

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE RHETORIC OF ECOLOGICAL FOOD: ENVIRONMENTAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL GOD TERMS IN BLUE APRON, SOYLENT, AND SLOW
FOOD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Norman, Oklahoma
2017

THE RHETORIC OF ECOLOGICAL FOOD: ENVIRONMENTAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL GOD TERMS IN BLUE APRON, SOYLENT, AND SLOW
FOOD

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

The rhetoric and language surrounding technologically and environmentally oriented food systems illustrate that what and how we eat shapes the way we think about food, ecology, and the world. Analyzing the rhetoric of current food trends protects against the risk of reproducing unproductive dualisms between ecologically oriented technologists and environmentalists. To break this dualism, in this paper I will examine the rhetoric of ecological food underlying three cases of food innovation. I first examine Blue Apron to investigate the ways technology and environment intersect. I then examine Soylent to critique rhetorics of efficiency in food discourse. Lastly, I examine Slow Food to explore how rhetorics of nostalgia shape conceptions of environment and technology. Although Blue Apron and Soylent are companies with profit motivation, and Slow Food is a social movement, all reflect the reality that the term “sustainability” has been captured by various approaches to food that reproduce nature and technology as separate. The resulting effect is the reproduction of limited approaches and understandings of ecology and ecological food. The latter reflect the reality that older versions of nature as separate from technology no longer exist. Rather than focus on nature, the goal is ecology which does not ignore or distance itself from the presence of technology. Rather than a materialist analysis of food, which is a future goal, this paper instead analyzes the rhetoric behind food as a practical and potential starting point for recognizing and tracing the chaotic consequences of using terms such as “sustainable” in the pursuit of ecological food discourse.

Introduction

The rhetoric and language surrounding technologically and environmentally oriented food systems illustrate that what and how we eat shapes the way we think about food, ecology, and the world. We learn from notable food scholars such as Carlo Petrini (2013), Michael Pollan (2006), Dan Barber (2014), and Sophie Egan (2016) that our food decisions inform and are informed by cognitive relations to our environments. For example, the introduction of packaging methods such as tin cans and now subscription boxes signals the rapid evolution of what people consider acceptable food distribution and practice. Furthermore, what one considers acceptable distribution has a real impact on how people perceive food and subsequently the world around them. For instance, sociologist Elizabeth B. Silva argues that the introduction of the microwave introduced “reheatable convenience foods” that “have grown in popularity and the diffusion trends are related to changing family lifestyles” (84). Eventual incorporation in the kitchen as a gendered technological advance reflected and facilitated a change in the roles of the wife and mother. With the increase of women in the workforce, the microwave and the TV dinner industry offered an alternative to more traditional and time intensive cooking. Carl Disalvo defines a rhetoric of design as “[T]he ways in which the built environment reflects and tries to influence values and behavior and...the capacity of people to design artifacts or systems that promote or thwart certain perspectives and agendas” (49). Re-conceptualizations of food rapidly change and affect and are affected by history and society. A rhetoric of ecological food is a rhetoric of design.

But, although the ways we talk about food shape the ways we interpret our environment, food cannot be reduced to pure concept. Food has a dynamic material existence that is inseparable from the processes we rely on to orient ourselves to the world around us. Given this knowledge, Egan asks “the bigger question... *Why* do we think about what we think about when we think about food?” (14). This paper argues that one answer is the rhetorical tension between ecologically oriented technology and a more traditional environmentalism that defines the rhetoric of ecological design. For example, Blue Apron’s promise of sustainable food argues that I should be comfortable with and, therefore, not pay close attention to the ecological effects of where my food comes from. Blue Apron as we will later learn is a step forward but also urges a subject position that rhetorically excludes multiple other means of understanding food. This paper will not argue for or against approaches to food, but will instead point to the complex and chaotic consequences of food practices and decisions. The goal is to examine the problem of the food system from an ecological standpoint. The food system today is one where terms such as “sustainable” are employed by both food companies, organizations, and even social movements. The issue is that the examples rhetorically utilize terms such as “sustainable” to produce a particular version of sustainability that excludes other complex consequences that result from using the term in relation to food system design or redesign.

In this paper, I introduce what I call a rhetoric of *ecological* food, which exposes that how we talk about food and how our food (from Blue Apron to the local farmer’s market) talks to and persuades us, reproduces and transforms understandings about the relationships between ecologically oriented technology and environmental which will

from now on be referred to as technology and environment for the sake of space and simplicity. The resulting transformation is to recognize that approaches to the food system will not save the planet by reviving nature and environment—the traditional source of food—as a realm separate from technology. In other words, traditionally environmental approaches to the food system will not resurrect nature because such a version of nature no longer exists. At the same time, such an argument must acknowledge that such conceptualizations of nature, whether nature exists or not, still holds a place of nostalgic and cultural importance within the minds of people or food consumers. A rhetoric of ecological food does not reject technology even if at times used for seemingly “unnatural” food practices. A rhetoric of ecological food does not seek to revive nature or traditional environmentalism but does uphold ethical responsibilities to recognizing the significance of local ingenuity and peoples’ connections to place. A rhetoric of ecological food recognizes the intelligence of food consumers and invites people to participate in food system design by inviting them to identify and trace the consequences of current food discourse.

Such a rhetoric is needed now more than ever, because we can no longer afford to ignore ecological destruction nor that the production and distribution of food plays a huge role in this destruction. In this light, eco-theorist Timothy Morton argues for an “ecology without nature” (3). Morton suggests that “the ghost of Nature” attempts to resurrect “a time without ‘technology, as if we had never used flint or wheat’” (5). The conceptualization holds that “Nature [is] always ‘over yonder’” (5) and separate from more technological and synthetic human activity. Ecology without nature holds that Nature and technology do not exist independently from one another. Juxtaposing nature

and technology (as has been common in ecological rhetoric for centuries) reveals the two have competing interests. However, the adherence to nature and technology as separate competing interests does not progress us toward food system or even more general ecological solutions. Thus, the more vital endeavor is to imagine how to approach them as different angles toward the same goal. The goal of this paper is to pursue ecological food where technology and environment are placed in symbiotic balance. Such a balance does not mean technology and environment achieve perfect harmony or even should. The balance refers to pursuing beneficial technological solutions and upholding responsibilities to place as inseparable parts of ecological food which aims for more symbiotic relationships with the planet. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that food innovations and sustainable movements will not resurrect a picturesque version of nature or environment as a reified realm separate from uglier human practices. Similarly, a purely technological approach ignores critically beneficial nostalgic connections to environment. For example, we can attempt to grow meat in labs, but should not ignore or displace our responsibilities for animals and ranchers. In any case, ecological food is necessary in a world where the food we depend on for survival is destroying the planet we depend on for survival.

Analyzing the rhetoric of current food trends protects against the risk of reproducing unproductive dualisms between nature and technology and hopefully propels us into a more ecological future. To break this dualism, in this paper I will examine the rhetoric of ecological food underlying three cases of food innovation. I first examine Blue Apron to investigate the ways technology and environment intersect. I then examine Soylent to critique rhetorics of efficiency in food discourse. Lastly, I

examine Slow Food to explore how rhetorics of nostalgia shape conceptions of environment and technology. We must recognize that Blue Apron and Soylent are companies with profit motivation, and Slow Food is a social movement which are different. However, the aim of the case studies is to examine and acknowledge how terms such as “sustainability” have been captured by different but still interrelated and currently popular approaches to food. In juxtaposing each of these gastronomic approaches to nature and technology, I develop what I call a *mesh of god terms*. The mesh¹ maps out the ways in which terms and their associated meanings direct attention to unproductive understandings of food rather than inviting the contestation necessary for symbiotic conversation. The mesh serves as an alternative rhetorical tool for tracing or mapping out the consequences of using terms such as “sustainable” in food discourse. The goal is to demonstrate how current gastronomic rhetorics reproduce ecological or non-ecological conceptualizations of food.

Methodology: What is a Rhetoric of Ecological Food?

Many consumers refer to the popular snack Pringles as a potato chip. However, the status of Pringles has been one of legal debate. Initially created by Proctor & Gamble² (P&G) in 1967, the snack was known as “Pringle’s Newfangled Potato Chips.” Popularity for the chip rose quickly to the ire of competitors such as Detroit’s Superior Potato Chips Inc. and the Potato Chip Institute International (“Marketing: Non-crunch

¹ The concept of the mesh is informed by Timothy Morton’s mesh in *The Ecological Thought*. However, rather than an ontological means for understanding the reality of human interactions with the world, I borrow the visual concept of the mesh as an alternative rhetorical tool for visualizing the relationships of rhetorical terms. The goal of the tool is to open a means for tracing and mapping the complex consequences of rhetoric.

² Proctor & Gamble officially sold Pringles to Kellogg Company in 2012 (de laMerced, Michael J. *The New York Times*, 2012)

on Pringle's"). Pressure from these older companies resulted in the US Food and Drug Administration ruling that Pringle's must be labeled as "potato chips made from dried potatoes" ("Marketing: Non-crunch on Pringle's") in lieu of the simple beloved term "chip." Although the new label just wordier and harmless, it drew attention to the fact that Pringles only possess a potato content of around 42% which requires the more unnatural process of adding a mixture of rice, corn, and wheat. Eventually, Proctor & Gamble would adopt the label potato "crisp" instead of "chip" to avoid the less appetizing label of "dried potatoes" and its associated meanings. Proctor & Gamble found themselves in a situation where the seemingly harmless semantics of "chips" and "crisps" actually reflected and impacted the ways in which people perceived Pringles. What Pringles are and how one could tell became unclear.

As the example of Pringles demonstrates, current conceptualizations of food rely on what Kenneth Burke calls terministic screens. For Burke, "terministic screens" direct the *attention*" so that any terminology or nomenclature "directs the attention into some channels rather than others" (*Language* 45). The word "crisp"³ directs the attention to a Pringle's technological means of production while "chip" directs attention toward its connection to a "natural" potato. As the legal battles expose, the words "crisp" and "chip" carry implicit meanings regarding production, ingredient

³ It is important to note that in the UK "crisp" refers to what Americans call the "chip." However, the label in the UK also faced identification battles. For example in 2008, "A High Court judge ruled... that Pringles' packaging, "unnatural shape" and the fact that the potato content is less than 50% meant the snack was exempt from VAT [taxation]." However, in 2009 "The Appeal Court judges disagreed. 'There is more than enough potato content for it to be a reasonable view that it is made from potato,' said Lord Justice Jacob." It was a court battle that saw "Procter & Gamble insist[ing] that their best-selling product was not similar to potato crisps, because of their "mouth melt" taste, 'uniform colour' and 'regular shape' which 'is not found in nature'" ("Pringles lose Appeal Court case"). The tensions between the natural and processing reveal the complexity of food production, supply chains, and the overall food system. The information is provided here for the sake of moving forward with the overall purpose of the paper but serves as an additional example for recognizing the complexity of a term's meaning.

identification, and economy. Additionally, the case of Pringles unmasks that common interpretations can be further broken down into more specific processes of production, consumption, and distribution. It is impossible⁴ for an individual to perceive and speak about food while accounting for all possible means of interpretation; therefore, we filter them out. Thus, any conversation about food employs terministic screens that companies and producers try their hardest to shape and control through websites, packaging, advertisements, and even lawsuits.

