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Eat me! Drink me!:
“Natural” Rhetoric in Modern America’s
Prepackaged Food Industry

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English Language and Literature

Bachelor of Arts


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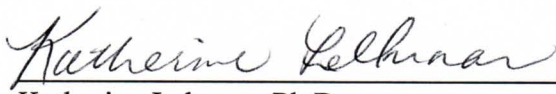
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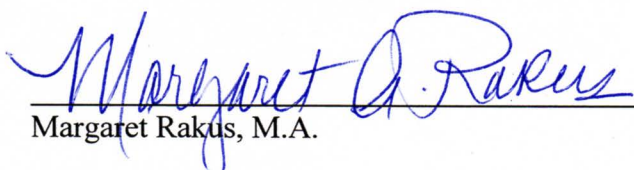
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THE DISCOURSE OF AMERICAN FOOD

'It seems very pretty,' [Alice] said when she finished [JABBERWOCKY], 'but it's rather hard to understand!...Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!' (Carroll 116).

The rapid radicalization of the American food landscape that ignited with the onset of agricultural industry in the twentieth century manifests today in the unending offerings of prepackaged products termed 'convenience foods' available for sale at retailers across the nation and via the internet. To a potential consumer unfamiliar with the stereotypical tropes and patterns of food packaging, the supermarket may seem akin to a farmers' basket, for an enormous amount its products boast claims of being "natural" in some manner. Phrases such as "made from all-natural ingredients," "naturally cholesterol-free," "natural flavor added," frequently accompany bucolic images of dewy tomatoes or verdant leaves; in perhaps more dubious cases, the word "natural" seems to augment entirely separate pretexts of a product's "healthy" or "organic" quality. Factually, the definitions of the term "natural" as provided by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) misalign, yet an attentive inspection of food labels show that marketers nonetheless strive to present an overall appearance of unity—in more ways than one. The highly-sensory literary elements marketers in the food industry use to advertise and describe various food products function in similar emotive ways as conventional poetic language. In much the same way as with literature, a society's actions pertaining to food and eating reveal insight to collective values and traditions. The misleading rhetoric of modern food labels—particularly in America—suggests a vast cultural

void and an ultimate disconnect between the nation's population and the food being produced and consumed.

The Supermarket, or, the 'Wonderland'

The premiere of prepackaged convenience foods to the American public came, in response to a number of interrelated reasons, at the apex of the Second World War. Certain prepackaged foods—predominantly sweets—had been on the market since the nineteenth century, though as the agricultural sector of the United States grew more mechanized, so too did the production and consumption of food. First, interest in weapon development spurred technological innovation that led to the monumental agricultural breakthrough of artificial nitrogen-fixing. Nitrogen accounts for 80% of the earth's atmosphere, though in its organically-occurring form is non-reactive and useless for plants, which require the element in water-soluble forms in the soil (Blatt 30). American scientists discovered that ammonium nitrate, which was used primarily to manufacture explosives, also functioned as a highly-effective (though environmentally toxic) crop fertilizer by providing plants nitrogen supplementary to the limited amount they were able to garner from the soil. As a result, large 'agribusinesses' across the country generously fertilized their fields, eager to reap substantial harvests (Pollan 51). In his tremendously influential book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan retorts that "if...the discovery of agriculture represented the first fall of man from the state of nature, then the discovery of synthetic fertility is surely a second precipitous fall" (55). Years of litigation, such as grain subsidies and the devastating Farm Bill of 1973, which removed the floor underneath corn prices, would plague small American farmers and ultimately result in the domination of agriculture by large colloquially-termed "agribusiness" (Pollan 61). Family farms across the

country suffered as new industrial practices led to their increasing replacement by large conglomerate farm companies which, thanks to the industrial technology, had the ability to produce much more crops per acre. Even mid-way through the century, higher American crop yields meant that America possessed copious amounts of food, and businesses needed to sell it.

Concurrent with the technology that made increases in food production possible, the World Wars also forced strategists to develop new, creative ways to provide food that could withstand shipment, travel, and potential lifespan of several months for thousands of mobile soldiers. During war time, soldiers ravenously consumed prepackaged, preserved provisions of canned vegetables and tinned meats overseas (Kawash np), but the leftover machinery that produced such comestibles and surplus amounts of raw ingredients prompted the food industry to rebrand their products after the soldiers returned home. War-food became easy-to-prepare “convenience food” (Kawash np). Kick-starting a trend that can still be observed on today’s supermarket shelves, convenience food promised busy homemakers everywhere the ability to treat their families to delicious “home-made” food, even, as one 1971 Chef Boyardee label reads, “without really cooking at all” (Parkin 4). To enable the mass-distribution of mass-produced products, supermarkets began to replace small general stores across the American landscape. In 1915, A&P operated 1,600 stores across the United States, and the chain opened its first large supermarket in 1936 (Reardon 3). Post-World War II, the supermarket trend erupted with the new suburban lifestyle of the American 1950s (Reardon 4) and, as modern Americans know, the supermarket still reigns today. Enormous and ubiquitous retailers sell everything from produce to home furnishings to small pets, in addition to, of course, prepackaged convenience foods.

Blatt estimates that contemporary supermarkets stock approximately 22,000 different food products on average, “nearly 100% of them processed to a greater or lesser degree” (200). Citing the rapid scientifically-enhanced expansion and performance of global agriculture, gastronome and ‘Slow Food’ activist Steven Schneider notes that today’s supermarkets “seem to be built upon a similar effacement of space and time, as products from a wide range of countries and seasons sit side by side of store shelves, erasing local traditions in favor of product range and innovation” (394). With an over abundance of competing products lining supermarket shelves, the products’ labels function as mini-commercials to urge consumers to pick one company’s product over that of its competitors. In what Pollan hypothesizes to be the latest stage of food processing, “the industry has gazed upon nature and found it wanting,” (107), in effect implying that the food industry applauds itself in a noble mission of improving upon the surely-inadequate, though albeit posh, ‘natural.’

The Pleasure of Food

In regard to the marketing role of food labels, the rapid expansion of the prepackaged food industry also resulted in a barrage of advertisements. In order to make profits, food producers needed to convince consumers that their specific soup/sandwich bread/condiment etc. was superior to those of competing brands. Blonsky reminds readers in his introduction to the essay collection *On Signs* that “all language is figurative” despite the frequent habit of participants to assume otherwise (xxvii). In relation to advertisements in particular, one must recognize that the signs and words the marketers use to communicate do not and cannot communicate objects directly, but instead serve as a mediator to suggest ideas to a compliant reader. By the mid-century supermarket boom, Americans already had been subjected to a fair

amount of advertising, as a society built on industry and capitalism needs consumers. The advertisements—specifically foods labels—function as signs within our culture, hearkening on concepts that appeal to consumers’ senses through a series of arbitrary and appealing references.

In truth, the advertisement exists only as an Image, a “*lure*” (Barthes xxix), presented before an observer and capable in its separation from the physical, earthly world to envelope ideals and truths that would otherwise be untouchable (Blonsky xxix). Blonsky explains the state of the Imaginary as “a staring at life” (xxix); in looking at an advertisement, one views a scene whose truth ‘lives’ in a separate sphere from that wherein the observer walks, breathes, and exists. Beginning with Lacan, theorists have referenced human’s first cognitive separation of the world into ‘self’ and ‘other’ as the “mirror stage” (Blonsky xxx). The mother, initially thoroughly connected to the infant who, even in his/her early months of life cannot yet move his/her body independently of her aid, is theorized to be the first recognized Image, thereby interrelating notions of physical comfort and nurture to the overarching idea of the Image. When an observer looks at an Image now, he/she inexorably reverts to a state of metaphorical infancy in that he/she desires pleasure from the Image akin to the pleasure that came of the mother’s comfort and nurture.

The experience of smelling, tasting, chewing, viewing, and even preparing food renders it an innately sensory subject. The act of eating—willingly putting something into one’s body—is a highly personal and intimate concept, especially when it also induces a smattering of afferent bodily responses, such as the satisfactory fullness of the stomach. French epicure Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote extensively on the physicality that accompanied food and eating and published *Physiology of Taste* in 1825, over a century before the processed food-spurred

supermarket revolution. In his exceedingly aphoristic account of gastronomy, he discusses taste, “which has as its excitement appetite, hunger and thirst” (Meditation II) in corporeal, somatic language and analogy—nothing short of poetry. Nonetheless, Barthes underscores Brillat-Savarin’s displacement of the pleasure food incites; though “food provokes an internal pleasure: inside the body, enclosed in it, not just beneath the skin, but in that deep, central zone... primordial because it is soft, tangled, permeable” (Barthes 62), Brillat-Savarin describes its pleasure in the visible experience of others. In one passage, “la belle gourmande” bites into a partridge wing while “her eyes sparkle, her lips glisten” (Barthes 63), in many ways exemplifying the attractiveness of the Imaginary and marrying ideals of gastronomic and intimate pleasures into one sensual and appealing Image. Though his text describes the girl, Brillat-Savarin ‘sells’ the partridge as well—an omnipresent incident in today’s prepackaged food marketing strategy.

NAMES OR NONSENSE?: STRUCTURALISM

[Alice] was rambling on in this way when she reached the wood: it looked very cool and shady. ‘Well at any rate it’s a great comfort,’ she said as she stepped under the trees, ‘after being so hot, to get into the—into the—into what?’ she went on, rather surprised at not being able to think of the word. ‘I mean to get under the—under the—under this, you know!’ putting her hand on the trunk of the tree. ‘What does it call itself, I wonder? I do believe it’s got no name—what to be sure it hasn’t!’ (Carroll 133).

Lewis Carroll, though perhaps under the guise of child-friendly nonsense talk, illustrates a central aspect of modern semiology in Alice’s quizzical pondering. Although she may not

realize it, Alice has understood what Saussure taught in his breakthrough lectures: words exist as an arbitrary system of integrally-linked signifiers and signifieds. Her inability to produce the term “tree” in the wake of recognizing the concept that the forgotten sound-image (or what she calls its ‘name’) signifies shows the duality of each word as two equal halves: the sound-image signifier and the concept being signified. The concept being signified by the sign is not compromised by having a multitude of possible “meanings” or “suggestions,” but such is the enigmatic basic of Saussure’s semiological theory.

