusiast participants use different equipment and props when making their foodstagramms that looked very unfamiliar to me, I, therefore, utilised the practical sessions offered at the course as tools to stand in my participants' shoes to a physical sense to empathise with them.

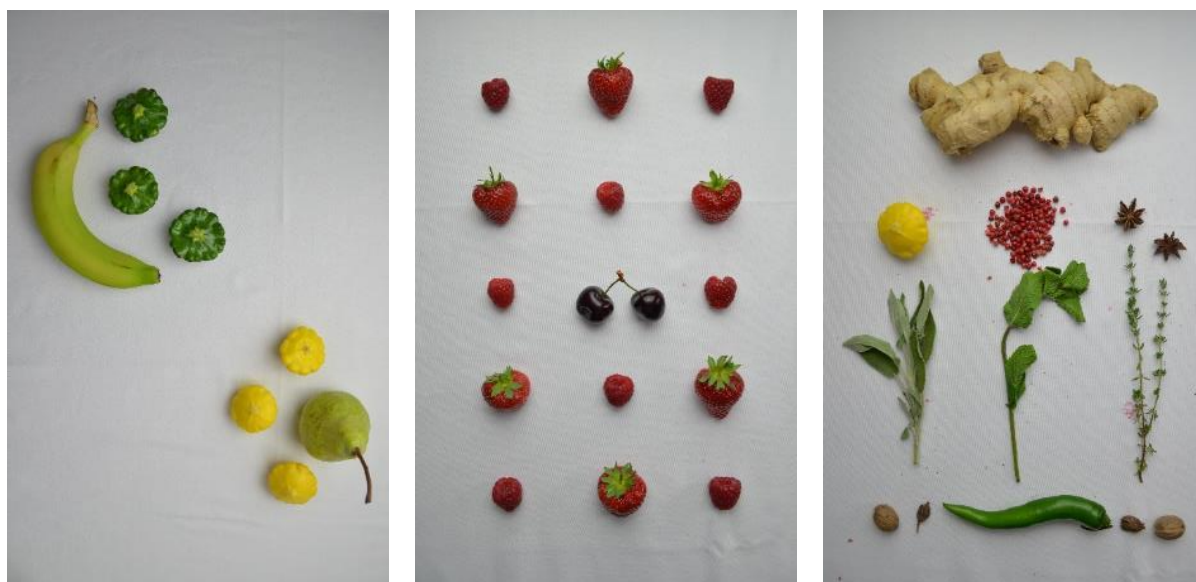


Figure 38 abc: Food photos I created during the first-day practical session

Figure 38 shows the photos I took on the first day. I utilised the different vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices provided at the scene to test my camera and compositional skills. As the ingredients were all unprepared raw materials, I decided to use them to conduct visual

exercises to explore their different material qualities, like how some of my participants reported what they often do when producing their foodstagram (see chapter 5 especially). When creating the visual compositions of each photo, I did not think too much, but just observed the different material qualities of the objects and moved them around the table. Whenever I considered the composition looked interesting, I then use my camera to photograph the scene. Now to interpret, 38a shows the interesting shape combinations I discovered in the fruits and vegetables; 38b demonstrates the different shades of red I managed to discover from different fruits; while 38c presents the variations of interesting shapes, colours and textures of different vegetables, herbs and spices. Through this exercise, like what my participants reported, I started to notice the interesting material qualities of different food objects. Also, playing with these objects and creating the compositions brought me pleasure, as I considered the pictured compositions aesthetically interesting. Additionally, even though I now realised that I might have unintentionally borrowed visual techniques from the photos that I have seen in the past (the image I used in my recruiting poster shown in 7a of Figure 7 and 38b of Figure 38 is an example), I was still very pleased that I was able to create these photos, as they helped me to express my excitement of the interesting material qualities of food that I did not notice before. As I present in the analysis chapters, such feelings all echo with my participants'. Therefore, this visual exercise allowed me to use an embodied way to understand and reflect on the embodied experiences of my participants' food photo-making activities.



Figure 39 a: Adding water to activate the dry ice; b: Steam started to come out; c: The final product

The third day of the course was dedicated to practical tasks. The students were grouped into pairs to conduct six mock commercial and editorial food photography tasks, such as shooting the cover of a food magazine and shooting materials for promoting certain dishes of a restaurant on their social media accounts. Figure 39 shows such an example. This was a task to shoot a photo for a scallop supplier to showcase the quality of the products to impress a potential scallop importer. For this task, my partner and I first decided to choose a big round plate which matches the circular shape of the scallop shell. We assembled the dish with the help of both a chef from the school and our course instructor. Figure 39 shows the process of how a final image product was created. As 39a shows, first, the chef added water to activate the dry ice. As 39b shows, when the steam started to come out, I kept shooting at the dish from different angles to capture the dish with the movement. Then 39c shows one of my most satisfying shoots. These six tasks all resemble the ones some of my participants have conducted which they shared on their Instagram.