When analyzing terministic screens, it becomes apparent that certain terms and concepts elicit positive or negative connotations. According to Burke, “In any term we can posit a world...in the sense that that we can treat the world *in terms of it*, seeing all as emanations, near or far, of its light. Such reduction to a simplicity being technically reduction to a summarizing title of ‘God term,’ ... we must forthwith ask ourselves what complexities are subsumed beneath it” (*Grammar* 105). Here, “chip” serves as a god term when it serves as a frame for shaping human actions. As a god term, “chip” prompts positive responses and associations to the “natural” that are not open to dispute. Conversely, “potato chips made from dried potatoes” is a term that elicits negative responses to the “artificial” and can be understood as a “devil term” (Weaver 222). It is important to quickly note that Weaver is a bit dated. I simply use devil term here because it has practical purpose for the discussion at hand.

In an analysis of “sustainability” as a god term, Dale L. Sullivan presents the danger of complacency towards such food rhetoric and terministic screens. Expanding on Burke, Sullivan reveals that terms like “sustainability” which are central to

⁴ At the very least incredibly difficult and tedious

ecological food discourse are in the process of losing meaning. Sullivan emphasizes that food rhetoric “employ[s]...terms in order to gain support for a policy or group” (3). Terms like “sustainability,” typically a god term used by groups from environmentalists to food advertisers, do not always adhere to meanings and actions we consider ideal. As a god term, “sustainability” is upheld as an ecologically beneficial concept that invites no dispute. However, Sullivan points out that agribusiness and food companies have since co-opted the word to advertise products that prioritize profit over ecology (3). There are products labeled “sustainable” on shelves that are not what most would consider sustainable. Such terms are what Richard Weaver calls “charismatic terms” or those words that co-opt positive associations without any real attachment to upholding them. “Chip” becomes a charismatic term when Pringles advertise the product as “chips” without any real intention to uphold common interpretations of “chip.” In the scope of food discourse, a rhetoric of ecological food exposes god terms and devil terms at risk of becoming charismatic or empty of content by interrogating what the actual ecological implications of the terms are.

An analysis of food rhetoric reveals there is no perfect solution to the food system. Neither technology or nature alone will solve humanity’s problems; unfortunately, our proclivity towards categorizing concepts cleanly as god and devil terms produce unproductive dualisms, what David N. Cassuto identifies as the production of false choices. Rhetoric that proposes a solution directs attention away from the fact that any gastronomic solution is always in a process of becoming and usually exists in a space of contestation. The space allows one to identify “false choices” where “the shared expectations of expectations that enable the system’s

functioning are crippled, and a legitimation crisis becomes inevitable” (Cassuto 124). Here a desire to define a solution ignores the need for “linguistic uncertainty and for the shifting nature of norms and expectations” (124). Cassuto asserts that a less open food rhetoric results in combative relationships where different approaches seek to legitimize their solution while delegitimizing others. When the shared expectations of a Pringle align with the expectations of the term “chip,” the system remains stable. When the expectations of a Pringle do not align with the expectations of the term “chip,” the system fails and a legitimation crisis occurs as to what a Pringle is. This paper will call the space where such crises occur contested space and the terms that reveal spaces contested terms. Pringle is either “chip” or “crisp.” Technology is either “solution” or “obstacle.” Environment is either “essential” or “antiquated.” Contested space, which in this paper is used to refer to the spaces of the mesh, enables one to move past such false choices and engage a more beneficial discussion where technology and environment gain the chance to become ecological. In short, it allows one to trace and map the actual lived consequences of food discourse and language.

Blue Apron, Soylent, and Slow Food rely on terministic screens and false choices in their arguments and advertisements in order to smooth over the productivity of contested space. They do so because contested space does not lead to money, at least thus far, and requires difficult concessions and conversations about what is necessary for new solutions. I aim to show ecological food means recognizing that food discourse exists in a contested space with interconnected clusters of technological and environmental rhetoric. Food discourse requires one to examine how the clusters

intersect and diverge so that one may avoid false choices. Technology and environment cannot be the sole center of food discourse, because ecological food has no center.

Blue Apron: Subscribing to Ecology

Founded by Matt Wadiak (a chef), Matt Salzberg (a venture capitalist), and Ilia Papas (a computer engineer) in the summer of 2012, Blue Apron promised engaging and sustainable meals. Customers pay a weekly subscription fee for a box of fresh ingredients and three recipes⁵. The company experienced rapid growth and currently sends over 8 million meals per month to home chefs in the United States (BlueApron.com: Our Team). Blue Apron is not alone. Competitors such as HelloFresh and PeachDish signal changes in the relationships between technology and environment as mediated by food consumption. Such growth requires rhetorical examination to unmask risks including myopic views of sustainability, co-optation by “big-market” food corporations, and false harmony between technology and environment. Furthermore, rhetorical examination can help to identify the beneficial solutions that are present within Blue Apron as well.

The logic behind Blue Apron has ecologically altruistic intentions. The site’s homepage proudly proclaims “we can’t wait to cook with you!” (BlueApron.com). Indeed, the name Blue Apron comes from the aprons “worn by apprentice chefs in France” which the company treats as “a symbol of lifelong learning in cooking” (BlueApron.com: Our Team). The goal is to have consumers reenter the kitchen and engage with the foods they eat through the process of cooking and eating. In a video interview, Wadiak asserts that Blue Apron’s motivation is to have users realize that

⁵ Customers may elect to skip weeks. However, the default payment schedule is weekly payments for weekly delivery.

“cooking isn’t just about being in the kitchen and the activity of cooking” but “supporting...an agricultural system that makes sense” (Kell). Blue Apron’s “integrated [online] model” is meant to focus on delivering “sustainable” food to the consumer by “eliminating the middleman...[and] reducing food waste” (BlueApron.com: Home). Working with farmers for sustainable ingredients and utilizing technology, Blue Apron attempts to avoid the environmentally destructive practices of big-market agribusiness and food corporations. Their statements indicate the desire to revitalize being present with our food through teaching people how to cook. In doing so, Blue Apron’s core selling point becomes “building a better food system” (BlueApron.com: Home). Their focus on having consumers engage with food opens participation for users in the food system. Such engagement in conjunction with an eliminated middleman can encourage consumers to participate in the discussion of where their food comes from and how it is sourced. Thus, this paper does not aim to demonize Blue Apron. On the contrary, the paper finds that the company at times succeeds at being ecologically minded but will simply place more focus on ways in which to better engage with the consequences of food design and rhetoric.

While the combination of technology and environment is admirable and a goal, Blue Apron is open to the risk of creating a false harmony between the two. Ecological food will never be perfect, and it’s not as easy as Blue Apron suggests. However, in trying to solve such tensions, the company glosses over the reality that technology and environment—the foundation of their approach—are always in tension even if inseparable parts of the same goal. Blue Apron’s understanding of sustainability at times relies on terministic screens that direct attention toward harmony through

eliminating food waste instead of the more productive contested space of ecological food. My goal in this section, then, is to examine what happens when we start exploring Blue Apron's rhetoric within contested space.

A. The Rhetoric of Blue Apron

Blue Apron's aim is to work directly with local or small farms to distribute food responsibly with their online model. To pursue such aims, Blue Apron employs the use of god terms to convince consumers that members can avoid the constraints of traditional food systems and contribute to a solution. In a video interview, Salzberg claims:

We have a very big focus on sustainability in our company, and we actually prefer to work with farmers. Almost all of our direct farming relationships are people who have a very organic approach to their farming. We're not an exclusively organic company...but we strive toward all those principles. A lot of our farmers are medium or small sized farms instead of large commercial farms (Crook).

Within Salzberg's statements are multiple god terms that advertise the benefits of Blue Apron. Words such as "sustainability," "organic," "medium or small farms," and "people" all possess positive valences in food discourse. However, it is never quite clear what the words actually mean or entail. That is, the words are defined by the other words around them to an extent that only directs attention toward their positive and popular associations. Although it is clear that Salzberg avoids negative associations for the sake of advertisement, analysis of his rhetoric reveals identifying tensions within Blue Apron's mission would better serve their goal of designing an improved food system. An organic approach to farming is understood to be localized or small in scale while maintaining sustainable principles. It is not explained what sustainable or organic principles are, what they require, or what complications they may face. The introduction

of “people” personalizes the subscription service and downplays the technologies required to achieve organic food. “Organic” is a harmony of people and nature, which does not seem to involve technological achievement. Any food system that utilizes technology will eventually have to introduce the technological intrusion of humans on environments, but Blue Apron does so by reinforcing a vision where their intrusion will still uphold harmonious contact for consumers. Yet, the balance is not one of harmony. Ecological food involves recognizing the greater consequences of food advertising and discourse as well as the need to discuss how many affordances can be made for advertising even when aiming for a better food system. There is not space or time to examine such a discussion in detail here, but it is important to recognize the impactful and complex consequences of food discourse. Blue Apron’s use of both digital and agricultural technology can and do combat big-market traditions and food waste, but ecological food is a much bigger endeavor.

We can commend the design of Blue Apron for its ability to build a quasi-bridge for viewing technology and environment as parts of ecology. After all, its design removes the false choice between technological or environmental practices by suggesting digital ordering systems can make it easier to access natural food. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the removal of the false choice does not result in harmony between the two. Doing so relies on the assumption that “all technological manipulations amount at best, to zero sum games in which the costs balance the derived benefits” (Huesemann & Huesemann 8). The reality is “it is a mistake to believe that any benefits of technology can be obtained without cost” (8). In their advertising, Blue Apron masks the costs of their beneficial techniques. We see the end results of

technique—small farms, organic, etc.—but we don't see the actual technical process and costs of packaging and delivery. The combination of good terms that Salzberg uses such as “sustainability” and “organic” demonstrates good intentions, but it also perpetuates the illusion of false cost balance or harmony. The combination is a network of good terms that lays out a complex system of interrelationships between people, technology, and environment, but directs attention to positive understandings or moments of interaction to simplify. Perhaps better understood as a meshwork, our goal is a true rhetoric of ecological food that reveals the contestations and chaos that good terms always hide. That is, the meshwork of good terms functions as a terministic screen that masks the holes from our view. For example, Blue Apron's terms “sustainable” and “efficient” can serve as good terms that place devil terms such as “waste” into a negative space that results in particular and unfavorable associations or limited attention (Figure 1).

Still, a mesh cannot exist without the holes and the terms that exist within them. Rather than solely viewing the negative spaces in the meshwork as a place for devil terms like “waste,” a rhetoric of food ecology allows us to see the holes as contested spaces where rhetoric exposes the various meanings or meaninglessness of ecological discourse. “Waste” is a term in contested space. When applied to the context of Blue Apron, it becomes clear that the company's rhetoric directs us to particular understandings of “waste” that exclude what “waste” actually signifies.