Rapid industrial expansion, international tension, and vigorous interest in academia amalgamated in a highly galvanized and variable twentieth-century American culture. While industry instigated adventurous measures in production and marketing to recover from a critically war-torn economy, scholars devoted attention to theories that proposed methodical order in fields like psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. Though initially a tool of the prior two academic concentrations, “structuralism” was first applied as a literary concept by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in his 1915 *Cours de linguistique generale* lectures, which would be translated into English by 1959 to the great advantage of a highly-interested English-speaking scholars (Scholes 14). Recognizing the merit Saussure’s theory had in language, literary critics applied it to their own field by relating “the language of literature to the whole of literature” (Scholes 13). The literary theorists’ standpoint was logical enough: Saussure’s semiology, “*a science that studied the life of signs within society*” (Scholes 16) organizes itself around the premise that meaning, such as expressed by language, can be explained systematically via a hierarchy of activities broken down into the *langage* (a physical ability to express and comprehend meaning), *langue* (the language spoken in a society), and *parole* (the utterances

understood as part of a society's *langue*) (Scholes 14). Twentieth-century literary critics manipulate Saussure's original thoughts by supposing that the overarching whole, instead of *langage*, is now the literary tradition, and the individual paradigms of interest are not sentences, but works of literature (generally deemed "poetry").

Saussure makes the crucial point that communication via language is only possible because multiple speakers have agreed to apply the same sound-images to the same concepts: language is both arbitrary and assumed. The different sound-images used across different cultures to signify the same concept ("tree" vs. "baum" vs. "arbor") illustrate that the nature of the sound-image is in not linked to the concept in any way other than the society of humans that determined the two should correlate. Of course, it is not as if languages are formed with a rule book in hand; "...every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behavior or—what amounts to the same thing—on convention" (Saussure 68). For multiple speakers to partake in "intelligible" (Scholes 14) conversation, they must all understand the signs in the same manner. Saussure's understanding of the sign and its components can be understood via the following diagram, which is in many ways similar to Marten's model of human perception and worldview construction (see Figure 2):

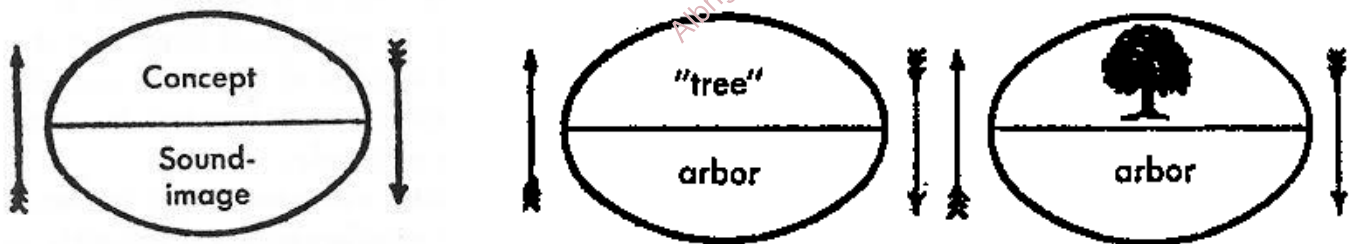


Figure 1- Saussure's diagrams on the sign (66- 67)

The diagrams rendered by Saussure illustrate language's cycle. Speakers of a language constantly find themselves in a cycle of understanding, creating, evaluating, and understanding. As much as the pairing of a signifier to a specific signified concept is ruled by overarching social agreements, the arbitrary attachment of the signifier to the specific signified concept is also a product of human construct and subject to manipulation—the only catch is collectivity. Theoretically, a speaker could attach any signifier to any signified idea he or she chose; he is only limited when he seeks to “intelligibly” communicate his ideas to a fellow participating listener/speaker.

NEW CRITICISM LITERARY THEORY

Prominent in the emergence of literary structuralism were, among others, Cleanth Brooks, T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, and Robert Scholes, each of whom borrowed ideas from and referenced one another. Central to all of their theories is the structuralist notion that a holistic work can be broken down into parts, which can then be negotiated for meaning based on the surrounding context. Cleanth Brooks terms the emerging school of literary theory “New Criticism” (Brooks 76) and maintains, along with his contemporaries, that any given word in a poem has the potential to invoke countless different associations—possibly even varying reader to reader. New Criticism uses concepts of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology to stress a primary concern for the multitude of reader interpretations of a text instead of authorial intent. In other words, a New Critical approach to understanding literature entails breaking literature down into the individual words that comprise it. The study of any word's meaning can be undertaken either via diachronic exploration of the word's relevance and possible transformation over time or via a

synchronic exploration of the word in relation to other aspects of culture concurrently existent to its modern usage. The synchronic approach holds more merit within the New Criticism process and shifts the poem's functionality from that of the writer's creation to that of the reader's interpretation.

New Criticism on Poetry

Accepting that reading a poem is participatory instead of observational, a reader must consider a range of anachronistic "disparate" concepts attached to a word in his/her individual interpretation. T.S. Eliot's work surmises that poetry offers a personal emotional resolve for readers who live in an otherwise disparate society ("Semiotics and Structuralism" np), or what he artistically envisions as "a heap of broken images" (*The Wasteland* 23). According to Eliot, every individual word in a well-written poem, when arranged together, should converge to a sense of amalgamated satisfaction for each particular reader. In the follow up to *The Intentional Fallacy*, which attempts "to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological causes of the poem," (31) Wimsatt and Beardsley's *The Affective Fallacy* proposes that successful literary criticism entails the ability of the critic to determine what about a poem results in emotional resolve in the reader. It is impossible to explain exactly how a signified, cognizant object results in the reader's emotional experience, but "the more specific the account of the emotion induced by a poem, the more nearly it will be an account of the reasons for emotion" (47). Though a word in a poem is recognized for its definite, dictionary-supplied definition, it is also read with an attached collection of emotional suggestions that cannot be stabilized or quantified based in linguistic or scientific fact (33). In specific regard to this paper, the adjective "natural" could mean "not made or caused by humankind" (OED 1.a) but it may also suggest a number of

unregulated ideas, such as that a subject is spiritually superior or particularly nourishing for the body. The affective critic relies exclusively on the layers of implications a word “imports” into the reader’s experience reading the poem, negating psychologically- and physiologically-based responses for the less-concrete explanations as to how certain words indicate objects that translate into a reader’s emotions. Obviously, each individual aspect of a poem’s construction—diction, rhyme, meter, etc—contributes to possible importation of meaning and suggestion as well, and by tangent, sensory response. Recognizing where the various elements of a poem cohere is a crucial point in the literary critic’s presentation of a poem’s overall emotional resolve that brings readers satisfaction—which, simultaneously, is what Eliot meant by unity and, interestingly enough, what Brillat-Savarin attributes to the act of eating (Meditation XIV).

Richards radicalizes—though somewhat problematizes— twentieth-century literary theory by integrating the study with scientific principle (Fry, “Semiotics” np). A philosopher and psychologist, Richards theorizes that readers read texts either to answer factual questions or to fulfill emotive desires that exist outside of factual solution; respectively, text is either “scientific” or “poetic.” Science is “simply our most elaborate way of pointing to things systematically” (Richards 833) and not susceptible to literary criticism. It differs greatly from poetry, which presents ideas concerned with emotion; because readers read poetry to satisfy individual emotional needs, the ‘truths’ presented are “pseudo-statements, or fictions” (834) that Richards says supply “fanciful or imaginary fulfillment” that cannot be realistically attained. Nonetheless, perhaps Wimsatt and Beardsley define poetry best as “characteristically a discourse about both emotions and objects, or about the emotive quality of objects, and through its preoccupation with symbol and metaphor” (52). Poetry, they say, is unique in the sense that the emotion, which

typically is understood to be an inexplicable attachment to an object, is made the object itself. Therefore, it is crucial that literary critics approach poetic text differently than they approach scientific text.

Marrying the idea of the poem as a “pseudo-statement” and an “affective fallacy” concludes that poetry provide humans with a temporary harmonious escape from the true, harsh disparity of the world (Fry, “Semiotics” np). Richards applies the following sort of ‘suspension-of-disbelief’ principle to the reading of poetry in a largely scientific world:

Briefly, if we can contrive to believe poetry, then the world seems, while we do so to be transfigured. It used to be comparatively easy to do this, and the habit has become well established. With the extension of science and the neutralization of nature it has become difficult as well as dangerous. Yet it is still alluring; it has many analogies with drug-taking. (834)

Essentially, Richards reminds readers that while indulging in the luxury of poetic truth and harmonization is “alluring,” one must remember that it is poetic truth, an Image, and therefore the opposite of reality. Wimsatt and Beardsley question why society values such an indulgence in what is known to be untrue, landing eventually on the supposition that poetry is a means of sharing the experience of a culture with others who want to understand a culture over time (54). Undoubtedly, asserting that poets write poetry for the purpose of historical record cannot be regarded as more than speculation; in fact, the critics dispute their own statement by the essay’s conclusion, reminding readers that affective criticism negates extensive knowledge of history or anthropology for the much more timeless attention to universal human emotion instead. In applying poetic understanding to modern advertising, possible explanations behind poetic

marketing strategies are much easier to pinpoint—and much more concerning, considering the lucrative deviousness on which they rely. Whereas traditional poetic appeals to emotion are socially understood to exist—by explicit definition in Richards’s text—completely outside of scientific governance, today’s food labels share all of the same emotive strategies and properties without the clear division between emotional pull and reality. Succinctly, the marketers, acting as the poets, employ evocative strategies when they arrange text into *poetic*, unified labels while simultaneously assuring that the works masquerade as *scientific* truth.