As I have never had the experience of completing such tasks, by having a holistic experience, I then was able to understand from an image producer's perspective the making of such photos. The most striking feeling I generated through these photoshoots was that it was very difficult to use the camera to represent what I saw using my eyes directly. For example,

when styling the dish, we had to make the pumpkin puree slightly uneven, so that when the scallop lay on top of it, it could be slightly tilted to avoid it appearing too flat in the photo. However, using my eyes, I could simply just tilt my gaze slightly to achieve the same effect. Also, when I tried to shoot the dish, the lighting in 39c appeared more like how the dish looked through my eyes. However, as the light difference shown in 39a and 39c suggests, I had to adjust my camera and attempt different settings to achieve the effect. It was not simply a straightforward click. Such embodied experience then made me reflect on the account of one of my participants: “*your camera is already a filter*”. Therefore, when I later read other participants’ accounts on creating foodstagrams concerning whether they chose to modify certain elements of the pictured food scenes or add filters to their foodstagrams, I always tried to find how they justify the purposes of such choices, instead of imposing a formulaic judgment.

Appendix 4 Information Sheet



INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Manli Zhu. I am a PhD student from the Department of Sociology, University of York. My supervisors are Dr Daryl Martin and Dr Laurie Hanquinet. For my PhD degree, I am doing research with the title: **‘Insta-glammed’ Eye-candy: Critically Understanding the Production and Consumption Activities of Food Photography on Instagram.**

The purpose of this research is that sharing pictures of food on social media has already become a common social practice among people who live in the UK. This topic has attracted extensive media coverage but has received little attention from social researchers. I plan to use this research to examine such food photographic activities on social media, especially on Instagram.

I would like to invite you to have a face to face or Skype interview with me to discuss your routine photographic activities on Instagram, especially about food. The interview will last for approximately 30 to 60 minutes, but you can end it at any time. In association with the interview, if you give me your consent, I would like to make observations of the publicly available content, especially food-related content from your Instagram account. Additionally, if you are happy to do it, you can also send me food images that are produced by you and others that you think are Instagrammable and not Instagrammable (typical and untypical to Instagram).

You will be asked to sign a consent form to state which activity/activities you would like to participate before any data is collected. The data collection process at each stage will only take place after you have given me your informed consent.

All data collected from the above activities will be analysed and potentially be used in research outputs. As a default practice, for all people who participate in this research, all data provided will be anonymised, so in this case, I will use pseudonyms to refer to you and your data in all forms of report and publication of the research. If you do not mind being identified by other people and prefer to let me refer to you and your data using your Instagram username or your real name, you also have the right to request so.

If you choose to be anonymised, by assigning a pseudonym to you and your data, anonymity can only be kept to a certain level but cannot be fully guaranteed. Especially for images,

because they are already publicly accessible on your Instagram, so you might be recognised by people who have already seen the post. On the other hand, if you choose to be identified, it will potentially make you and your data easily identified by all readers of the research outputs.

Please think thoroughly and make sure you do not mind the consequences before you give me your consent to participate in the research.

For reporting results from the above activities, only the images that are originally produced by you will potentially be included in the research report and only publicly available images on your Instagram will be included. Additionally, all images used will be images of food only. No images with any individual's frontal face that allows him or her being identified will be included. You will be asked to complete a separate IMAGE REPRODUCTION RIGHTS FORM if you allow me to use some or all images in the research output.

All data you provide in the research will be stored in password-protected computer devices and a hard drive that is locked in my office at the University of York. All digital data files in all digital devices will be encrypted and printed data files will be locked in my office, so only I can get access to your data. Your data will be securely stored during my PhD study and will be permanently deleted two years after I am awarded the PhD degree.

Your participation would be completely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from any of the above activities or withdraw your consent to the use of any type of information you provide without any cause for concern within 3 months after participating in the research. If you choose to do so, all types of information you do not wish me to use will not be included in the research and will be permanently deleted. During your participation, you also have the right to refuse to answer any questions. If you have any queries, you can ask me at any time before, during or after your participation. The contact detail of me is as follows:

Manli Zhu, Department of Sociology, University of York, YO10 5DD. Email: instaeyecandy@york.ac.uk

The contact details of my supervisors are as follows:

Dr Daryl Martin, Department of Sociology, University of York, YO10 5DD, Email: daryl.martin@york.ac.uk

Dr Laurie Hanquinet, Department of Sociology, University of York, YO10 5DD, Email: laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk

* If you have any enquiries regarding ethical issues of the study, please contact the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) at the University of York at elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk

Appendix 5 Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

This form is for you to state whether you agree to take part in the interview. Please read and answer every question that is relevant to your participation. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please contact me at insta-eyecandy@york.ac.uk

Have you read and understood the information sheet about the project?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the project?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that you may withdraw from the research for any reason within 3 months after your participation?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that all information you provide for the research will be securely stored during my PhD study and will be permanently destroyed two years after I am awarded the PhD degree?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that the information you provide in the interview may be used in the future report of the research?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that the information you provide in the interview will be anonymised by the researcher (unless you choose not to be anonymised)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that because we will discuss your Instagram images that are publicly available, even if you

choose to be **anonymised** and a pseudonym is assigned to you and your data from the interview, anonymity can only be maintained to a certain level, but cannot be fully guaranteed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that if you choose to let me refer to you and your data from the interview using your **Instagram username** or your **real name**, you and your data from the interview will potentially easily be identified by others?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you agree to take part in the interview?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you agree to take part, do you agree to your interview being audio recorded?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you agree to take part, do you allow me to use excerpts from the interview data in the future report of the research?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please answer questions in the following box if you let me make observations of your publicly accessible Instagram food images and(or) send me food images.