B. The Rhetoric of Chaos Terms

In order to engage a fuller rhetoric of food ecology, the real aim is therefore to identify contested spaces. While contested terms help to reveal contested spaces, for

ecological food discourse they better serve as what I call *chaos terms*. I borrow “chaos” from variations of Mary Cartwright (Byers & Williams 2010) and Edward Lorenz’s (Lorenz 1963) work on Chaos Theory. The theory holds that even small changes in dynamical systems can have large effects. That is, “nonlinear things... are effectively impossible to predict or control, like turbulence, weather, the stock market, our brain states, and so on. Recognizing the chaotic, fractal nature of our world can give us new insight, power, and wisdom. By understanding that our ecosystems, our social systems, and our economic systems are interconnected, we can hope to avoid actions which may end up being detrimental to our long-term well-being” (Wolfe). Therefore, chaos terms help identify the food system as a chaotic system and food rhetoric as chaotic design. God and devil terms become chaos terms when moved to and viewed within the contested spaces of the mesh.

The key takeaway is to recognize that god and devil terms in food discourse distract from the chaotic consequences of using such terms. Given terms on the mesh can move and have different consequences, it becomes clear that even the slightest shift in terminology use can have a large impact. In order to visualize the chaotic consequences of terms it helps to imagine 3 points spaced out evenly on a solid vertical line. The first point is anchored and can represent ecological solutions (the main topic). The second point is a pivot point and can represent food discourse (the sub-topic). The third point can be placed anywhere and can represent the god term “sustainable” (a rhetorical approach). If we move the third point to a starting position and let go, the third point will bounce around chaotically. Furthermore, if we shift the starting position of the third point ever so slightly, the resulting trajectory of the third point will still be

chaotic but change completely. Tracing the trajectory of the third point would essentially be tracing or mapping the consequences and various meanings that result from using the term “sustainable.” Although companies, farmers, and movements may understand the word in a similar way, the small differences in rhetorical use and positioning on the meshwork will have different consequences regardless of similar understanding. The point is to recognize that rhetoric surrounding the food system benefits when we move away from reliance on good and evil terms and instead recognize the chaotic consequences of terms. Recognizing the chaos can allow for greater participation in and understanding of what particular approaches and their relationships to ecology. The mesh helps us to visualize how terms direct attention away from chaos. Recognizing a more chaotic model allows us to acknowledge that terms are dynamic and possess meanings that may have small effects in the present but can lead to large consequences. While we cannot predict the future with complete accuracy by engaging with chaos terms⁶, critical engagement can lead to a better understanding of the interconnectedness and consequences of our actions in the present.

For example, the Blue Apron website makes it clear that the company’s driving force, besides financial stability, is the elimination of excess food waste in the food system. The site affirms that “our food system...is complicated” so they are changing that “by partnering with farmers to raise the highest-quality ingredients, by creating a distribution system that delivers ingredients at a better value, and by investing in the things that matter most—our environment and communities” (BlueApron.com: Our

⁶ The use of “chaos terms” is for the sake of simplicity. From here on it is best to understand the label as an approach that places emphasis on recognizing and engaging with the chaotic consequences of terms and rhetoric.

Vision). The site admits it will be a “decades-long effort, but with each Blue Apron Home chef” it becomes possible to pursue a “membership model” that allows them to “predict... orders each week, so [Blue Apron] can work with farmers to plan and utilize whole crops, growing only what’s needed” to “reduce food waste” (BlueApron.com: Our Vision). The statements on Blue Apron’s site certainly appeal to rhetorics concerning sustainability and cost. Furthermore, they do so by approaching sustainability and cost through environmental and technological appeals. The god terms of regenerative farming and Slow Food are at play through “environment,” “highest-quality,” “whole crops,” and “communities.” The god terms of technology are more subtle but present through logics of “efficiency,” “innovation,” and “cost-effectiveness.” After all, Blue Apron delivers food straight to doorsteps through digital subscriptions at a “better value.” What is important to recognize is the appeals to sustainability and efficiency rely on limited perceptions of what sustainability and efficiency mean. In our meshwork of god terms, as seen in figure 1, “efficiency” and “sustainability” are meant to represent a food system that avoids “food waste.” Excessive farming, wasteful grocery stores, and unused ingredients at home do not reflect a sustainable or efficient system. Blue Apron’s rhetoric suggests that their subscription box allows the consumer to focus on the more present acts cooking and eating as a means to avoid “food waste.” The consumer can trust Blue Apron to deal with the past by working with farmers to reduce waste and develop a better food system before they receive their subscription box. Consumers can trust Blue Apron to take on the future or the decades-long and effort intensive work of redesigning the food system.

As a devil term, “food waste” directs additional attention to the positive counterforce of sustainability” and “food efficiency.” The additional focus on sustainability and efficiency then allows for terministic screens that create a limited view of what ethical food entails. However, treating “waste” as a chaos term demands that the attention return to “waste” to more critically evaluate its place in the meshwork or ecology of god terms. To do so, it helps to examine the subtle visual rhetoric on the Blue Apron website. While one can extrapolate the technological god terms the website appeals to, technology is for the most part absent when compared to the focus on sustainability.

As seen in figure 2, the presence of technology is implied through the delivery service, but explicit images of technology are hidden or only made visible for advertising purposes. As the arrows demonstrate, the text in the image asks the user to download the app but layers the white text over a white background. Packaging materials are largely surrounded by more natural ingredients or pushed to the margins of the image. Sullivan points out that the pushback on technologies is usually due to rejection of “standardized mechanization” in agriculture or the use of fertilizers, GMOs, and large equipment (6). While Blue Apron avoids such mechanization, it is clear that it accepts other technological standards of mechanization such as food packaging and delivery by truck. Indeed, the image of the phone in figure 2 accepts standards of mechanization involving the depletion of mineral resources, and the use of the truck is a standard of mechanization that leads to carbon emissions. In other words, the “waste” that Blue Apron accepts from other interactions between technology and environment deflates the sustainable logic behind preventing “food waste.” A limited focus on “food

waste” risks remaining “wasteful.” Thus, “waste” becomes a chaos term that exposes the ineradicable tensions between technology and environment.

Despite the connotations of the word, unlike a devil term, the tensions of a chaos term do not enforce a pessimistic view of technology and environment. On the contrary, chaos terms avoid reductive discourse and allow for productive potential. They allow for what Byrne, Glover, and Martinez call “Ecological justice” which “cognizes a commonality of interests between nature and society, thereby reflecting a radical reconceptualization of the human regard of ecology” (288). By separating from the notion of harmony between technology and environment and making room for a variety of tensions and consequences, one can unmask the inconvenient conversations that must take place for ecological action to occur.

Chaos terms and contested space reveal that harmony between technology and environment is impossible and a false promise. Rather than fall into pessimism, the productive potential of chaos terms in contested space exposes the real goal is symbiosis. Conflict exposes tensions that require the evaluation of concepts and differences. The result of such evaluation is to progress symbiotically without producing a false notion of harmony. Chaos terms call for “agonistic pluralism” or in Chantal Mouffe’s terms. For Mouffe, such pluralism or conflict ideally leads to discourse between agonistic parties and deliberation between rivals rather than the silencing of opponents (756). Chaos terms account for the difference and tensions that affect the world we inhabit while harmony attempts to smooth over difference. Chaos terms call for engagement within a contested space that accounts for the irreconcilable differences between technology and environment across time. The result leads to a

rhetoric of ecological food where discussions of Blue Apron and “waste” include food waste while also accounting for other forms of waste. It is through the examination of chaos terms that one can direct attention to the unintended risks and costs of ecological food. A rhetoric of ecological food reveals that food, technology, and the environment do not exist in a space of order. Ecological food relies on agonistic relationships (potentially productive but tense interrelationships between technology and environment as inseparable parts of ecology) with the goal of creating spaces of symbiosis (better relationships with the planet).

C. The Material Rhetoric of the Box

Perhaps the strongest example of the contested space of Blue Apron is the box it comes in—a materialization of the meshwork I’ve discussed thus far. Delivered to my doorstep as promised, the box (Figure 3) displays Blue Apron’s logo with the statement “food is better when you start from scratch” (Blue Apron Box). Inside the box were three recipe sheets and an insulated bag with the pre-packaged ingredients necessary for completing the respective meals. For example, our box included items such as a plastic bag containing two scallions, a cardboard container with an egg, and another cardboard container with two eggs. From the beginning of our encounter with the food, the inside cover of Blue Apron’s box reaffirmed that we would participate in “building a better food system.” The box reassures that the neatly packaged ingredients come from “chefs and farmers” who “plan crops together to make farmland healthier” (Blue Apron Box).

While cooking with a clear conscience is favorable, the rhetorical analysis of Blue Apron’s statements and website disrupts the notion that the box offers technological and environmental harmony. With such a frame of analysis, the meal kit

materials and their positive associations become open to complication. In the context of Blue Apron, we learn interactions with the plastic or cardboard packaging for the scallions and eggs affect how we talk about food storage and distribution. Conversely, how we speak about food distribution and storage shapes how we perceive the food and packaging materials in the box as well as the box itself. If discourse and material are inseparable, then the rhetorical meshworks we rely on to understand food cannot exist without attention to both⁷. The Blue Apron box is an embodiment of the relationships between the discursive and material. The Blue Apron box is an embodied rhetorical meshwork.

As an embodied rhetorical meshwork, we understand the box by relying on relationships between discursive and material symbols. Good terms such as “sustainability” and “efficiency” are embodied through the absence of excess ingredients and the portability of the box across distances. More specifically, the inclusion of a single and pair of eggs in pre-measured and separated packages amplifies the interconnection between language and material. The eggs and their packaging are presented in a way that directs attention to positive associations with a “better food system.” Each egg is “cage-free” and produced “sustainably;” however, the positive associations distract from the realization that separate packages for three eggs is arguably wasteful (Figure 4). The meshwork of the Blue Apron box and its contents become an embodied terministic screen. Barbara Dickson argues that “multiple discourses and material practices collude and collide... to produce an object that momentarily destabilizes common understandings and makes available multiple

⁷ That is not to say that language and the material exist as a binary, but that rhetorical analyses of food requires understanding the complex relationships of language and material.

readings” (298). What Dickson helps to expose is that rhetoric allows for not only the production of harmonic but contested spaces. The Blue Apron box and its eggs may be understood positively due to terministic screens, but the meshwork that makes such a terministic screen possible cannot exist without contested spaces. Within the spaces, chaos terms (e.g. “wastefulness”) and chaos materials (e.g. cardboard or plastic) make visible tensions between technology and environment. Blue Apron’s eggs may avoid food waste and avoid Styrofoam packaging, but a rhetoric of ecological food helps to identify the need to participate and engage not only the chaotic practices of consumption but also production and packaging.

Material rhetoric allows us to recognize chaos materials and the ways in which our perceptions of materials are heavily directed. An unopened bag of red pepper flakes from Blue Apron serves as a good example (Figure 5). Without the context of the bag being unopened or Blue Apron, the packaging also looks like an almost finished bag of pepper flakes or “waste.” The bag of pepper flakes becomes chaotic material that places Blue Apron’s rhetoric concerning sustainability and efficiency into contested space. Even within the rhetorical filters of Blue Apron, the bag is arguably wasteful. The bag makes visible tensions between the technologically based approach to food and the environment. To assuage the noticeable contradiction or tensions, Blue Apron supplies a recycling symbol on the bottom of the bag (Figure 5). The bag upon first glance exists within contested space, but the discursive, visual, and material rhetoric of Blue Apron quickly directs attention toward a supposed solution to the conflict. The recycling symbol functions as a “god symbol” that stands in for the god term “recyclable.” The bag of pepper flakes does not make the conflict disappear but masks

it through the more present act of cooking. If we extend the analysis of the bag to all of the packaging materials for the ingredients, the box transforms into a collection of “chaos materials” (Figure 6). In any case, material rhetoric removes the mask and draws attention to the past and future of the bag.