New Criticism on Food Labels

Certainly, both “science” and “poetry” are extremely relevant to the study and understanding of food: science incorporates the physicality of food and eating, and poetry encompasses personal reactions to the role food and eating play in social culture. In a capitalist, industrial society wherein countless companies inundate grocery stores with an ever-expanding range of products, marketers have employed strategies based in distinctly emotive rhetoric; studies such as the ones cited by McCluskey and Loureiro in their article “Consumer Preferences and Willingness to Pay for Food Labeling: A Discussion of Empirical Studies” reveal that consumers, unsurprisingly, are attracted to foods that lay claim to some form of ecological-sounding standard. It is important to note that McCluskey and Loureiro’s work, being a marketing study, expresses the public’s reaction to the food *labels*—the physical signage the industry attributes to the food. Akin to Alice’s “names,” the appearance of “natural” on the labels does not always adequately represent the “natural”-ness of the food it advertises. Society’s reaction to the labels equates to society’s reaction to the ideas associated with the “names”—what Wimsatt and Beardsley say the names *suggest* (37). New Criticism theory offers ideal

support to analyze the marketers as poets; the unified and fictitious works the marketers create are meant to appeal to consumers' inexplicable emotions without respect for scientific truth. Unfortunately, widespread ignorance to regulatory fact, such as is cited in McCluskey and Loureiro's study, dictates that consumers oftentimes do not realize that the labels they are reading are nothing more than emotional indulgences. The industry's purposeful blurring of the lines between "science" and "poetry" endanger consumers, and as the two concepts carry irrefutably different imports that readers and critics "must distinguish" (Richards 834).

Communication is central to marketing, as marketers create text with regard to how the public will respond. As he browses the aisles of a Whole Foods Market grocery store, Pollan suggests today's prepackaged food labels might merit their own literary genre (143). Regarding the labels as aspects of cultural literature, the application of New Criticism offers insight as to how readers interpret food labels, and subsequently, how marketers implement poetic tactics to contribute to their product's sale. It is possible to regard food labels in the same manner that Brooks regards poems: each label is a united and organized arrangement of signs meant to communicate some sort of statement when read and observed together. In addition to the importance of Saussure's signifier-signified system of convention, Brooks reminds readers that each sign also holds a "powerful second meaning" (74) within the context of a larger body of work that transcends the dictionary's definitions and is shaped instead by the signs arranged around it. Below is a recreation of Brooks's fundamental theory on poetic discourse, modified slightly to better adhere to the description and reading of convenience food labels:

Our examination of the [poemlabel] has not resulted in our locating an idea or set of ideas which the [poetmarketer] has communicated with certain appropriate

decorations. Rather, our examination has carried us further and further into the [poemlabel] itself in a process of exploration. As we have made this exploration, it has become more and more clear that the [poemlabel] is not only the linguistic vehicle which conveys the things communicated most “poetically,” but that it is also the sole linguistic vehicle which conveys the things communicated accurately. In fact, if we are to speak exactly, the [poemlabel] itself is the only medium that communicates the particular “what” that is communicated. (Brooks 74)

Here, the emendations demonstrate the relationship between literary theory and strategic rhetoric of food labels. The marketer, acting as Brooks’s “poet,” has succeeded in creating a unified work—in this case the label is the “poem”— that relies more heavily on how the individual words function in the context of the entire creation than how they are defined in the dictionary. Added “decorations” such as sketches of leaves, playful fonts, and/or photographs of ripe, shiny apples serve to augment the printed word “natural” and create a set of ideas for the word that do not appear in the dictionary. Therefore, it is impossible to simply attach a meaning to the word “natural” as it is used in food labels; instead, only a holistic consideration of the manufactured labels can yield a viable “‘what’ that is communicated,” which, obviously, both factually challenge and aesthetically support the existing definitions held by society. The signifier “natural” on its own is applicable to neither the food products it advertises nor its intended signified concept. In the context of food label, the sign “natural” functions as an ideal pseudo-truth; however, given the results of McCluskey and Loureiro’s study, it is oftentimes recognized as verifiable fact.

The marketer, like the poet, can be understood in New Criticism to be “exploiting the potentialities of language—indeed, as all poets must do, he is remaking language” (Brooks 74). Since the marketer does not employ the term “natural” in the sense that it is used in the dictionary, he is effectively, as Brooks claims of the poet, creating new language by attaching different meanings to the already-existing word. As noted, the realistic predicament ensues when consumers reading the product label do not comprehend the marketers’ sly revitalization of the seemingly-familiar language. An article published by the *Washington Post* in 2005 reported that, second only to their doctors, people claim to get most of their nutrition advice from the labels of their food products; similarly, marketers oftentimes speak of educating customers with bold, eye-catching “natural” claims pertaining to products and their ingredients (Simon 99). If marketers intend to provide consumers with accurate, educational information, their intentional rehabilitation of language poses a problem, for reports reveal that consumers are not always aware of the inexact meanings the term “natural” holds in reference to the foods they are purchasing in supermarkets.

APPLICATION: DEFINING “NATURAL”

The Red Queen shook her head. ‘You may call it “nonsense” if you like,’ she said, ‘but I’ve heard nonsense, compared with that would be as sensible as a dictionary!’ (Carroll 122).

What “Natural” Means

Before delving into speculation on the veracity of the term “natural” in regards to highly unnatural prepackaged food products, linguists must first consider a number of possible anachronistic concepts the word could be interpreted to *mean* in poetic context. Under a New

Critical lens, the word “natural,” bears eighty-four different dictionary-identities as well as an infinite degree of undefined societal-*suggested* attributions, and the only determinate manner of understanding how the word relates to the label’s overall function is by inspecting its use on a label-by-label basis within the context of other “certain appropriate decorations” (Brooks 74) creating the unified whole. The OED supplies thirty-one different definitions for “natural” as a noun, fifty-two as an adjective, and one as an adverb, each of which holding potential value within a text. While all considerations could be deemed pertinent by New Critical scholars, a few select definitions include:

[3.a.] n. *in one's (pure) naturals*: in a purely natural condition, not altered or improved in any way; completely naked. Obs.

[4.] n. A normal feature or attribute.

[6.a.] n. A natural thing or object; something having its basis in the natural world or in the usual course of nature. In modern use: a natural product, a product that has not been processed or manufactured.

[6.b.] n. The genitals.

[7.a.] n. Of a substance or article: not manufactured or processed; not obtained by artificial processes; made only from natural products. Also: manufactured using only simple or minimal processes; made so as to imitate or blend with the naturally occurring article.

[7. d.] n. Involving no artificial or man-made ingredients, chemicals, etc.; ecological, organic; spec. (of food and drink) containing no artificial colourings, flavorings, or preservatives.

[9.b.] n. That which belongs to the natural world or occurs in the ordinary course of things.

[1.] adj. Existing or present by nature; inherent in the very constitution of a person or thing; innate; not acquired or assumed.

Undoubtedly, neither is this list complete nor does every provided definition seem to logically correlate with popularly-demanded qualities in food products; obvious in its absurdity in relation to food and food labeling is definition 6.b., in which the word “natural” refers to one’s genitals (unless one wanted to argue for a correlation to the Eden tradition of seductive fruit, which could be possible depending on the label in question and the skill of the critic). Several of the other provided definitions (for a complete list, see Appendix) and/or portions of the definitions relate more closely to the ideals consumers tend to associate with “natural” food products than to the reality of the food’s industrial production.

What “Natural” Suggests

As mentioned, specific associations with the “natural” may vary from person to person, and there is little a comprehensive study can do to accommodate for such variances. Wimsatt and Beardsley point out that a poem may seem to lose clarity over time or across cultures as collective ideas shift (53). Not unlike the semiological understanding of language itself or Lacan’s “mirror stage” theory (Blonsky xxxi), the general human understanding of the world is based on an integral and continuous cycle of perception, resulting reality, and ongoing reevaluation and repetition; the cycle is represented in the following diagram:

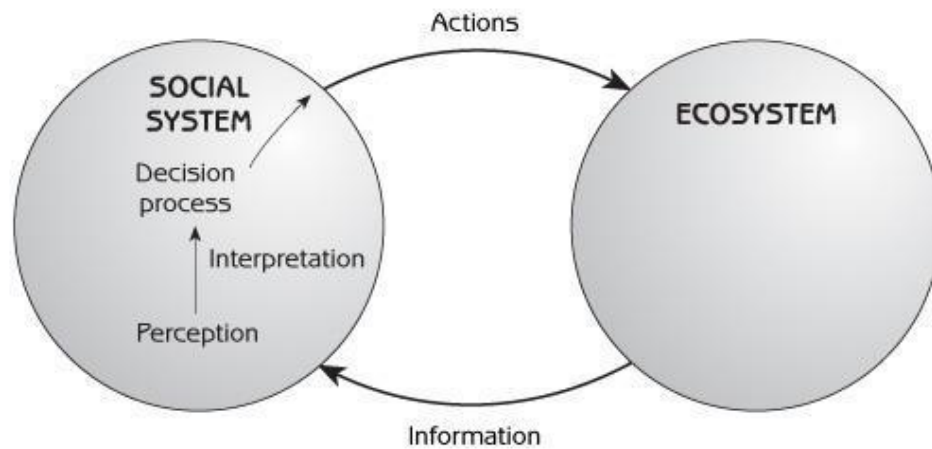


Figure 2- The cycle of societal decision making's impact on the ecosystem and the ecosystem's resulting impact on perception, which affects further decisions (Marten np)

Society must observe their surroundings in order to form a “worldview” that serves as a collectively-mandated concept and contributes to the formation of informal *suggestions*. The collective suggestions correspond with the broad “pseudo-statements” about the universe, the soul, etc. that Richards warns cannot be regarded as hard facts, as they are constantly susceptible to reevaluation and reinterpretation by others in society. Hence, the human perception of the surrounding ecosystem—or more pertinent to this paper’s discussion, the human perception of what is “natural”—is equally as sentient as language itself. As people continue to see the term “natural” attached to prepackaged foods, the observation will contribute to and alter their existing views on what “natural” is, and the new conclusion will become the new reality in their minds.