Do you understand that images originally produced by you on your Instagram account may be used in the research outputs?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that I will assign a pseudonym to anonymise your images (unless you want me to name you as their creator)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that if you choose to be **anonymised**, anonymity can only be maintained to a certain level, but cannot be fully guaranteed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Do you understand that if you choose to let me refer to you and your images using your Instagram username or your real name , you and your images will potentially easily be identified by others?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you allow me to make observations of the publicly available content from your Instagram account?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you want to send me food images produced by you and/or links to food images produced by other people?	Yes ☐	No ☐

Please tick ONE box below to state how you would like yourself and your data (your information, words and images) to be referred to.

- ☐ I would like the researcher to **anonymise me** and my data and I would like her to refer to those types of information using a pseudonym.
- ☐ I would like the researcher to refer to me and my data using my **Instagram username**.
- ☐ I would like the researcher to refer to me and my data using my **real name**.

PRINTED NAME (please write your name in capital letters):

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

* If you have any enquiries regarding ethical issues of the study, please contact the chair of the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) at the University of York: Tony Royle at elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk

Appendix 6 Image Reproduction Rights Form



IMAGE REPRODUCTION RIGHTS FORM

This form is about the use of images in the report of the research **‘Insta-glammed’ Eye-candy: Critically Understanding the Production and Consumption Activities of Food Photography on Instagram**. The images refer to either or both of the food images you have submitted to me and the food images that I have collected from your publicly available content from your Instagram page from my observation.

The food images you have produced will be a valuable resource for me to include in the report of the research because by presenting your images, it allows me to explain more vividly the visual characteristics of the images and your food photographic practice on Instagram, as well as your understanding of such a practice. For these reasons, I would like to use some images (in electronic and print form) in the research outputs. All images will be securely stored in password-protected computer devices during the research period. All image files will be deleted and destroyed permanently two years after I am awarded a PhD.

If you are happy for me to use your images in the stated forms of research outputs, please sign in **ONE** of the two boxes below according to your decision and choose how you would like to be accredited. If you do not wish me to use any of your images, please leave this form in blank.

1. As the copyright owner of all title, rights and interests in the images, I give my consent for **ALL** the images requested by the researcher to be reproduced as set out in this form for non-commercial academic purposes. I allow the researcher to reproduce my images in her PhD thesis, reports, presentations, publications and websites that are related to the research project (in both electronic and printed forms): **‘Insta-glammed’ Eye-candy: Critically Understanding the Production and Consumption Activities of Food Photography on Instagram**.

I allow the researcher Manli Zhu to use **ALL** images requested by her in her research outputs.

Signed.....Date.....

Printed Name.....

Please choose ONE of the following three options regarding how you would like to be accredited:

- ☐ 1. I would like the researcher to ANONYMISE all my images and assign a pseudonym to them when using the images in the research outputs.
- ☐ 2. I would like the researcher to use my INSTAGRAM USERNAME when using all my images in the research outputs (Please fill in the blank with your Instagram username if you choose this option).
- ☐ 3. I would like the researcher to use my REAL NAME..... when using all my images in the research outputs (Please fill in the blank with your real name if you choose this option).

OR

2. As the copyright owner of all title, rights and interests in the images, I give my consent for **SOME** but not all the images requested by the researcher to be reproduced as set out in this form for non-commercial academic purposes. I allow the researcher to reproduce the specified images in her PhD thesis, reports, presentations, publications and websites that are related to the research project (in both electronic and printed forms): **‘Insta-glammed’ Eye-candy: Critically Understanding the Production and Consumption Activities of Food Photography on Instagram.**

I allow the researcher Manli Zhu to use **THE FOLLOWING IMAGES** specified:

.....

Signed.....Date.....

Printed Name.....

Please choose ONE of the following three options regarding how you would like to be accredited:

- ☐ 1. I would like the researcher to ANONYMISE all my images and assign a pseudonym to them when using the images in the research outputs.
- ☐ 2. I would like the researcher to use my INSTAGRAM USERNAME when using all my images in the research outputs (Please fill in the blank with your Instagram username if you choose this option).
- ☐ 3. I would like the researcher to use my REAL NAME..... when using all my images in the research outputs (Please fill in the blank with your real name if you choose this option).

Many thanks for participating in this project. If you have any queries about this form or about the project or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact me: Manli Zhu, email: insta-eyecandy@york.ac.uk

* If you have any enquiries regarding ethical issues of the study, please contact the chair of the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) at the University of York: Tony Royle at elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk

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