Blue Apron is a step forward in approaching ecological food and does employ the rhetoric of ecological food at times. Again, the goal here is not to reject Blue Apron, but to point toward the goal of recognizing the chaotic reality of food discourse. While Blue Apron succeeds in eliminating food waste, allowing customers an alternative to traditional and exploitive food systems, and arguably still using less packaging than can be found in a traditional market, a better approach to the food system will entail further recognizing the chaotic consequences and complexity of food rhetoric. One such means may include inviting consumers to participate in the chaos of food production and distribution rather than removing it. Indeed, the company is still young and has room to grow which may make such participation possible. In any case, the key here is to recognize that emerging approaches to food introduce rhetorical and chaotic consequences that are worth examination.

Soylent: Efficient Ecology

Soylent is a current FDA approved food that one can purchase off the Internet. It is the invention of former engineering student Rob Rhinehart and designed by his tech-company Rosa Labs. Originally produced by Rob Rhinehart as a personal solution to his self-described unhealthy and inconvenient eating habits, he developed the drink in his dorm room by combining a mixture of powdered vitamins and nutrients. Recording his experience on his blog, his experiment surged in popularity with readers asking for

instructions to create their own. Rhinehart obliged and kept his product open source but soon pursued the opportunity of creating a business, and Soylent came to fruition. The goal of the product is to satisfy the nutrient requirements of an average adult. The claim is that if chosen or necessary, a human could live solely off of Soylent all while having a low impact on the environment. It has the form of a drink powder, a bottled shake, and a bar⁸. Currently, the bottled shake and powder are the most popular. Soylent has even gone on to release new flavors of its bottled shake, which seemingly contradicts its pure focus on efficient nutrition, but is understandable within the context of a business attempting to target more consumers. The overall aim of Soylent is “food system innovation” (Soylent.com: Home). While Soylent invites multiple angles of analysis, what is important for a rhetoric of ecological food are the implications of a technologically based food system that prioritizes and celebrates efficiency above all else. As we will see, Soylent’s god terms are “efficiency” and “innovation” but lurking in wait are chaos terms that turn this logic on its head.

A. A Rhetorical Analysis of Soylent’s Logic

If one treats “food efficiency” as a god term, it becomes clear that Soylent is not an entirely new concept. I use the term “food alternative” to refer to Soylent, because most do not necessarily view it as food⁹ regardless of legal identification. Nonetheless, in contemporary grocery stores, one can find multiple protein bars, granola bars, and

⁸ At the time of this writing, the bar is not in production. An ingredient imbalance resulted in gastrointestinal distress for users, and Soylent pulled the bar from the market.

⁹ The popular responses are that Soylent does not count as “real” food regardless of what Soylent or the FDA says. Rather than write “real” food which introduces another Pandora’s box of analysis, I use “alternative” for the sake of simplicity and focus. I go with “food alternative” rather than “meal alternative” because of the various implicit meanings (culture and nutrition) that one may associate with food. Although unhealthy foods such as candy or even fast food are alternatives as well, they fall under what most recognize as “food.”

other meal alternatives. In a *Vice* interview Rob Rhinehart, the creator of the product, simplifies “food as ‘nutrients required by the body to function’” (Heisey). Although the food products often do not receive or elicit much time for critical attention, Luce Giard’s discussion in *Practice of Everyday Life Volume II* reveals that “eating...serves not only to maintain the biological machinery of the body, but to make concrete one of the specific modes of relation between a person and the world” (183)¹⁰. Building on Giard, food scholars Christopher Miles and Nancy Smith argue that Soylent is reflective of an already existing “American culture” with a “persistent focus on nutrition as a way to understand food” (126-7). An examination of contemporary American society reveals a cultural and anthropocentric tendency to treat food in terms of utility. Granola and protein bars are relatively recent but familiar alternatives for traditional breakfasts and seemingly natural snacks. While they are not technically food alternatives, they do indicate a shift toward a “snack culture” where snacks replace time consuming meals. In contrast to Blue Apron, which attempts to get the consumer focusing on slowing down and enjoying cooking and eating, food alternatives focus on quick efficient consumption. That is, food alternatives focus on the future—they present food as a burden to get through so that one can get to more important events in their lives. Rhinehart argues “people have this belief that just because something is natural it’s good. It doesn’t make sense that [one] would keep technology out of this very important part of life” (Morin)—i.e. the food system. Soylent’s website proclaims that “Each Soylent product contains a complete blend of protein, carbohydrates, lipids, and

¹⁰ Citation information for the quote refers to the original text. Christopher Miles and Nancy Smith also use the quote as a point of analysis. Additional information from the original text is used later in this paper.

micronutrients: everything the body needs to thrive. We know your life is busy enough already, but we're here to make things a little less complicated" (Soylent.com: Home). Such practices of eating prioritize ways of relating to the world that emphasize efficiency and utility. From the website and Rhinehart's rhetoric, a meshwork (Figure 7) of god terms such as "protein," "micronutrients," "thrive," "efficient," and "sustainability" function as a terministic screen directing attention away from contested space.

Though Soylent and its variations are fairly extreme representatives of efficient food systems and arguably different than breakfast bars, a similar logic of eating still informs the product. The rhetorical emphases on the god term "efficiency" which Soylent relies on reflects an already existing and unguarded desire to obtain optimum nutrition as quickly as possible. The result is an emphasis on efficiency that simultaneously removes or masks the larger importance of food's chaotic relationship with time and everyday experience. In a 2013 interview with *Vice*, Rhinehart states, "I started wondering why something as simple and important as food was still so inefficient, given how streamlined and optimized other modern things are" (Heisey). To be fair, he is interested in the beneficial practicality of his product and is "optimistic at the prospect of helping developing nations." For Rhinehart, "Soylent can largely be produced from the products of local agriculture, and at that scale, it's plenty cheap to nourish even the most impoverished individuals" sustainably (Heisey). However, as Miles and Smith point out, Soylent as a food alternative "indicates a lack of understanding of food as more than biological need, but as something...deeply integrated with cultural, social, and economic frameworks that differ widely around the

world” (127). They argue that the product “suggests a utopic post-human vision where bodies are...subject to the rules of machine optimization” (128). What is clear is that Miles and Smith are treating “efficiency” as a chaos term. A technological and digital culture that prioritizes biological information, celebrates food alternatives that seek to solve human problems by attempting to remove the chaos of “food.” For example, Soylent is meant to alleviate resource depletion and malnourishment resulting from nostalgically inefficient agriculture and socio-economic inequalities. However, by attempting to hack biological dependence on food with little regard for the quality of food experience, Soylent ignores how food reflects meaningful relationships to environment and place or how “efficiency” exists as a chaos term. The implications of engaging with food during production, distribution, and consumption are masked by or reduced to the “less complicated” act of drinking a serving of Soylent. Unlike Blue Apron’s emphasis on cooking as a meaningful act, Soylent’s emphasis on efficiency treats time spent engaging with food (traditional farming, cooking, and eating) as “waste.”

Interrogating the rhetorical emphasis on efficiency creates a contested space where the implications of food and time reappear. Viewing efficiency as a chaos term in contested space reveals that non-agonistic relationships between technology and environment leads to additional non-symbiotic exploitive consequences. For example, the logic of efficiency and utility has led to Soylent being quite popular among workers in the tech-industry who often have “the early-adopter personality” (Chen). Rhinehart is right to suggest that sending food to malnourished nations serves a benevolent purpose. At the same time, Soylent as a relatively popular and technological food

product cannot escape neoliberalism's attraction to the tech-industry. While technological innovations may have altruistic purpose, they still exist in a world where dominant logics of accumulation take instrumental stances towards resources, environment, and people¹¹. Food alternatives like Soylent risk being used as an alienating, homogenizing, and colonial force which is masked by the tech-industry's popularity and seemingly altruistic designs.

While supporters of Soylent would likely deny the risks of exploitive relationships as an extreme, historical evidence suggests that exploitation through food is not limited to dystopic fiction. For example, Stephanie Black's film *Life and Debt* depicts how the introduction of cheaper, powdered milk from the United States aided in the destruction of Jamaica's dairy industry. A scene from the documentary depicts dairy farmers pouring out their milk, because they were not able to compete with the lower price and influx of powdered milk. Indeed, the introduction of cheaper foreign produce provided further obstacles to Jamaica's agricultural industry (Black). The resulting effect of introducing a cheaper "food alternative" to traditional milk impeded post-colonial Jamaica's development of their own geographically, economically, and culturally significant agricultural industry. The powdered milk became a direct obstacle to Jamaica's ability to form an economic base with their environment. What resulted was an ability for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to provide loans to Jamaica with conditions that led to economic dependence and exploitation. It is not surprising that the IMF and World Bank were controlled by the

¹¹ This is not to suggest that Soylent causes capitalism or global capitalism. To do so is highly problematic. Rather the idea here is to acknowledge the need for examining the various ways in which capitalist logics of accumulation relate to food and food discourse.

nations that were exporting the food to Jamaica. Although one may argue that the film is an example of intended exploitation and, therefore, not like *Soylent*, it is important to note that the director, Stephanie Black, initially intended to make the documentary to extol the virtues of the IMF and World Bank (Black). After unmasking the various ways in which imperialistic neocolonial powers continued the exploitation of Jamaica through means such as food industries, it became clear that her previous assumptions about what the IMF signified were false. Assumptions about what *Soylent*'s efficiency signifies should also invite ambivalence. Introducing chaos to *Soylent* reveals it is similar to the powdered milk from the film. For example, the altruistic intentions of *Soylent* are admirable, but the prioritization of efficiency is at risk of ignoring important factors such as local ingenuity with food. Unless treated as a chaos term in contested space, *Soylent* too easily masks class, culture, and exploitive forms of globalization. The technological future *Soylent* envisions does not take into account the intricacies of the past and present connections to environment and place that currently shape the future. The ethical obligations of ecological food rhetoric cannot be reduced to unchecked efficiency.

Sociological perceptions of taste and food, according to Pierre Bourdieu, are dependent on the organizing principles that one acquires from their environment and class position. Treating “efficiency” and “taste” as chaos terms allows one to recognize that *Soylent*, while futuristic, is repeating an error of the past. Sociologist George Ritzer's calls the focus on efficiency within food culture “McDonaldization.” Ritzer's term refers to how “the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (Ritzer 1).

Similar to Soylent, the fast food industry promises convenient and affordable meals that satisfy the basic human need to eat. While Soylent claims to be healthier, Ritzer unmasks the notion that meal efficiency transfers to and shapes the other ways in which people interact with the world. Indeed, Giard reveals that “every food practice directly depends on a network of impulses (likes and dislikes) with respect to smells, colors, and forms, as well as to consistency types” and that “this geography is as strongly culturalized...as [it is] historicized” (Giard 185). McDonaldization allows us to recognize that food and food alternatives like Soylent directly reflect the ideological perspectives found within classed societies.