Evidenced by McCluskey and Loureiro’s study, English speakers attach positive associations to the term “natural” despite the contradiction of the prepackaged, supermarket driven industry. Brillat-Savarin also expresses in his writings an overwhelming preference for

food considered more rudimentary and therefore more “natural.” Although Brillat-Savarin credits quantitative science, Barthes conjectures reasons more poetic, employing whole coffee beans as a case study:

One can crush them or grind them. BS greatly prefers the first method of reduction, for which he honours the Turks...what is ground depends on a mechanism; the hand is applied to the mill as a force, not as an art...what the grinder thus produces—abstractly, as it were—is a coffee dust, a dry and depersonalized substance. On the other hand, what is crushed comes from a series of bodily gestures (pressing, turning in various ways), and these gestures are transmitted directly through the most noble, the most human of all materials, wood...the precedence which the artisanal takes over the industrial—in short, nostalgia for the Natural. (65)

Certainly, the “series of bodily gestures” cannot be tasted in the crushed coffee; it is the emotive association attached to the gestures and the “natural” product that Barthes proposes effect Brillat-Savarin’s perception of its superiority. As demonstrated by Marten’s model of the formation of societal perception (Figure 2), attachments to the term “natural” tend to overlap, lead into, and relate to one another. Following are several predominant *suggestions* critics could attribute to the term “natural” as employed on contemporary food labels. While elements of pre-industrial nostalgia, spiritualism, a comforting home, and a nurturing mother appear most relevant to modern food labels, the possible amount of extraneous suggestions are, of course, limitless.

Twentieth-century literary theory suggests a linguistic platform for the otherwise-inexplicable “nostalgia for the natural” via the structuralist principle that meaning is dependent

on man's ability to understand. French structuralist and anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss argues that "the bringing into existence of the very thought of meaning...instantly confers meaning on everything" (qtd. Fry, "Deconstruction" np). Effectively, as soon as man understands that objects are culturally linked to meanings, language is born in his mind "in one fell swoop" (qtd. Fry, "Deconstruction" np). Language follows nature, which already was there, rendering it impossible for human culture to coincide with the existence of nature. Levi-Strauss exhibits "nostalgia for the natural" in his book *Tristes Tropiques*, writing "what is more, the pleasures which the sea has to offer are now no longer available to us. Like an animal whose carapace thickens with age...most European countries have allowed their coasts to become cluttered with villas, hotels, and casinos" (333). Though it is now integral in the way the modern world functions, Levi-Strauss exhibits clear disdain for where the "littoral" (333) material culture has replaced earthen structures that preexisted human intervention. Levi-Strauss's sentiment, which his accompanying literary theory supports, is echoed by writers before, concurrent to, and after him in world literature tradition.

"Natural" analysis begins with the supposed correlation between the "natural" and the divine home. Stemming from what Brooks calls "the general tradition" (76), literary critics—and really all participants in the English language—have presumably encountered some form of reference to the traditional Christian representation of Edenic Paradise. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* links classic Biblical text to that of the poetic tradition. Cycles of cultural revisitation and reinvention ensure that the notion has transformed over time, and its lingering aspects correlate implicitly with the notion of the "natural." English-speaking writers and artists have capitalized on a nostalgia for the "quintessential home" (Ladino 89) for centuries. In American literature,

“natural narratives are fraught with nostalgia—for the western frontier, for unspoiled landscapes, for a pre-industrial golden age, or for harmonious communities with close connections to nature” (Ladino 89). The apparent nostalgia for the natural creates an interesting dilemma for both American and British English speakers who never lived on the “natural” land. All the same, the representation of the home front- “natural” continues to manifest in contemporary art and popular culture, often intermixing with the previous “natural is pre-industrial” association; Hollywood tends to portray the farmer archetype as a caricature of traditionally nostalgic principle. The farmer’s dirt-streaked face is virtuous where he stands strong alongside his kind, tight-knit family in the “vision of a rutted dirt road, a farmhouse in need of paint and with a sloping front porch...a tired old plow horse, and the faithful family dog” (Blatt 1). Nostalgic images romanticize a sense of closeness to the earth and unquantifiable sensations of fulfillment and comfort. As demonstrated by Brillat-Savarin’s coffee preference (Barthes 65), epicurean scholars also recognize this guttural human phenomenon, referencing the physicality of eating and drawing a connection between the human body and the “natural” earth. Pastoral depictions of gardens and farms are common on contemporary American food labels, presumably in correlation to such favorable associations.

Additional market usages of “natural” liken to related ideals of the ‘Mother’ Earth and conjure feelings of protection, strength, and responsibility. Despite their own undoubtedly industrially-dependent lifestyles, 19th-century Romantic poets celebrated nature by praising it as the supreme source of life. Perhaps one of the most widely-recognized and immediately referenced American Romantic poets was Walt Whitman, who penned a number of verses uniting “natural” ideals to the American landscape, thereby perpetuating society’s current

associations of “natural” with “home,” “comfort,” and “Mother.” Three lines of his short and aptly-titled *America* ode describe America in terms that suggest characteristics of the conventional- and also natural/spiritual/homely/comforting ‘Mother Earth:’

Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
 Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
 A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother. (3-5)

Whitman’s metaphorical association of America with the Mother Earth persona links comforting “nostalgia for natural” to the “rich,/ perennial” American land again. Language from the Romantic period, though not necessarily depictive of history, relies heavily on appeals to emotion and latent psychological desires, again bringing the tradition back to “nostalgia.” In and of itself, the idea of ‘Mother Nature’ links images of nature with the ideas of safety and security—thus, comfort—one associates with a nurturer.

Considering also the historical correlation of prepackaged convenience foods with American gender roles of the 1950s, it is not surprising to find food packages wrought with references to the mother and the family. A Triscuit advertisement that appeared in a 1905 Ladies Home Journal proclaims: “The popularity of the queen of the kitchen depends largely upon her ability to surprise and please her subjects. If she will invoke the aid of Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuit her talk will be simplified and the loyalty of her subjects unquestioned” (Parkin 30). Even as American feminism erupted through the 60s and 70s, advertisers perpetually subordinated women into marginally-eased homemaker roles by marketing products that would make preparing meals for their family easier and less time-consuming. Advertisements for convenience food such as frozen dinners and canned soups promised women they could fulfill

their duties to their families and express their love without dedicating hours to meal preparation (Parkin 32). Many modern food labels still depict the woman as the household cook whose “day cannot accept a break in the family circle” (Blonsky 435). Traces of the role a mother is expected to play in nourishing her children remain in the food industry via lasting mascots, taglines, etc., which harmonize the Romantic, mystical Mother Earth image to contemporary societal ideals.

Though the American woman’s role in society has certainly changed over the years, it is still widely assumed that a model mother loves her children and loves her family. Logically, any parent who loves his/her children wants to keep them safe and healthy. Thus, notions of “healthfulness” often intertwine with the understanding of the term “natural,” especially in conjunction with familial overtones. Products appear to be marketed either toward the mother who wishes to be reassured she is making good, responsible choices in feeding her family or toward the a-gender consumer who seeks to be reminded of the nurturing comfort of his/her own mother, who prepared excellent meals. Of course, one’s actual role as a mother and/or connection to one’s mother matters little, as the label is a pseudo-truth: if the label elicits feelings of responsibility, contentment, or protection, the feeling exists regardless of verifiable, outside truth.

Example 1: Garden of Eatin’ Sesame Blues

This particular bag of Sesame Blues tortilla chips exemplifies one angle by which marketers utilize the term “natural” to suggest comforting, secondary ideas to the word’s cognitive meaning. Of course, New Critics would maintain that it is impossible to pinpoint one hard strand of scientific fact that links this packaging—the ‘poem’—to ideals of spiritual comfort

associated with the Christian Garden of Eden. He or she can only denote the multitude of poetic elements that corroborate into a specific meaning, as “the critic’s report will speak of emotions which are not only complex and dependent upon a precise object but also, and for these reasons, stable” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 48). At any rate, critics begin an interpretation of a poem with existing knowledge of Brooks’s “tradition” (76). William Tyndale’s translation of the Christian Bible in 1526 marked the enormously-popular religious text’s successful introduction to the English language (British Library np). Judeo-Christian images of Eden promote an ideal vision of nature that has long been upheld in English-speaking tradition as the quintessential image of origin—an idea that, when applied to food, tends to appeal to consumers. Consider the bag of tortilla chips in Figure 3:



Figure 3- Garden of Eatin’ Tortilla Chips (Garden of Eatin’ np)

Cognitively, “natural” in the phrase “ALL NATURAL TORTILLA CHIPS WITH SESAME SEEDS” can be understood to mean the tortilla chips are “based in the natural world or in the

usual course of nature” (OED 6.a.). The depictions of corn stalks bordering the text and the hyper-realistic illustration of the ear of blue corn, which is framed in a tan circle suggestive of the earth, supplement such a reading of the term “natural” by reminding consumers that the tortilla chips first existed, or are “based in” (OED 6.a.) the earthly soil.

Building on these perceptions, this brand of chips explicitly —and rather humorously— capitalizes on “natural’s” emotive *suggestion* of Paradise. Despite the indicative brand name, consumers understand that the “ALL NATURAL TORTILLA CHIPS” do not *actually* hail from a divine haven. All the same, a New Criticism literary critic would argue that the use of the term “natural” within the context of this specific bag of chips, while *meant* to indicate the quality of the corn used to make the chips, *suggests* notions of sanctuary, salvation, divinity, and perfection. The suggestions satisfy the emotional yearning poetry exists to mitigate. In further buttress of a religious interpretation of the term “natural” within the context of this package, a literary critic may also make reference to the motif of the color blue, reasoning that not only is it representative of the blue corn used to make the chips but that it also symbolizes the sky and traditional notions of heaven. In this way, the collective aspects of the product’s packaging converge to create Eliot-isian unity. From an advertising standpoint, such a reading of the package would be considered hugely successful; if a potential consumer links these Garden of Eatin’ tortilla chips to almighty ideals of Paradise, he or she may be more apt to select these chips over competitors’ less-appealing products.

Example 2: Kashi Apple Cobbler Soft ‘n Chewy Bars

In another example (Figure 4, below), marketers capitalize on the implicit nurturing ideas suggested by the term “natural” via cognitive statements of accomplishment and responsibility.

The Kashi Apple Cobbler Soft n' Chewy Bars are suggested by the packaging to be objects of conscientiousness and love. By extension, one who purchases the “All Natural” bars is conscientious and loving—the ideal nurturer. The box simply proclaims the bars to be “All Natural.” Readers must extend their attention to surrounding text and visuals to determine how to interpret the word “natural” in the box’s specific paradigm.



Figure 4- Kashi Apple Cobbler Soft n' Chewy Bars (Kashi np)

Much of the text on the box explicitly comments on taking care of one’s family. By definition, most Americans would recognize that an apple cobbler is a dessert made with apples and pastry dough, though what the term *suggests* by extension is a warm, gooey dessert that has been prepared by someone—traditionally a mother—and is served as a special treat. The description of the bars as “soft-baked goodness with sweet apples and a touch of warm cinnamon” furthers the suggested notion of homemade comfort through both the image of a person *baking* the bars (the “goodness”) and the sensory descriptions of how the “sweet apples” and “warm cinnamon” taste on one’s tongue. Implicitly, the text’s design also suggests notions

of lightheartedness and nurture: designers printed “Apple Cobbler Soft n’ Chewy Bars” in san-serif font reminiscent of hand-written notes. When the consumer turns the box over, he/she finds that the san-serif font could be indicative of text on a blackboard. A rudimentary diagram of a soft n’ chewy bar mimics an image one would expect to find in an elementary schoolroom or textbook, and the expletives “kid friendly!” and “Fruit + Veggie + Whole Grains = 1 Nutritious Snack” underscore the caretaking theme.

The large, prominent ribbon that runs across the front of the box boasts that the bars are “Made with real fruit and veggie”—two items that are commonly understood to be healthy and nourishing. The use of the colloquial “veggie” instead of the more formal and intimidating “vegetable” adds to the overall familiar tone of the package as “veggie” is a word a parent may say to his/her young child in an effort to make eating the nutritious food more appealing and less daunting. The accompanying line of text, “Bring home real fruit and veggie goodness in a tasty snack your family will love,” which loops across the front of the package in a playful manner, reaffirms that the consumer is to read this package from the assumed role of ‘good parent,’ as the copy clearly presumes the consumer is buying the bars for his/her family. In Brooks’s words, the images have “become a symbol heavily charged with meanings which no dictionary can be expected to give. When the symbol is revived at the end of the poem, even though in somewhat different guise, the effect is powerful” (73). The elements undoubtedly function as signs just as communicative as the printed text, jointly suggesting kindness and playfulness akin to the attitude one associates with the ideal mother.

Hinted at earlier, the combination of copy and images that make up the package also encompass a number of references to good physical health. In addition to the “Made with real

fruit and veggie” banner, the front and back panels of the package feature a picture of an apple next to a cinnamon stick. Despite the fact that the bars are obviously processed products and the ingredients are long from raw, the visual image suggests ideas of whole, intact ingredients—a notion that is encouraged by the “*Naturally Sweetened*” [emphasis added] claim. Given all of this evidence, a critic could surmise that the term “natural” in this instance is indicative of “involving no artificial or man-made ingredients, chemicals, etc.; ecological, organic... containing no artificial colourings, flavorings, or preservatives” (OED 7.d). Just like a child is a product of its mother, the bars are, within the label-poem, products of the earth that have been reared with care. As a whole, the label appeals to the consumer-reader by dually reminding him/her of ideals of his/her own childhood and complimenting him/her on being a good parent him/herself. Of course, whether or not the consumer did have a merry childhood and whether or not the consumer is a good parent are irrelevant facts within the accepted reality of the label-poem.

INVESTIGATION: THE INDUSTRY

‘What’s the use of their having names,’ the Gnat said, ‘if they won’t answer to them?’ (Carroll 129)

Carroll’s poor Gnat would certainly not appreciate the institutional mismarking of food; though the food’s labels boast of “natural” qualities, it is clear that the makers are under little legal obligation to match the “natural” name to a dictionary-definition-natural product. Vague definitions provided by food industry regulators render the word “natural” essentially devoid of meaning, particularly in America. Historically, this was not always the case: back in 1886, the

Oleomargarine Act sought to protect both the dairy industry from collapse and the public from deceit by taxing margarine, and the “Filled Milk Act” of 1923 barred the interstate sale of milk that contained supplementary non-dairy fats on account of “fraud upon the public” (Wilson 223). When the Great Depression placed pressure on the country and on individuals to procure food cheaply, the industry answered with a barrage of inexpensive substitutes that stretched what today’s market would call “organic” food. At the time, the FDA’s antiquated 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act bore no leverage over highly imitative foods such as Bred-Spread, which was made to look and taste like jam despite containing mostly pectin and little fruit, so long as the marketers did not attempt to pass off the products as their “distinctive name” (which in the case of Bred-Spread would be “jam”) (Wilson 223). FDR revolutionized the FDA in the late 1930s when he signed new legislation that enforced all foods be labeled with their “common or usual name” and made to adhere to corresponding standards; the idea backfired when companies simply began to implement the word “imitation” in front of their “common or usual name” thereby evading accusations of pleasant-sounding dishonesty (Wilson 225).

Agencies responsible for regulating what industries can and cannot use in the mass production of food are also responsible for regulating how the industries are able to market the food to society—i.e., they regulate language. Consider the following paragraph the FDA published in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of their website:

From a food science perspective, it is difficult to define a food product that is 'natural' because the food has probably been processed and is no longer the product of the earth. That said, FDA has not developed a definition for use of the term natural or its derivatives. However, the agency has not objected to the use of

the term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances. (Dept. of Human Services np)

Thus, according to the FDA, the term “natural” *cannot* retain its true meaning within the context of the food industry. Why, then, do countless labels of countless food products across the country claim to be “natural?”

Complication 1: Food Additives

Today’s food market relies heavily on human manipulation of food via what are generally termed “food additives.” Manufacturers add substances to food items for a plethora of reasons: some additives enhance color, smell, taste, durability, longevity, and/or bulk (Blatt 199). From a rhetorical standpoint, defining “food additive” is straightforward enough: anything that was not in the original, live organism before it was converted into its ready-to-be-consumed state is an additive. Somewhere along the line, a human manually and purposefully inserted a substance into the organism. Pertaining to the “natural” debate, it also seems fairly straightforward that human intercession should render the resulting product distinctly *unnatural*. Nonetheless, the FDA, which nests in the executive branch of the United States under the Department of Health and Human Services, approaches the definition of “food additive” and consequently the definition of “natural” differently. Official litigation rules that as long as the substance being added to the food is “generally recognized, among qualified experts, as having been adequately shown to be safe under the conditions of its intended use, or unless the use of the substance is otherwise excluded from the definition of a food additive” (Dept. of Human Services np). If a food additive is GRAS (the FDA’s ironically-named acronym for Generally Recognized As Safe), the manufacturer need not list the additive in the list of ingredients that

appears on the food's label (Blatt 199). When the FDA instituted the GRAS rule in 1958, there were 182 GRAS chemicals; three years later, the list had grown to 718 (Wilson 232). Currently, the FDA's website lists 562 GRAS chemicals (Dept. of Human Services np). The FDA's policy directly opposes the commonly upheld OED definition, as even if the additive did "[exist] in...nature" (OED 1), as some do, humans interceded in manually joining it to the base product, thereby nullifying the same definition's tail end, "innate; not acquired or assumed." Further, food manufacturers, not the FDA, are responsible for conducting tests and deeming whether or not they "generally recognize" their own product to be safe (Blatt 200). A food's naturalness then, according to the American government, is based in the perception of safety. Undoubtedly, the radical disparities between mandated and legal definitions of the term "natural" not only problematize the language but also raise alarm. Legal regulations of the American government have aided industry in purposefully and quietly re-inventing "natural," which holds traditionally-positive societal associations, into a fine-print contradiction of itself.

Accepting the FDA's contradictory definition for argument, a linguist also may question whether or not the GRAS additive, isolated from the holistic food, could be considered "natural" in the context of the OED. After all, many labels boast claims of "natural flavor added," which should mean that the *flavor* is natural, regardless of the overall status of the complete food. Again, the perception of what is "natural" boils down to how one interprets language, not how one employs facts. Though the vast majority of food additives on the market have been synthesized by the human hand (Blatt 205), some additives, such as ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) for instance, do occur in nature. Still, the body may not be able to deal with the substance in human-generated over abundance (Blatt 204). The ambiguous language of FDA regulations

paired with the built-in practice of industry providing their own biased scientific evidence allows room for ample unspecific interpretation. Effectively, the operative qualification of a food's overall natural vs. unnatural identity is neither its closeness to the earth nor its factual innocuousness. Beyond the fact that the vast majority of American society already disagrees with the FDA's definition of "natural," scientific evidence suggests that the food, though "generally recognized" as such, is *not* even entirely safe (Blatt 204).

Complication 2: Industrial Agriculture

As is apparent in contemporary marketing trends of rustic barnyard imagery and American popular culture's quaint, nostalgic portrayal of farms, American society largely associates farms with implications of serenity and proximity to the earth (Blatt 1). Ergo, to assume that the country's agricultural sector produces "natural" food follows the ideal in suit. Surely something that was produced "naturally" was "not altered or improved in any way" (OED 3.a.) and "has not been processed or manufactured" (OED 6.a.)? As it is, modern technology, in combination with capitalist desire for profit, disrupts the quintessential pastoral vision and replaces it instead with chemicals and rigid domestication of animals. Collman, who attaches monetary notions to "natural" food, challenges the federal definitions of "natural:"

Ancient farming methods are now being promoted in the West to produce expensive natural food without the use of possibly toxic agrochemicals. The affluent few who can afford these foods believe that if products are 'natural,' they must be safe and superior. At the same time, they decry genetically modified crops, which can be grown not only with less synthetic chemicals, but also more cheaply than conventional foods. (35)

To consumers who accept or assume the first OED definition of the adjective “natural” as “existing in or caused by nature; not made or caused by humankind,” the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) definition comes as quite a shock; according to the USDA, a “natural food” is “*minimally processed*” [emphasis added] (Dept. of Agriculture). The USDA’s approval of processing to an unspecified degree exists in direct paradox to the dictionary’s definition and works in the rhetorical favor of food producers. The marketing agents who work for food producers are legally allowed to use the term “natural” (and thereby imply all of its customarily-associated ideals) without actually adhering to its factual, dictionary-determined limits.

Food Labels: Poetry or Science?