Placing the rhetoric of Soylent in contested spaces uncovers the need to acknowledge how efficient nutrition relates to the masses. In an interview and documentary about Soylent, Rhinehart imagines that “we will all be eating two to three meals a week...on top of Soylent” (Merchant). Here, “eating will become...something we do recreationally with friends, or as a hobby” (Merchant). The transformation of food into an object of leisure reproduces class divisions centered on access to deeply meaningful environmental resources. Furthermore, Soylent promises food for all, but neglects that leisure time exists in degrees. Contested space exposes that the rhetoric of Soylent reproduces combative relationships between humans and environment which are interconnected with socio-economic and political inequalities. Soylent fails to recognize that if utilized unconsciously, it could also be an exploitive assimilation tactic similar to those found in colonial and classist discourse. While Soylent’s rhetoric does expose the expensive prices of “natural” foods, it does not actually interrogate what it means to have “snack cultures” in a world where others do not have food security or

sovereignty. That is, Soylent introduces how “ecological justice [and food]” must be “applied more broadly...to embrace the presence of existing social disadvantage, the interests of future generations, and the intrinsic interests of nature in the present and future” (Glover et al. 288). Here it is important to again recognize that “nature” is not a romanticized realm separate from humans. It is instead more beneficial to consider “nature” as referring to the planet and places (along with their resources) we inhabit. Soylent forgets that class discrimination within food discourse is not only a question of access. A rhetoric of ecological food also interrogates the culinary capital one gains with leisure food and how it reflects one’s status in relation to technology and environment. Soylent masks the implications of being alienated from food and how alienation relates to the chaos of everyday life experiences.

B. Symbiosis and Antagonism: A Look at Soylent and Food Perception

Soylent reveals the necessity of discussing symbiotic relationships between technology and environment. A Soylent blog post proudly claims “Soylent 2.0 reaches an unprecedented level of environmental sustainability with half of its fat energy coming from farm-free, algae sources. This next generation agricultural technology has the potential to reduce the ecological impact of food production by orders of magnitude, signifying a major step towards a future of abundance, a world where optimal nutrition is the new normal” (blog.Soylent.com: Soylent 2.0). It is essential to recognize that current environmental destruction and resource depletion—e.g. aquifer and topsoil depletion—as well as food insecurity signals that low impact and efficient food alternatives could have potential and necessary benefits. Placing “food efficiency” and

Soylent within a rhetorically contested space, reaffirms that the food alternative attempts to aim for some version of symbiosis with the planet.

The rhetoric of Soylent prioritizes technologically oriented approach to food and symbiosis. Soylent highlights god terms like “sustainability” as seen in the Blue Apron analysis earlier, but what “sustainability” entails differs for Soylent and more traditional food activists. Rhinehart states that “it’s the organic foodies¹²... that seem very invested in the idea of the sanctity of nature and natural food and some idyllic view of farming, so they find [Soylent]...very offensive.” He argues that their platform is not “an evidence-based viewpoint” and that “there’s no evidence organic food is healthier than conventional food, and you just can’t feed the world without efficient farming techniques” (Merchant). Soylent’s website echoes Rhinehart by providing a pro-GMO blog post which states, “As a society, we struggle to satisfy the global demand for food. One in nine people across the globe suffer from hunger, and in order to keep pace with the rate of population growth, we will need to be able to produce 70 percent more food by 2050” (Figure 8). Soylent’s pro-GMO stance makes their pro-technology and efficient agriculture stance clear.

An examination of ideological connections to technology or nature exposes that combative relationships are purposefully reproduced by “technological” and “natural” camps. The rhetorical adherence to the “technological” and “natural” reveals that the differing positions imagine antagonistic relationships with the other. Why such a dichotomy occurs likely has roots in the fact that food is easier when clearly ordered into god and devil terms. The approach is similar to the logic of oppositional brand

¹² Other instances of his statements imply this includes Slow foodies. Sources for further reading of Rhinehart are available in the References.

loyalty, where “consumers...define their product category preferences not only by what they did consume, but also by what they did not consume” (Muniz and Hamer n.p.). The loyalty is a “behavior” that often includes consumers “frequently stating their preferences in terms of the brand they did not consume” (n.p.). Instead of a product or brand, the “technological” and “natural” camps practice loyalty through approaches to food. The result is the reproduction of antagonism between technology and environment. Each camp perceives the other camp’s conceptualization of what relationships to environment and food is and should be as unacceptable. What goes ignored is that both technological and environmental perceptions of food exist within chaotic contested space. Neither an understanding of progress as an endeavor guided by Enlightenment rationalism nor its negation of a romanticized “natural” serves as a viable alternative to human progress. Soylent’s support of GMOs avoids a problematic and nostalgic desire to resurrect a romanticized version of nature. However, their support also ignores nostalgic connections to environment that help to protect against a strictly utilitarian, exploitive, and human-centered approach. Unguarded acceptance of Soylent reproduces the opposition between humans and environment that ignores the significance of localized food innovation, production, and consumption. The aim of a rhetoric of ecological food is not to argue in favor of GMOs but to place terms such as “efficiency,” the “natural,” and “nostalgia” into contested space as chaos terms. The resulting conversation allows for an agonistic and symbiotic approach where the opposing camps cannot argue they are the sole solution.

C. Terministic Material: A Bottlenecked Perspective

An analysis of Soylent's design reveals that the material existence of the food alternative also calls into question what human relationships to food, technology, and environment are and should be. It helps to first examine the actual appearance of the drink. Similar to the powdered version (Figure 9), the drink for Soylent's bottled original flavor is neutral in color. There is not much to see. A bottle of Soylent 2.0 is white with the word Soylent, the label "ready-to-drink-food", 400 kcal, and brief information about it satisfying 20% of an individual's diet with plant based and low glycemic contents (Figure 10). From personal experience, the flavor of the bottled version is akin to milk that has been seasoned with plain Cheerios. The drink is slightly sweet but largely tasteless. The packaging for the product and the drink itself is minimalist in design and exemplifies the company's ideals of efficiency and low-impact resourcing. Additionally, the design attempts to avoid aesthetics and thereby culture by simultaneously taking part in an efficient capitalist culture. Though for many, the initial thought of Soylent invites interest but often disgust or displeasure as well. What is striking is that there is not much to be sensually affected by. Reactions to Soylent are responses to absence. The approach is an anti-aesthetic one which rejects attachments to aesthetic as that which "restore[s] a nostalgic, universal concept of selfhood at a moment when 'history seems to have run out of control' due to rapid advances in technology and an underlying anxiety of imminent catastrophe" (Meyer and Ross, 21). The design prioritizes "efficiency" and treats non-minimalist aesthetics as if it is "wasteful." Efficient food is chaotic and defined by whether technology and environment are present or absent.

The absence of flavor is likely a large factor in negative response, but more importantly, the hyper-processed look of Soylent signifies an absence of the “natural.” The absence of the natural highlights the human transformation of natural systems. A greater presence of human intervention replaces the natural. Thus, the design of Soylent functions like a terministic screen that emphasizes Soylent’s efficiency. Indeed, the design excludes any representations of what Rhinehart and company deem to be a non-evidence based adherence to natural food. The abandonment of “natural food” as a devil term is a design feature that the product utilizes to draw attention to its existence as efficient food innovation. While the unnatural appearance can either be viewed as a productive or unpleasing celebration of technological innovation and efficiency, negative reactions to an unnatural appearance do not equate to critical examination. After all, such reactions are expected. In both cases, discussions of efficiency will distract from the larger implications of Soylent as material rhetoric.

Contemporary food trends place great value on the natural.-Although a discussion regarding the abandonment of “natural” ingredients in favor of efficiency is important, broadening the analysis of Soylent as material rhetoric complicates Soylent’s adherence to efficiency. A simple but effective example is to analyze the box that Soylent comes in. Similar to Blue Apron, Soylent still relies on transportation methods that utilize fossil fuels. While traditional agricultural methods rely on such transportation methods as well, that does not change the fact that problems of sustainable food distribution are not being adequately addressed. For example, one may look at the powder and pitcher and argue they represent efficiency in design. Like Blue Apron, Soylent hides its past. Moving past the powder as a terministic screen elicits the

question of where the minerals for the powder came from. Here individuals learn the “majority of the vitamins and minerals come from mining or industrial synthesis” (Russell). While synthesis is arguably a sustainable option, mining has environmental implications. Additionally, vitamins in the powder degrade over time which only further complicates the efficient material. What is clear then is Soylent is food material that is an extension of environment and technology and has larger implications than a cursory glance would reveal. Therefore, material rhetorical analysis is essential for understanding how everyday experiences of technology and environment are shaped by our perceptions of food material.

A more critical look at the visual and material rhetoric of Soylent indicates that the company is aware that the product will not be the sole solution to the current food system. Indeed, the company is still committed to proving that their product should be considered food in the first place¹³. As seen in figure 11, the company places Soylent next to what many would consider natural foods such as fruits and vegetables.

Ironically, Soylent relies on the visual and material rhetoric of the natural foods it considers to be unviable for prolonged human survival. Indeed, the similarities with Blue Apron (Figure 2) and the juxtaposition of technology and environment are difficult to miss. Nevertheless, the image reinforces Soylent’s more deeply rooted technological approach to “efficient” food design through the bottles and even fruit packaging. The additional flavors employ more ingredients and use more ink with the bottles, but the colors help with immediate identification. The caffeinated coffee flavor appeals to

¹³ It is arguable that Soylent does not necessarily see “natural food” as only a devil term. However, the attachment to “natural food” is considered unviable and unproductive as demonstrated through Rhinehart’s and Soylent’s rhetoric. In that sense, “natural food” is acceptable but not as a solution for ecological food from Soylent’s perspective.

productivity oriented tech workers. The image of the car and the recycling symbol only further emphasize the “efficient,” “sustainable,” and “progress” oriented identity of Soylent (Figure 11). Technological food as part of a diet offers perspective on human progress. A rhetoric of ecological food introduces the need to scrutinize what human progress signifies in a world of technological and environmental tension. Ecological food reveals that discussions of human progress must take into account the social and moral obligation for establishing locally situated symbiotic relationships with technology and environment.

Slow Food: Slowing Down Ecology

As the name suggests, the Slow Food movement prioritizes a slower approach to food production. Such a position stands in contrast to the convenience and efficiency of Blue Apron and Soylent. Indeed, the Slow Food manifesto, written by founding member Folco Portinari, declares “In the name of productivity, *Fast Life* has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes,” so “*Slow Food* is now the only truly progressive answer” (SlowFood.com: Manifesto). Beginning in 1986 as a protest against the opening of a McDonald’s restaurant near the Spanish Steps in Rome, founder Carlo Petrini popularized Slow Food as a means to push back against the growing fast food industry and corresponding focus on “efficient” progress. The movement calls for a return to smaller communal agriculture with an emphasis on the meaningfulness of food and taste. Slow food differs from Blue Apron and Soylent in that it accepts and is aware of its politics of tradition and has a direct activist agenda. That being said, the development of Blue Apron and Soylent indicates a need to further examine what Slow Food as a sustainable solution means in an age of ongoing

technological advance. Although founded almost two decades earlier than Blue Apron and Soylent, contemporary food activists often utilize Slow Food to resist GMOs and celebrate organic food movements. As rhetorical analysis will demonstrate, the relationships between Slow Food and ecological food are more complicated. Unlike Blue Apron and Soylent, Slow Food relies on a nostalgic perception of what relationships between technology and environment should be. While the nostalgia of Slow Food has productive potential, such chance for progress also distracts from “nostalgia’s” location in contested space as a chaos term.