Remembering Brillat-Savarin’s sensually-evocative descriptions and explanations of food’s role in Western culture, linguists can easily connect texts written in relation to food to poetic discourse. Food labels in particular play a dual role in identifying and advertising food products to the public. Applying Richards’s theory suggests that labels, seeking to appeal to consumers’ sensual, physical desires, require the distorted references of poetry in order to function effectively. The emotive appeals cannot be decisively resolved. Richards’s binary theory means that emotive appeals of “poetry” are not-“science” and therefore not-fact, which is to say, they are fiction. Everything on the label—every word, image, color—is attached to a number of simultaneous concepts, each contributing to the label’s overall appearance of emotionally-satisfying unity even though the realistic world in which the food exists complicates and thwarts the impossible desires the label is made to appear to fulfill. In specific regards to this paper, the current market’s portrayal of the “natural” on food labels exists as poetry:

“natural” food is an impossible emotional desire that society can only resolve with perceived harmony.

Welford describes the vast majority of consumers as “easy prey” (5) in relation to the enormous powerhouses both of the industry marketers, who utilize the purposefully misleading vocabulary to sell their products, and of the industry regulators in federal government, who enable instead of police such action. In a study published in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Lusk et al. acknowledge the purposeful miscommunication between industry and consumers in noting that “[c]onsumers make decisions based on their perceptions of quality, but the utility consumers actually receive from a product is based on actual quality” (np). Consumers see the word “natural” and innocently associate it with the classic OED definitions that the marketing agents support via appropriate label “decorations,” as we have seen Brooks term them; however, since industry regulators assert that the word “natural” can legally be applied to a number of artifices, what the marketers *mean* when they use the term is separate from what they tend to *suggest*. The system of communication is malleable, rendering the word itself to be an object of interpretation instead of an object of fact. In short, the labels masquerade as facts while they quietly function as poetic pseudo-truths. So long as the marketers deem that their consumers may be more favorable toward quaint, old-world notions of food preparation, they can and will promote their products as “natural” in both text and repeated decoration. Consumers see the word “natural” accompanying nostalgic images of antiquated pastoral farmland, and in their minds, the product assumes quintessential “natural” ideals which are much more appealing than its “minimally processed” reality.

Example 3: Kix Cereal

The following box of Kix Cereal boasts that it is “made with All Natural Corn.” In respect to the OED’s definitions, it makes most logical sense for readers to read “natural,” as used on the cereal box, as falling under definition 7. The statement appeals to the hope that the corn is “not manufactured or processed; not obtained by artificial processes; made only from natural products.” The vague ending of definition 7.a. is as unclear as the USDA guidelines, as “manufactured using only simple or minimal processes” leaves a great deal to personal interpretation. The straight-forward idea that Kix Cereal is “a natural thing or object” (OED 6.a.) seems to be more fitting. On the front of the box, the individual pieces of Kix Cereal are depicted in the place of the kernels of a green ear of corn, as if the cereal and the plant are one and the same. Above the corn, marketers also include a small illustration of a grain of wheat, reminding consumers that the cereal is “Whole Grain Guaranteed”—though whether the “grain” in question is corn or wheat seems irrelevant. Nonetheless, the images coinciding with the copy reinstate the latter portion of definition 6.a., depicting Kix Cereal as “something having its basis in the natural world or in the usual course of nature.” Still, when the OED specifies the word’s ‘modern use’ to be “a natural product, a product that has not been processed or manufactured,” scrupulous readers note that the cereal, despite its depiction inside an illustration of an ear of corn, has undoubtedly been processed and manufactured a great deal, therefore complicating wholly accurate the use of the word “natural” on its packaging. Thus, in analyzing the cereal box word-by-word, it seems that one cannot employ an OED definition of the word “natural” to the Kix Cereal box without stretching the fact-based veracity of the word.



Figure 5- Kix Crispy Corn Puffs Cereal (General Mills np)

Significantly more important than what consumers see pictured on the box's front is, perhaps, what the marketers choose to disregard. Both customary and expected, the ingredient list is printed in small, unexciting black-and-white text and is located on the box's side rather than its front; though not visually enticing, it provides valuable information pertaining to the cereal's "natural" character. The ingredients list reads as follows: "Whole Grain Corn, Corn Meal, Sugar, Corn Bran, Salt, Brown Sugar Syrup, Trisodium Phosphate, Vitamin E (mixed tocopherols) Added to Preserve Freshness." As noted, the mere reality that the ingredients have obviously been processed by human labor to some degree (the corn was ground into corn meal, the sugar was harvested from the cane and refined, etc.), technically invalidates "natural" claims. Moreover, much of the recent years' surge in American corn production can be credited to staggering increases in genetic engineering and advances in agricultural technology specific to the corn industry (Blatt 53), and cereal makers strive to ensure that a medley of additional human

interference goes unreported. In 2012, California legislature voted on Proposition 37, which would have, if passed, mandated that manufacturers include proper labeling on all genetically-modified products (Mercola np). Breakfast cereals have long been among the worst culprits of misleading “natural” claims, and even innocent-sounding ingredients such as Kix’s “Whole Grain Corn” are oftentimes subject to highly *un-natural* agricultural and preparation practices. As of 2007, 73% of American corn had been genetically modified (Blatt 89). Because genetic modification technology is still relatively new, many scientists caution manufacturers to refrain from their use until further testing can be completed. A popular countering argument posits that unspecific regulation complicates a product’s qualification as “genetically modified” so much so that a loose interpretation would mean that just about *everything* could be argued to be genetically modified, and therefore, the phenomena is more or less unavoidable. Such an argument only advocates the importance of rhetoric and established convention within the industry.

Additionally, industrially-produced cereal grains are commonly sprayed with loosely-regulated toxic pesticides while in the fields and a number of other laboratory-synthesized chemicals during various other stages of production and packaging. A large portion of synthesized, determinately *un-natural* chemicals typically used in industrial agriculture have been effectively linked to a number of concrete adverse effects on human and environmental health. U.S. companies have the freedom to use an unnerving eighty-two different chemicals that are banned for safety precautions in the European Union (Smith, Azoulay, and Tuncak 6). Amid the eighty-two chemicals are carcinogens that have been linked to cancer and endocrine disruptors that have been shown to interfere with a number of biological functions in the

respiratory, reproductive, neurological, and metabolic systems, among others (Tuncak 7).

Without any systematic regulation on the use of these chemicals, companies are essentially able to ignore them when they develop marketing techniques for their products. Effectively then, calling a product “natural” even though its ingredients were grown using laboratory-synthesized chemicals perturbs the concept “natural” signifies and challenges associated poetic ideals.

Moreover, purposefully shielding information from the public’s knowledge and continuing to use contradictory language to sell products makes for a situation wherein consumers are manipulated and deceived by the labels on their food.

Unsurprisingly, General Mills was one of the many large-scale food producing companies in opposition to Proposition 37 and even donated \$1.1 million to the “No to Proposition 37” campaign (Mercola np). Regardless of the myriad of highly *un-natural* man-made substances the cereal contains, overarching federal laws allow marketers to continue to apply the term “natural” to Kix Cereal, and the conventions of language make it so that society applies the implications of comfort and wellness themselves. It does not take a professional marketer to assess that boasts of “Potentially Unsafe!” or “May be Linked to Cancer!” do not sell products; customers undoubtedly find the phrase “All-Natural” more appealing. The marketing designers responsible for the copy on General Mills’s Kix Cereal box sought to promote many of the popular ideals society associates with the word “natural:” Kix Cereal is healthy, children will eat it, its round little granules practically came straight from the farm, and apparently, eating *this* breakfast is indicative of a functioning household. While marketers may want to imply any number—possibly all—of these ideas, the enigmatic term “natural” hampers any definitive scientific conclusion. A scholar of New Criticism would argue that the overall appearance of the

box, encompassing the ear of corn, the grain of wheat, the text “Kid Tested Mother Approved,” and certainly the boast of being “Made with All Natural Corn” unite to an overall harmonic notion: the cereal is healthy, family-friendly, and “a product that has not been processed or manufactured” (OED 6.a.). Regrettably, the impression created by the packaging is based on signifiers that have been factually disconnected from their societally-understood signified concepts.

DISCOURSE, DERRIDA, AND DECONSTRUCTION

In regards to contemporary food labels, one might consider the factual definitions of the term “natural” as provided by the OED, the USDA, and the FDA as well as the associations society commonly attributes to the word in what Brooks calls “the general tradition” (76). Not one of the 84 varying entries for the term “natural” mentions anything concerning healthy nutrition, being “Generally Recognized As Safe,” or connecting to “the quintessential home” (Ladino 89); nonetheless, marketers purposefully include neighboring images (“whole grain guaranteed,” the picture of the ear of corn, “kid tested, mother approved,” etc.) to augment the plentitude of favorable ideas “natural” suggests, thereby actively perverting society’s modern *langage* to best cater to its financial ventures. Clearly, the crucial question raised is not what “natural” *means* exactly. Instead, analysts must ask into which paradigm society contextualizes the term. The exceeding measures marketers take to create sensational, emotive, and fictitious labels indicate that labels should be read as Richards’s “poetry,” but it is not uncommon for customers to assume that a product deemed “natural” on the label is subject to factual regulations concerning its physical quality. Effectively, what the food industry has done is present itself as a

part of the scientific paradigm while implementing language that can only be regarded as poetry. As demonstrated, Kix Cereal does not meet any of the dictionary's eighty-four provided definitions, and the images of it being wholesome, healthy, homegrown, and familial are not supported by verifiable evidence.

Following a list of erroneous texts that evoked significant emotional response, Wimsatt and Beardsley conclude "None of these examples...offers any evidence, in short, that what a word does to a person is to be ascribed to anything except what it *means*, or if this connection is not apparent, at the most and with a little reflection, by what it *suggests*" (37). Perhaps the critics would have agreed to add the poetic rhetoric of the Kix Cereal box to the list; the text and imagery that interlace to form the unified poetry of the product's package do not, on their own, instill much of a response. Remember the inane cartoon of the irrelevant "Whole Grain" and of course, the problematic "All Natural Corn." A close investigation to the components' *meanings* divulges very little that would appeal to consumers' desire to purchase the Kix Cereal. Wimsatt and Beardsley's supposition is correct—the marketers rely on consumers' emotional craving for everything the "natural" objects implicitly *suggest*.