A. Slow Food’s Approach to Nostalgia

The rhetoric of the Slow Food movement is open to interpretation and appropriation. Slow Food exists as a meshwork of multiple interpretations. A simple example is how the name of the movement functions as a double-edged terministic screen. The term “Slow Food” is meant to direct attention toward the benefits of the movement’s approach to the food system. At the same time, nostalgic approaches to food invite perceptions of environment and technology that are dependent on one’s rhetorical context and position. The moniker “Slow Food” becomes for many a symbol “against globalism” which “[mistakes]...interest in local areas and the promotion of the local economic scale for something incompatible with globalization” (Petrini 26). Additionally, the name often entails the expectation of more “time-intensive food” which Petrini accurately describes as “the fruit of a mechanistic, schematic *modus pensandi*, as if a food can be judged according to how long it takes to prepare, process and consume” (27). What Petrini makes visible are the ways in which people utilize Slow Food as a rhetorical tool to argue a position on what relationships to food should

look like. The issue for Petrini is that individuals do so by relying on preconceived notions of what Slow Food entails regardless of accuracy. At the same time, it is a mistake to reject differing interpretations, because they may have productive potential. The key is to recognize that without a rhetoric of ecological food, productive differences between interpretations of Slow Food may be missed, because our attention is directed elsewhere. Fortunately, the ambivalence in Slow Food's meaning also makes it easier to highlight contested space if placed under a lens of ecological food. For some, Slow Food functions like a god term that vehemently opposes globalization. Others may celebrate Slow Food as a means to gain cultural capital by engaging with food in ways that contradict "fast," commercial food industries. On the other hand, some criticize Slow Food or even treat it as a devil term for the same reasons.

While the various versions of Slow Food have degrees of accuracy regarding the movement's motivations, what becomes clear is that the term "Slow Food" directs attention toward particular meanings in a multiplicity of ways. Rather than allow Slow Food to be made empty of content or charismatic by not engaging multiple interpretations, treating "Slow Food" as a chaos term in contested space preserves the meanings of Slow Food by rhetorically situating them. One must acknowledge that rhetorically situated meanings have necessary and progressive potential in terms of designing food systems more in tune with issues of class, race, gender, and even sexuality. Thus, a rhetoric of ecological food reveals the meshwork of Slow Food is more fluid (Figure 12) than that of Blue Apron or Soylent. Doing so offers protection against Slow Food's various versions of nostalgia that may seek to revitalize a romanticized past.

Similar to Blue Apron and Soylent, Slow Food exists in a contested space where perceptions of environment and technology are largely related to perceptions of time. Soylent's directs attention toward a futuristic conception of time where non-efficient activity falls under the label of leisure or obsolescence. Blue Apron serves as a closer comparison to Slow Food with its focus on the present through the act of cooking and eating. Slow Food places greater emphasis on nostalgia and the past. To understand the implications of Slow Food and nostalgia, it is essential to explore what nostalgia signifies in terms of worldbuilding. Memory and nostalgia scholar Svetlana Boym, argues that "nostalgia is not 'antimodern'" (8). On the contrary, "Nostalgia and progress are...doubles and mirror images of one another" and the "result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible" (8). Here, "nostalgia appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time." Therefore, "the past of nostalgia...is not even past. It could be merely better time, or slower time...not encumbered by appointment books" (8). Slow Food is not meant to revitalize a romanticized version of nature that existed before contemporary technological advance. It is inaccurate to claim that Slow Food's rhetoric is meant to demonize modernity and all technology, but it does resist modern emphasis on efficient progress which underlies technological advance. Rather than attempting to implant a past version of nature as a place or places, such as through the farmer's market, Slow Food attempts to direct attention to a reverence for the nostalgic and slower practices of the past.

Slow Food's rhetorical approach to time indicates a desire to reduce the anxiety and chaos surrounding the uncertainty of technological progress and its effects on the environments people inhabit. For example, Slow Food rejects GMOs and argues

GM products do not have historical or cultural links to a local area... Continued industry promises about the ability of GM crops to tackle the world's growing social problems are a myth: They have reduced biodiversity, polluted landscapes, threatened the future of small-scale farming and reduced the food security of the world's poorest people. They have not fed the world, but rather concentrated profits and power into the hands of a few ruthless companies. It's time to stop the big scam. (SlowFood.com: Why Against GMOs)

Slow Food's critique of GMOs places the god term "efficiency" into the contested spaces of the meshwork that makes up ecological food discourse. The critique serves to unmask the danger of quickly adopting efficient technologies and practices. Doing so exposes the risks of producing exploitive and destructive effects on people, animals, and environment. As a strong contrast to the position taken by Soyent, the critique holds weight. Slow Food's rhetoric points toward an anxiety for who and what gets to be sustained in an age of technological advance. Petrini admits that to argue Slow Food has "an inclination toward the natural" that "conveys an aversion...toward all processed food" while "true only in part" (27) has accuracy. The use of god terms such as "nostalgia" and "slower" elicit a specific view of what constitutes a "natural" use of time. "Processed food," such as Soyent and its rhetorical meshwork, do not fit within Slow Food's conception of natural time.

Slow Food's solution is to extent a means to define "natural" uses of time. The heavy processing of foods is an example of what would constitute unnatural use of time. Such "efficient" or "fast" time ignores class and peoples' connection to culture, environment, and food. Within discussions of food, nostalgia also "inevitably reappears

as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms...but this defense mechanism has its own side effects (Boym 10).” Therefore, defining “natural time” also draws attention to the possibility that Slow Food’s focus on slow time may also produce a limited view of time and nostalgia’s complex relationship to environment and technology. Indeed, Slow Food distracts from the possibility that “slow” is not good simply for the sake of being “slow” regardless of positive association and intention. Slow Food actively distracts from the possibility that it may not be the only solution but rather only part of a larger one.

B. An Exploration of Nostalgia and Slow Food as Contested Space

Rather than observing how technology exists on a meshwork of terms and concepts that make up ecological food, “technological advance” functions as a devil term for Slow Food. The underlying logic behind its transformation into a devil term is “restorative nostalgia [which] does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition” (13). While Slow Food draws attention to the positivity of nostalgia’s prospective potential, in doing so it also causes one to ignore the greater implication of statements such as “GMOs are unreliable from a scientific point of view...and from a technical standpoint they are obsolete” (SlowFood.com: GMOs). Slow Food’s claim that their approach is the only solution makes the notion of “truth” more significant. The claim may be a simple rhetorical tool to attract support, but it can lead individuals to equate rejections of technology with upholding Slow Food’s “true” ecological solution. The result is a tendency to accept positions on food—and to extent environment and technology—as true, but only if they uphold visions that one has a

nostalgic connection to. The issue, then, is when potentially reductive versions of “truth” shape one’s understanding of environment and technology.

Slow Food’s argument that GMOs are obsolete from a technical standpoint invites skepticism. Indeed, GMOs, whether one likes them or not, are the result of ongoing technical advances in genetic engineering. Although it isn’t Slow Food’s goal to deflate all technology, one may reject technological advances, because upholding restorative nostalgia feels better. GMOs certainly invite ethical concerns, yet rhetorical analysis reveals the risk of rejecting a potentially beneficial technological advance for the sake of maintaining an identity based on Slow Food. Similar to Blue Apron’s pre-packaging of ecology and waste, Slow Food may be used as a rhetorical means to remove one’s ethical responsibility for critically examining the complexity of the food system. “Truth” is a chaos term at least within the contested spaces that make up ecological food discourse.

A rhetoric of ecological food makes the dangers of restorative nostalgia difficult to miss. For example, in a visit to Mississippi for his food travel series, Anthony Bourdain states “There is a discomfort level about exploring Southern food ways, particularly Mississippi food ways, when you’re talking about high end traditional Southern cooking, you’re talking plantations and slavery, because that’s where these recipes came from. So to revel in that, you don’t want to tumble into nostalgia. The potential for awkwardness and offense is enormous” (Selkow). In an analysis of Slow Food’s ethics, Kelly Donati presents their rhetoric “fail[s] to recognize the conditions of inequity or oppression often inherent within the preservation of tradition—whether they are socio-economic differences limiting access to education and opportunity or a gender

tradition in which the labor of women in the kitchen bears the responsibility for maintaining harmony in the family home and preserving the cultural traditions of society” (Donati 236). Bourdain and Donati reveals that the intuitive and tacit acceptance of restorative nostalgia can result in attempts to restore the racist, sexist, and classist practices of the past. Whether the attempts are intentional or not, the risk is present. Southern cooking is a symbol for resilience against the violent oppression of racism, but restorative nostalgia introduces the risk of consuming Southern cooking in a way that produces nostalgic connections to racist ideologies. Some may argue against the possibility as an unfounded fear, but Bourdain and Donati’s statements reveals that ecological food must place “food traditions” into contested space to address the risks of nostalgic marginalization and exoticization.

Placing Slow Food into contested space reveals that realizing the goal of ecological food discourse requires examining the multiple ways in which nostalgic expectations are formed throughout larger society and more local communities. Doing so enables what Boym labels “reflective nostalgia” which “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity (13).” While “restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth...reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt (13).” The reflective nostalgia that Boym describes would allow for the development of contested space. That is, reflective nostalgia allows people to interrogate the intuitive connections they have to traditions and practices from the past. A rhetoric of ecological food exposes that “Nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, a cure. It is up to us to take responsibility for our nostalgia and not let others ‘prefabricate’ it for us. The

prepackaged ‘usable past’ may be of no use to us if we want to co-create our future” (18). Therefore, prioritizing reflective nostalgia can facilitate a rhetoric of ecological food and provide an approach to Slow Food that places a much-needed check on efficiency albeit a guarded one. A rhetoric of ecological food relies on reflective nostalgia to emphasize the significance for cuisines across places, time, and cultures.

C. An Exploration of the Urban Farm as Material Nostalgia

The emphasis on locally situated food has led to the celebration of community and urban farming within Slow Food. A rhetoric of ecological food reveals how the space of the urban farm exists as potential contested space. The juxtaposition of technological advance as reflected by a cityscape and the more nostalgic setting of the urban farm offer a stark contrast (Figure 12).

As seen in the image, the urban farm exists within the spaces of buildings that stand as edifices of efficiency and technological advance. The urban farm provides a means to practice the slower nostalgic methods of food production from the past within “efficient” urban spaces. When viewed as contested space, the urban farms make visible the flaws of restorative nostalgia. The revitalization of older farming methods will not restore a pre-modern or pre-urban space. If the urban farm relies on restorative nostalgia, it amounts to no more than a transfer from a romanticized past that reproduces combative relationships to technology. Treating the urban farm as a means to momentarily commune with romanticized versions of nature masks the more important goal of increasing the viability of urban farms.