Derrida and Deconstruction: "Natural" Kix Cereal vs. the not-"Natural"

The year spanning 1966-1967 is eventful in the strange American food industry: Razzles, Pop Tarts, and Pringles all hit the shelves, and the FDA launches new protocol obliging producers to list ingredients on the labels of prepackaged goods (Wilson 233). In tandem, Jacques Derrida freezes the literary criticism world in its tracks with his rebellious theory of deconstruction. Derrida, who cannot be considered a "literary" critic on grounds that he deemphasizes a text's classification as "literature" ("Deconstruction I" np), stresses that the

structuralism approach to linguistics presupposes language's linear nature by assuming that "in order to become an object of study a language, or a model of it, must be constructed from the evidence of individual utterances" (Scholes 14). Structuralism, according to Derrida, operates in a cyclic paradox; to assume that language is a construct of man is to assume that there had to have been an impossible point of origin. Even alluding back to when cavemen grunted for food, Derrida asserts that "the grunt is already distinguished from other grunts and that the world has already been divided into the categories of 'food' and 'non-food'" (Culler 96). Therefore, the recognition that objects differ from one another—their *différance*—is recognition of their varying identities, or in a semiotic sense, it is a recognition that they hold varying meanings (Culler 97). Language is the one structure that cannot exist outside of itself, as at the point one considers language, he/she has already understood and applied meaning to a myriad of objects surrounding him/her. To that end, discussing the language of literature necessitates one to acknowledge that the language has become a meta-lingual, for the text "knows" it is a text even if it does not "say" it is a text—Wimsatt and Beardsley credit Coleridge with applying ideas of "a 'willing suspension of disbelief' and a 'temporary half faith'" (qtd. Wimsatt and Beardsley 43). Classifying literature into genres also necessitates recognition of how one work differs from another, which is to say, what qualifies one work as "fiction" versus a work of "non-fiction." Removing the applied labels of *différance*, every literary text is simply language in the general discourse, and every discussion of literary text is language speaking of language.

In essence, deconstruction explains that the text of the food label exists beyond the limiting genre of merely "food labels." Speaking of only one general discourse, the discourse of language, the term "natural" functions as any other term in language: it differentiates one object

from all other objects that are not it. So long as a participant in language can perceive that one object is “natural” and another object is distinctly “not-natural,” the ingredients on the side panel do not matter any more or less than any other components that may distinguish the objects from one another. By that end, deconstruction asserts that it is not what makes “natural” Kix Cereal “natural” so much as what makes “natural” Kix Cereal *not*-not-natural. The following image exemplifies what one may recognize as a distinctly not-natural cereal:



Figure 6- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Cereal (Raisin Foods np)

In comparison, the Kix Cereal (Figure 5) and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Cereal (above, Figure 6) share several characteristics: both are breakfast cereals packaged in identically-shaped cardboard boxes, both have a series of words and pictures to depict what is contained inside, and one can assume that when a consumer would open the boxes, both would contain grains of cereal that are about the same size. Additionally, investigation and application of FDA and USDA

standards dictate that there is no surefire way of knowing precisely what man-made chemicals and toxins may have been involved in the making of the cereals; still, marketers have separated the two products by deeming Kix Cereal to be “natural,” leaving consumers to assume that Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal, by comparison, is “not-natural.”

A critical inspection of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal packaging offers contrast from that of the Kix Cereal: the vivid color scheme and strong lines resemble the cartoon for which the cereal was created, suggesting a lack of seriousness or maturity. Whereas the Kix Cereal proclaims to be both “Kid Tested” and “Mother Approved,” the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal capitalizes on an appeal to the silliness and lighthearted fun of childhood. In accordance to poetic associations, the only adults who would eat “PIZZA-SHAPED MARSHMALLOWS” for breakfast are indulging in nostalgia for their childhood, not nostalgia for the natural, as elements such as the ear of corn and attention to family values insinuate to be the case with Kix. Further, whereas the Kix Cereal pieces are portrayed to be a part of the corn itself, the larger-than-life bowl of “Crunchy sweetened ‘Ninja Nets’ with ‘Ninja Turtle’ Marshmallows” exist in an obviously fantastic universe, extending the notions of both childish imagination and a separation from “the usual course of nature” in which Kix Cereal is professed to be based (OED 6.a.). Normally, consumers would not linger on the specificities of the differences between the two cereals before quickly and knowingly recognizing that Kix Cereal harbors a “natural” identity where the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal does not.

Derrida would point out that the *différance* between the two cereals—and what makes Kix Cereal “natural” as opposed to “not-natural”—is not the content of the cereal at all, but instead it is the consumer perception of it. Kix Cereal’s “natural” identity is determinate upon its

comparative appearance against surrounding objects. That being said, if analysts widen the paradigm to Derrida's general "discourse," it becomes necessary to also compare Kix Cereal with other items: is Kix Cereal "natural" in comparison to canned corn? an ear of corn? corn bread? a cornfield? The dilemma does not go unnoticed by Culler, who questions the deconstruction theory of language, asking, "if...meaning is thought of as the product of language rather than its source, how might that affect interpretation" (110)? Surely, his rhetorical question cannot be answered indefinitely. Nonetheless, it does highlight the essential structuralism problem that Derrida confronts: language and meaning are separated by human mediation, which makes meaning mutable and language inconcrete.

FOOD, CULTURE, AND LOOKING AHEAD

Historically, civilization has depended on stable means of food production and consumption to anchor them to a stationary, secure way of living. Thus, to industrialize food production and consumption in a society is to industrialize a society's culture. The question Pollan centralizes as the modern "omnivore's dilemma" asks how one should eat in today's gastronomically-complicated world. In a land of dizzying choice and rhetoric, the act of eating transcends mere bodily function and mediates on discourses of ecology, economics, politics, and social justice (Schneider 385). Though an increasing popularity of "natural" rhetoric in the prepackaged food industry¹ could attest to contemporary American consumers' desire for a renewed kinship to the earth through their food, Pollan maintains the desire exploits nothing more than a rhetorical paradox. Writing that he regards shopping at Whole Foods Market to be

¹ Pollan (16) and Schneider (384) both reference Whole Foods Market grocery stores as a popular contemporary supplier of "natural" food products.

nothing short of “a literary experience” (Pollan 143), Pollan notes the labels’ “evocative prose” as he browses the aisles of the purportedly “natural” grocer. More often than not, the bucolic-sounding ingredients he traces back to their agricultural sources reveal less-than-ideal actualities. Over the course of his investigations and analysis, Pollan establishes a troupe he refers to as the Supermarket Pastoral:

Taken as a whole, the story on offer in Whole Foods is a pastoral narrative in which farm animals live much as they did in the books we read as children, and our fruits and vegetables grow in well-composed soils on small farms much like Joel Salatin’s. “Organic” on the label conjures up a rich narrative, even if it is the consumer who fills in most of the details, supplying the hero (American Family Farmer), the villain (Agribusinessman), and the literary genre, which I’ve come to think of as Supermarket Pastoral. By now we may know better than to believe this too simple story, but not much better, and the grocery store poets do everything they can to encourage us in our willing suspension of disbelief. (147)

The simple fairy tale is easily understood, and the flat characters leave little room for challenging which images are meant to be “good” and which images are meant to be “evil,” especially within the established American literary tradition. Relating the food label, as Pollan so artfully does, back again to notions of poetry and artifice, it is necessary to recognize that the label “is really just an imperfect substitute for direct observation of how a food is produced, a concession to the reality that most people in an industrial society haven’t the time or the inclination to follow their food back to the farm...which today is apt to be, on average, fifteen hundred miles away” (147). Like Barthe’s Image, the “natural” label exists in a self-referential state that, when pitted against

ordinary physical laws, would be disproven by itself. Because the label could and does exist in a “suspended state” (Blonsky xxxi), the impossible ideal can be realized; in mitigating the distance between humans and their food with labels, “sex and politics have become romance and knowledgeable eating and drinking. Pleasure is the great naturalizer—food, drink and no analysis” (Blonsky xxxiii).

In essence, the basic concept of the Imaginary that enables producers to convince consumers to purchase their arbitrary products is the same property that makes Kix Cereal more “natural” than the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal. Inasmuch as the food industry relies on chemical supplementation and rhetorical strategy, it is also intrinsically tied to the much less controllable elements of both capricious weather patterns that may affect crops and the “inelastic” capacity of each human to only be able to stomach roughly 1500 pounds of food per year (Pollan 107). Thus, in order to insure and further increase their profits, industry must utilize appealing presentations to elevate the value of the raw materials they produce, or in other words, make consumers pay more money for equal or smaller amounts of product. Though the corn product a company may use in a breakfast cereal may only cost the producers about \$0.04 per box, promises of the cereal’s “natural” goodness and whatnot can effectively convince consumers that the cereal is worth closer to \$4.00 per box (Pollan 105). Clearly, issues of the Imaginary label hearken not only back to poetic ideals but also to the substantial disconnect between contemporary American society and their food sources.

Recognizing the gap and its cultural implications, Italian gastronome Carlo Petrini conceived the symbolic-based Slow Food Movement, a cultural reformation aiming to “relocate food as the center of human culture” (Schneider 388). Though Petrini’s ideology owes much of

its foundation to the Italian Leftist movements of the 1970s, it gained ground—and its current, pointedly English-language name—in the mid-1980s, when a McDonalds restaurant opened at the iconic Piazza de Spagna in Rome (Schneider 386). With its prevailing interest in the expediency of impersonal, streamlined meals made of ambiguous-quality ingredients, McDonalds epitomizes societal disconnect from food. Borrowing heavily from the writings of Brillat-Savarin, Petrini’s augmentation of community’s essential role in food systems propelled the spread of the Slow Food Movement to other areas, such as the United Kingdom and the United States. Among other methods, the Slow Food Movement’s push for food education in communities by ways of public gardens and food science classes in schools promotes both greater connections between human societies and their foods and the fostering of unique local culture (Schneider 391).