Issues of viability are likely why detractors such as Rhinehart argue urban farms are not ecological solutions. When asked about urban and community farming in a

documentary interview Rhinehart responds, “I don’t think that’s really practical, I mean the numbers just don’t work out. This is just not going to scale” (Merchant). Images such as the cover for an *Oklahoma Gazette* story on urban farming in Oklahoma City seemingly affirm Rhinehart’s critique. The image recreates stereotypical interpretations of urban farming as a restorative model (Figure 14). Indeed, the image of Paul Mays, director of permaculture at SixTwelve community garden, depicts him holding what most would label an impractical pitchfork against the backdrop of a cityscape. The pitchfork and overalls make Mays appear to be a traditional farmer (to a degree) that has been dropped into the context of the city. Although the image is likely for artistic purposes, figure 14 reveals the reality of urban farming is not to transfer the traditional farm into the city. While urban farming borrows from traditional gardening or farming, viewing the urban farm as contested space allows us to move past restorative models and see how nostalgic methods are transplanted to urban spheres. An ecological urban farm meshes with the technological environment of the city.

The interview with Paul Mays makes clear that the restorative model is not his aim. After all, logics of efficiency can be found “right there in his title: permaculture, the creation of sustainable agricultural ecosystems that require very little input” (Elwell). Although Mays does not adopt GMOs and other technological modes of efficiency, it is apparent that his approach to agriculture is aware of its existence within an era of rapid technological advance. Mays’ focus on permaculture indicates a desire to integrate community farming methods that are sustainable and applicable to a world shaped by “efficiency.” What Mays reveals is that urban farms are also contested spaces for reflective nostalgia. Oklahoma City’s Commonwealth Urban Farms (Figure 15)

founder Elia Woods states urban farming is “for people who want to be a serious home gardener or want to learn the essential skills for growing on a larger scale... It’s a chance to see if they really like it that much” (Elwell). As contested space, urban farms can become training grounds for ecological food. Although urban farms do not offer a perfect solution, personal experience with urban farming through Commonwealth’s partner organization Closer to Earth revealed that the core of urban farming offers the means to address the community building and education ecological food requires. Urban and community farms are places where individuals may experiment with the chaotic materials and methods that may lead to ecological food.

The urban farm is not a space to reject technology. Indeed, even Slow Food admits that “family farming” and to extent urban farms may “need technical assistance and policies that build on their knowledge and sustainably bolster productivity, as well as improved access to land, water, credit and markets. Greater support is also needed to support women and encourage more young people to take up farming” (SlowFood.com: Family Farming). Urban farming requires technical support in order to access the resources necessary for maintaining ecological spaces within technologically dominated areas. A rhetoric of ecological food recognizes that urban farms will not restore past versions of nature, but can at least reclaim some space to slow down and critically think about the role of food within the age of efficiency. Urban farms are contested spaces with chaotic materials (vegetables and fruits) which remind individuals of the significance of localized relationships to food and place that the “faster” urban and globalized life ignores. A rhetoric of ecological food transforms urban farms into a

training ground for food practices that take into account issues such as class, gender, environment, and technology.

Conclusion

The ways in which people perceive food have direct and indirect impact on the world. The act of farming, buying, cooking, eating, and disposing of food are acts of worldbuilding. Innovations such as Soylent and Blue Apron as well as more nostalgic approaches such as Slow Food all offer glimpses into what a more ecological food system entails. Rather than pit the ideas against each other and reproduce false harmony and choices between technology and environment, it is more productive to steer into the irreconcilable tensions to seek a more realistic approach to symbiosis. Chaotic terms and materials indicate a rhetoric of ecological food is more necessary than ever in a world where emerging food practices are coming into view. The emergence of Soylent, Blue Apron, and even cultured (lab-grown) meat substitutes indicate that discussions regarding the ethical implications of food design are on the immediate horizon. A rhetoric of ecological food will help to navigate the discussions.

Utilizing rhetorical meshworks as a frame to analyze god terms and devil terms also affords opportunities to examine current solutions to food ecology. There are certainly additional ways to approach and analyze the three case studies presented here such as a materialist analysis. However, the goal of this paper is to facilitate further discussion and participation with the chaotic consequences of food production, distribution, and consumption. Such discussion and participation allows for more critical understandings of possible solutions for designing a better food system such as the development of hydroponic (utilizing nutrient rich sand, gravel, or liquid without

soil) and aquaponic (raising fish and plants together in an integrated and codependent manner) watering systems which indicate that ecological food manifests in multiple dynamic ways. The grafting of lab grown mycorrhizal fungi (a symbiotic and beneficial fungus for plants) onto roots to increase plant growth and the placement of the previously mentioned watering systems on rooftop gardens reveal contemporary approaches to food may have pieces of an ecological solution. Indeed, using technology to develop watering towers for vertical farming in urban areas indicate a departure from antiquated conceptualizations of technology and environment and the possibility of agonistic relationships between ecologically oriented technology and environmental practices. Such solutions are certainly worth future examination and invite guarded optimism for food design and discourse. In any case, a rhetoric of ecological food allows better engagement with potential solutions and their consequences.

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Appendix A: Images

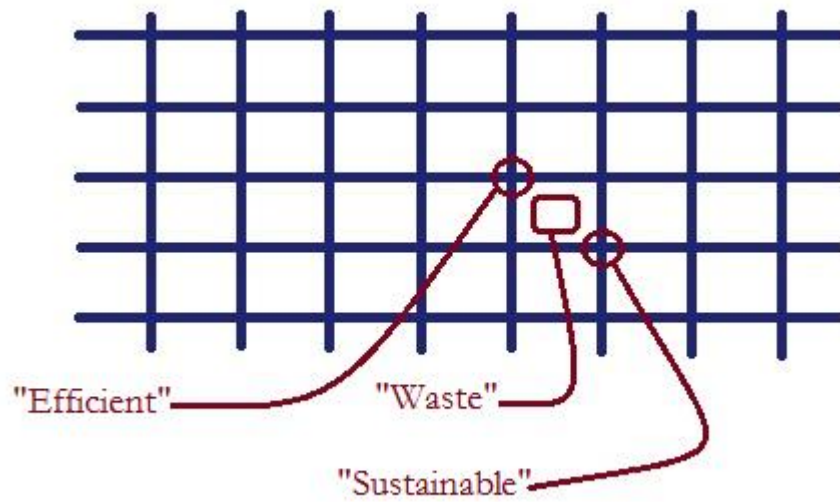


Figure 1¹⁴: The Meshwork depicting the god terms “efficient” and “sustainable” as interconnected nodes directing attention away from critical engagement with the term “waste” which exists in the gap between. The meshwork is a means to map god terms (e.g. “efficient,” “sustainable,” or “innovation”) and devil terms (e.g. “waste,” “GMO,” or “tastelessness”) for the purpose of locating contested space (the gaps).

¹⁴ Digital images that are not self-produced are cited in the Works Cited section by the first statement used in the corresponding figure descriptions.

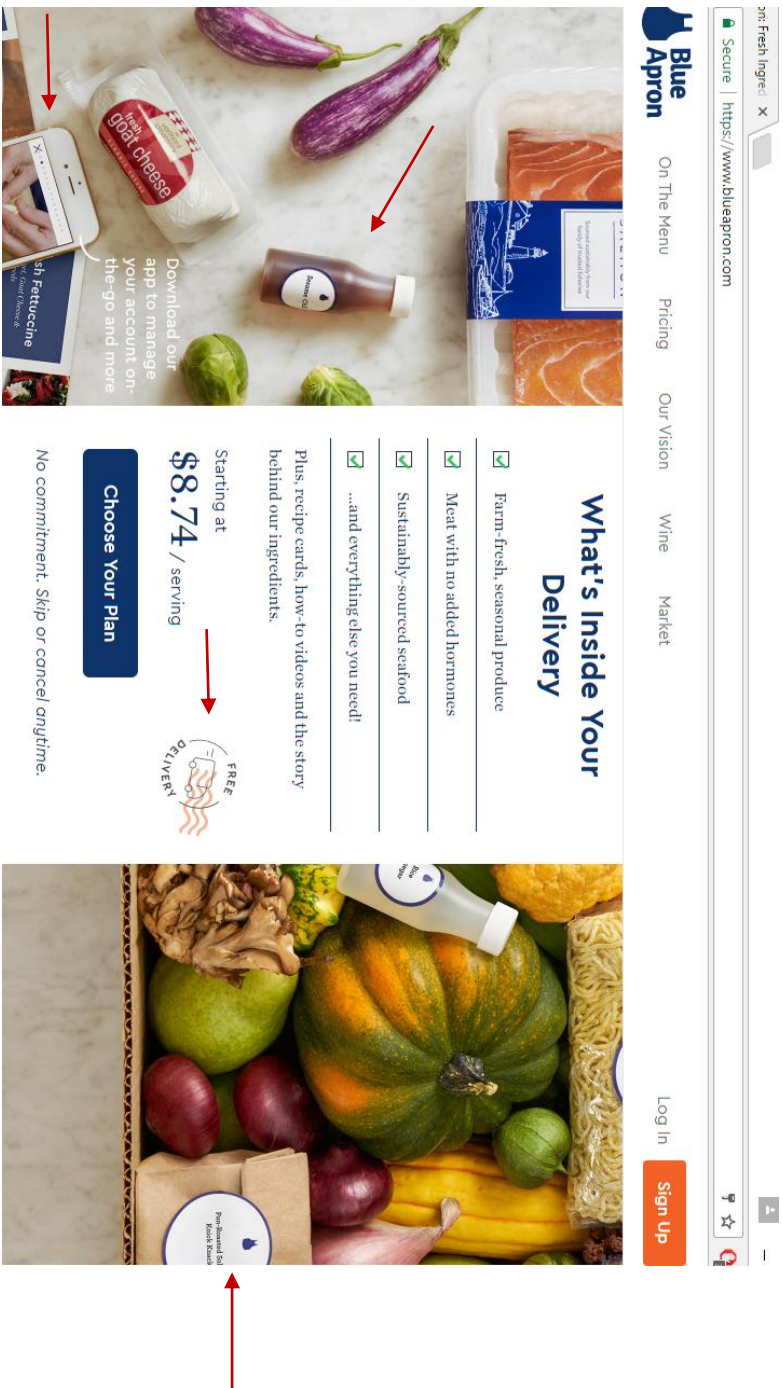


Figure 2: Screenshot of Blue Apron's website depicting ingredients and delivery options. The arrows identify a cell phone and a truck or the presence of technology. The arrows also mark packaging technology (food packaging) which is hidden among fresh vegetables or pushed to the margins of the image.



Figure 3: A Blue Apron box with messages concerning sustainability and enough ingredients for 3 recipes



Figure 4: Blue Apron’s packaging for their “cage-free farm egg.” The packaging is meant to prevent waste and utilizes good terms such as “cage-free” and “farm” which suggests an association with natural and sustainable practices.



Figure 5: An unopened bag of Blue Apron red pepper flakes. Without the discursive, visual, and material filters of Blue Apron, the package may appear to be “waste.” At the bottom is a “recyclable” symbol.



Figure 6: The packaging or “chaos materials” for one out of the three meals. Not all packaging is pictured as it was still in use. Furthermore, the Greek yogurt cup (top right) is Chobani brand, which is connected to the corporate food industry. While celebrated for its high protein content the brand is also currently searching for a means to dispose of the acid whey they produce. Acid whey is a by-product of Greek yogurt production that can be environmentally toxic.



Figure 7: An example meshwork for Soylent. It’s important to note that terms move along lines and nodes as well as in and out of the gaps. Meshworks are dynamic, but the image depicts how terms such as “sustainable” and “efficient” may place “waste” into the gap. The strategy is similar to Blue Apron, but Soylent’s “waste” also heavily entails “wasted time.”

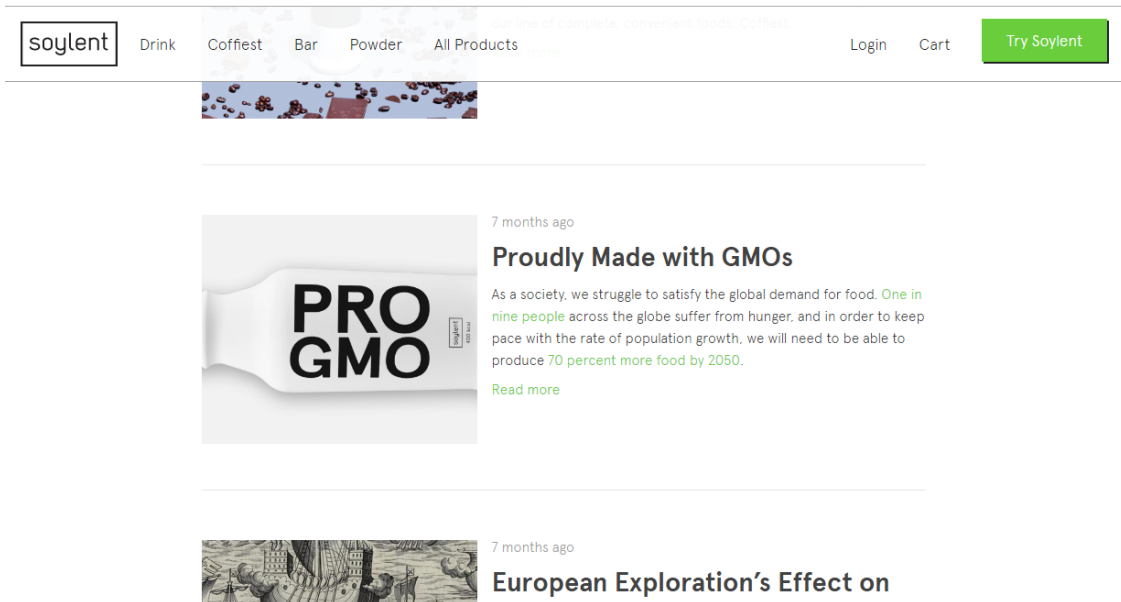


Figure 8: Soylent’s Pro-GMO post. The blog post argues that in order to produce enough food to feed the world’s growing population, GMOs will be necessary. The image states “As a society, we struggle to satisfy the global demand for food. One in nine people across the globe suffer from hunger, and in order to keep pace with the rate of population growth, we will need to be able to produce 70 percent more food by 2050.”



Figure 9: Powdered version of Soylent. Labeled “Powdered Food,” the bag contains a day’s worth of calories and nutrients for an average adult. The pitcher can contain one bag’s worth of Soylent. It is worth noting the similarity to “powdered milk.”



Figure 10: Original Flavor version of Soylent 2.0 (bottled). The bottled version is a pre-mixed version of Soylent that is ready to drink. One box contains six bottles. It takes five bottles to feed an average adult for one day.

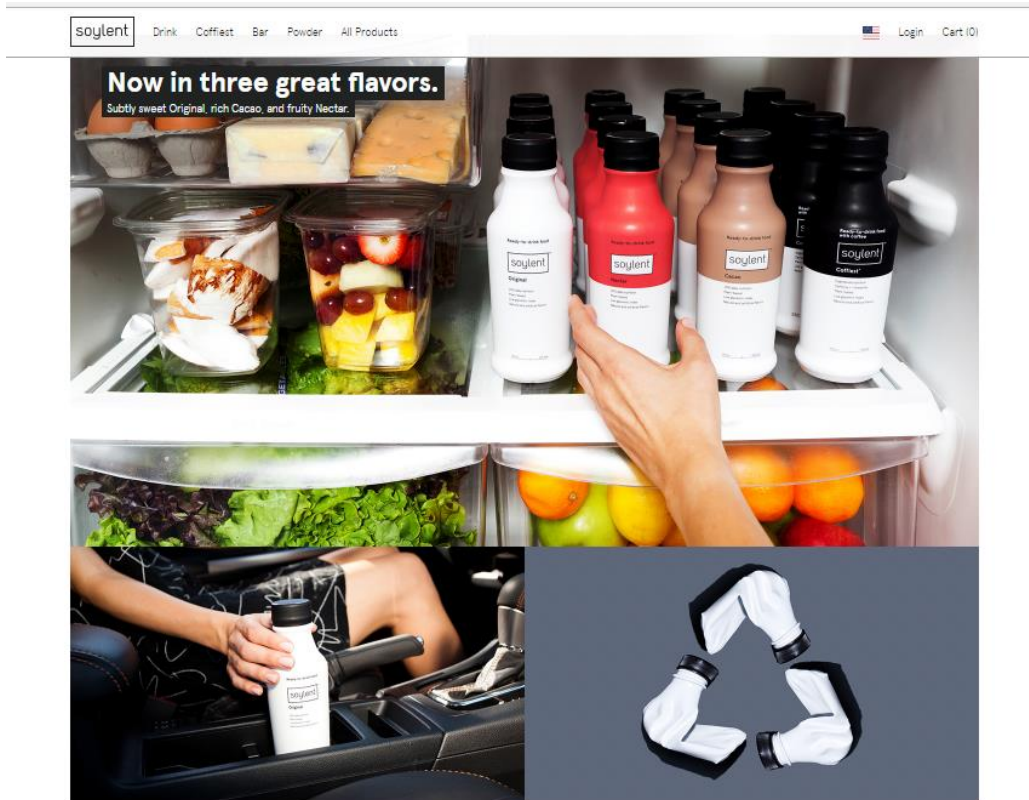


Figure 11: Advertising material for Soylent. The image presents a visual argument for Soylent’s efficiency (the car cup holder), sustainability (the recycling “god symbol”), and existence as food (juxtaposition with fruits and vegetables).

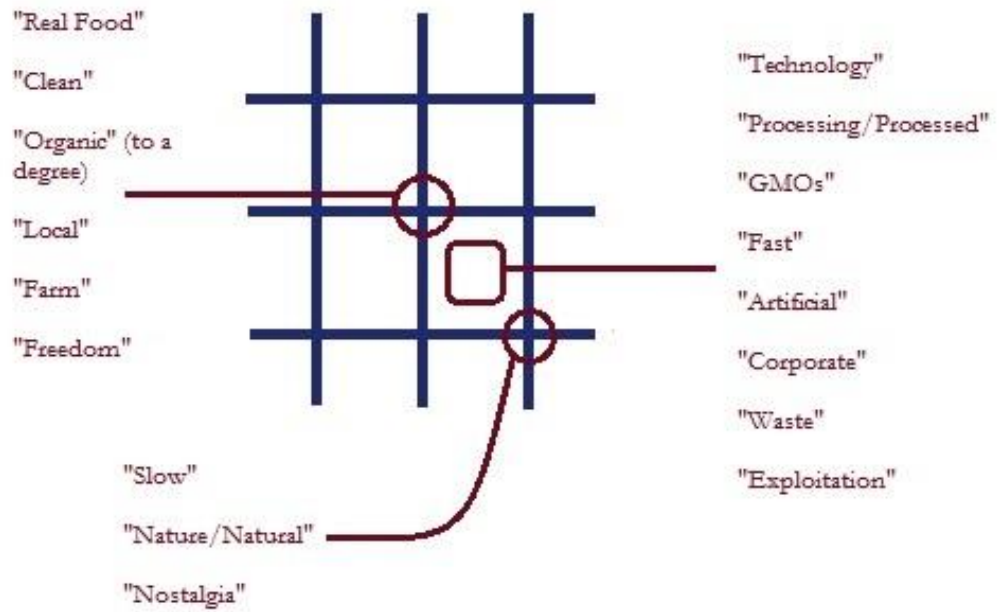


Figure 12: A Zoom In on an Example Meshwork for Slow Food. The example here uses Slow Food International’s version of Slow Food and its various god and devil terms as a base. Splinter versions such as the Organic Food movement would likely use the god term “organic” to a higher degree than Slow Food International.



Figure 13: A still from PBS production *Food Forward* which is a survey of urban farming across the US



Figure 14: Cover of the *Oklahoma Gazette* issue on urban farming in Oklahoma City. The image is of Paul Mays, director of permaculture at SixTwelve community garden.



Figure 15: Commonwealth Urban Farm located in Oklahoma City

Appendix B: Glossary

Ecological Food — An approach to food that acknowledges the “technology” and “environment” as different angles toward the same goal of sustainable and viable food production, consumption, and distribution. Ecological food aims for an agonistic symbiotic relationship between technology and environment where tensions between the two are not masked by false choices or harmony.

A Rhetoric of Ecological Food — A rhetorical approach to food with the aim of making visible and producing ecological food.

Terministic screen — Any terminology or nomenclature that directs attention to some channels of interpretation rather than others.

God term/material — Coined by Kenneth Burke, “god term” refers to any term or terminology that elicits positive connotations and associations that generally are not open to question.

Devil term/material — A term introduced by Richard Weaver that refers to any term or terminology that elicits negative connotations and associations. It is the “counterpart of the ‘god term’” (Weaver 222).

False Choice — A situation where choices are perceived to be good or bad which can eventually lead to a legitimation crisis that ignores linguistic uncertainty. Example: A person may choose technology or environment.

Contested Space — A space where terms such as god and devil terms are open to contestation. It is a space that allows the interrogation of false choices.

Chaos term/material — Chaos terms are terms that exist within contested space. The term borrows from Chaos Theory to identify how small changes in dynamical systems of interpretation can have large effects. In food discourse, chaos terms are a means to recognize how words and materials can have large implications for ecosystems, social systems, and economic systems.

Meshwork — A model for mapping out or visualizing the interconnected relationships between god terms, devil terms, contested spaces, and chaos terms. The meshwork allows one to see how terms direct the attention and creates opportunity to identify and examine chaos terms for the goal of progress. The meshwork here is inspired by but not to be confused with the “mesh” that Timothy Morton describes in *The Ecological Thought*. Rather than an ontological argument about the status of human or other life forms’ existence in contradictions, the meshwork here is meant simply to be an alternative rhetorical tool for tracing the chaotic consequences and effects of how organizations, companies, and even social movements talk about food.

Symbiosis — A productive relationship between two positions or concepts. Symbiosis does not demand a relationship of harmony and allows an agonistic one that acknowledges the tensions between two positions or concepts. Symbiosis allows for productive conflict in ecological food discourse.

Restorative Nostalgia — A form of nostalgia that seeks to restore a perceived “truth” or tradition from the past. It is a term coined by Svetlana Boym.

Reflective Nostalgia — A form of nostalgia that dwells on the ambivalences of the past, human longing, and belonging. Unlike restorative nostalgia it does not ignore the contradictions of modernity. The term was also introduced by Svetlana Boym.