Far from Luddite-induced ignorance, the Slow Food Movement advocates “a more intense mode of engaging with the world” (Schneider 395). The idea of “virtuous globalization” (397) would not completely revoke ventures of capitalism but instead ethically relate and support collaborative communities. In each of their writings, Pollan and Petrini both reference the conviviality of food and eating, echoing Brillat-Savarin’s declaration, “Gourmandise is one of the principle bonds of society” (Mediation XI). Petrini’s re-understanding of food demands partakers to regard food as a principle of community rather than a mechanism of capital gain. Schneider references historian Massimo Montinari’s theory of food’s structural “grammar,” illustrating that literary theorists can relate society’s regard for food to society’s understanding of language; based in a delicate duplicity of human construct and convention, they are each both rooted in and subject to their specific societies. With careful study, one might reason that a

gastronomic re-imagination such as Petrini's Slow Food Movement could function not unlike Derrida's theory of deconstruction and effectively upend modern society's malleable understanding of the foodscape.

CONCLUSION

There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" (when she thought it over afterwards it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but, when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge (Carroll 8).

At least pertaining to convenience food's "natural" identity, it seems as if the vast majority of the English-speaking public behaves in much the same manner as Alice, regarding an unfitting description to warrant very little extra thought; the industry's use of the sign both in writing and in suggestive, pertinent imagery has worked to effectively and subtly restructure how the word functions. "Natural" food, by convention, brings to mind an ironic lack of human interference that must, logically, be crucial to the creation of any food item found in a supermarket. Beyond even the obvious human acts of agriculturally growing, packaging, and transporting the food, research reveals that modern science has allowed the food industry to alter the food even further via laboratory-synthesized chemicals and other additives, many of which

remain unmentioned when labeling the food as “natural.” Referencing Saussure’s original lectures, Scholes reiterates in his *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* that the word itself is “a complex whole which links a sound-image and a concept” (15). Therefore, the term “natural,” like any other word, only functions as a part of a system wherein both the speaker and those with whom the speaker is communicating agree to attach the same common concept to the term in question; however, within poetic discourse, readers expect and accept that words take on definitions supplementary to those listed in the dictionary.

Prepackaged food is obviously not “natural” by the dictionary’s standards; it is the celebrated result of human ingenuity and modern enterprise. Especially in the wake of World War II’s dreariness, advertisers lionized the artifice and invited consumer to do the same, for “thanks to the wonder of flavor technology, no one need stint themselves or their children any more. It was Space Invader crisps and cheap ice lollies all around” (Wilson 254). Given that food-label “natural” cannot be understood in the scientific sense, the language of the food industry must then be understood to be poetic—which provides an intriguing portrait of contemporary society’s desires and consumers’ ignorance as to what they are purchasing. The ubiquitous and poetic “natural” rhetoric food industries include in their marketing demonstrates society’s aspiration to exist in close proximity to nature. Equally as important, the traditionally positive association the public subconsciously attaches to the term “natural” renders the marketer’s emotion-based sales strategy evidently lucrative. According to the principles of twentieth-century literary structural theorists, marketers in the food industry utilize poetic strategy to construct emotion-enticing labels, effectively manipulating language for profit. Can they do that? Is it even legal?

As it turns out, yes it is. Not only that, but work of later literary theorists, namely Jacques Derrida, argues that the industry is not committing a linguistic foul at all. The *différance* separating “natural” food from “not-natural” food exists—it is simply the packaging itself. Discussing the work of Craig Claiborne, an American gastronomic writer in the mid-1980s, Blonsky notes, rather pessimistically: “the fantasy of changing the world and confronting society has been turned into the urge to accept society and live within its values” (Blonsky xxxiii). Commenting on Brillat-Savarin’s work, Barthes accentuates the clear connection between hedonistic gastronomic pleasure and hedonistic sexual pleasure, noting that society only regards the latter as a “perversion” (62) despite the social and physiological similarities. The tactile, bodily relationship food demands has been largely disregarded and muddled by ideals. In effect, modern industry’s slyly poetic, realistically nonsensical language on prepackaged food labels renders a trip to the supermarket akin to a dizzying fall down the rabbit hole.

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Appendix

Natural, Oxford English Dictionary

Natural, noun

I. A natural condition or attribute.

1. In *pl.* The inborn mental or physical endowments of a person; natural gifts or powers of mind (or body). Occas. as *pure naturals* in same sense (cf. sense 3a). Freq. with possessive adjective. *Obs.*
2. Natural disposition, inclination, or character. *Obs.*
3.
 - a. *in one's (pure) naturals* [after post-classical Latin *in puris naturalibus*] : in a purely natural condition, not altered or improved in any way; completely naked. *Obs.*
 - b. Natural form or condition. *Obs.*
4. A normal feature or attribute. *Obs.* rare
5. In *pl.* Normal bodily features or characteristics, as opposed to those which are subject to illness or disease. Freq. contrasted with non-natural adj.

II. A person or thing having a natural, unaltered, or unrefined quality or attribute.

6.
 - a. A natural thing or object; something having its basis in the natural world or in the usual course of nature. In modern use: a natural product, a product that has not been processed or manufactured.
 - b. The genitals. Also in *pl.* Cf. natural parts n. Now rare.
7. A person having a low learning ability or intellectual capacity; a person born with impaired intelligence. Cf. natural fool n.
8.
 - a. A person whose moral or spiritual sense is either unawakened or uneducated, or is deduced only through human reason. Cf. natural adj. 9. *Obs.*
 - b. A mistress. *Obs.*
 - c. orig. U.S. A person naturally endowed *for* (a role, etc.) or *at* (a skill, etc.); a person having natural gifts or talents; a thing naturally having qualities necessary for success, or making it particularly suitable *for* (a particular purpose).
9. the natural.
 - a. The real thing or person; real life. *Obs.*
 - b. That which belongs to the natural world or occurs in the ordinary course of things.
10. Music.
 - a. A note in a natural scale. Cf. natural adj. 13.
 - b. the sign \natural , applied to a note to signal the cancellation of its former sharpened or flattened value, and hence a return to its value in the natural scale.
 - c. Each of the keys on a keyboard instrument (now usually coloured white) which produces a note in a natural scale.
11. A style of wig made from human hair. Cf. natural wig n.

- 12.
- a. In any gambling game: a combination or score that immediately wins; *esp.* (in craps) a score of seven. Also (in extended use): a period of seven years' incarceration.
 - b. *Cards*. A hand in pontoon (blackjack) totaling 21 in the first deal of cards.
13. *colloq.* (orig. Eng. regional (south.)). = natural life n.; now usu. in **in all my natural, for the rest of my natural**.
14. The off-white or beige colour of unbleached and undyed fabric.
15. *Archaeol.* Undisturbed soil or rock, below the levels affected by human activity.
16. *U.S.* A black hairstyle in which the hair is not straightened or bleached; *spec.* an Afro.
17. On a cut diamond: a small area of the surface of the crystal left in its original condition; = naïf adj.
18. *Math.* = natural number n. at natural adj. and adv. Special uses

III. A person or thing of or from a designated region; a native.

- 19.
- a. A native of a place or country. Now rare.
 - b. A plant, animal, or product native to a particular country, region, etc. Obs. rare.
20. A native language. Obs. rare

IV. A person having an interest in nature.

- 21.
- a. A naturalist. Obs.
 - b. A nature poet. Obs. rare.

Natural, adjective/adverb

A. Adjective

I. Existing in, determined by, conforming to, or based on nature.

1. Existing or present by nature; inherent in the very constitution of a person or thing; innate; not acquired or assumed.
2. Consistent with nature; normal, expected.
 - a. Ordinary; conforming to a usual or normal character (or constitution).
 - b. Of an emotion, reaction, event, etc.: naturally arising or resulting from, fully consonant with, or appropriate to the circumstances; predictable, understandable.
 - c. Being such by the nature of things or force of circumstances; inevitably or obviously such.
 - d. Normally or essentially connected with, related to, or belonging to a person or thing; consonant with or inherent or proper to the nature or character of the person or thing.
 - e. With *to*. Of a quality, attribute, emotion, etc.: that belongs intrinsically *to a* person or thing; that comes easily or spontaneously *to a* person.

- f. Of a condition, environment, etc.: naturally adapted *for*, or applicable to, something. Obs.
- g. as natural as breathing and variants: designating activities or circumstances which seem entirely natural or instinctive; second nature.
3. Having a real or physical existence.
- a. Belonging to, operating, or taking place in, the physical (as opposed to the spiritual or intellectual) world. Now rare.
- b. Actually existent, as opposed to what is spiritual, intellectual, fictitious, etc. In alter use only in natural body n. at Special uses.
- c. Belonging to the inanimate part of the natural world. Obs. rare
4. Based upon innate moral feeling; instinctively or immediately felt to be right and fair, though not prescribed by any enactment or formal compact; having a claim to be followed or acted on even if not legally prescribed. Cf. natural law n., natural justice n.
5. Based on nature or the intrinsic properties of a thing.
- a. Of a period of time: determined by cycles of nature.
- b. Of a quantity, number, measure, etc.: arising from or based on fundamental or intrinsic properties of an object or entity.
- c. Of a branch of science, or a method of arrangement, classification, etc.: having a basis in the normal constitution of things; arising from intrinsic properties. Chiefly in Biol.: (of a classification system or its groups) intended to correspond to the relationships presumed or inferred to exist between the organisms classified, rather than being based on an arbitrary or convenient principle; not artificial.
- d. *Math.* Designating a standard trigonometric function of an angle, as opposed to the logarithm of such a function.
- 6.
- a. Not unusual, exceptional, irregular, or miraculous; explicable in terms of natural phenomena. Cf. natural causes n.
- b. Of a function, characteristic, disease, etc., of the human body: occurring or appearing spontaneously or in the course of nature.
- c. Of death: resulting from old age or disease, not brought about by accident, violence, poison, etc. Also, in extended use, in (to die) a natural death: to fade away, become forgotten. Cf. natural causes n.
7. Formed by nature, not subject to human intervention, not artificial.
- a. Of a substance or article: not manufactured or processed; not obtained by artificial processes; made only from natural products. Also: manufactured using only simple or minimal processes; made so as to imitate or blend with the naturally occurring article.
- b. Occurring in, or part of, the environment; inherent in the form of an organism, etc.
- c. Of vegetation: growing of itself; self-sown, self-propagated; not introduced artificially. Also of land or a landscape: not cultivated or altered.
- d. Involving no artificial or man-made ingredients, chemicals, etc.; ecological, organic; spec. (of food and drink) containing no artificial colorings, flavorings, or preservatives.

- e. Of a medicine, treatment, etc.: avoiding the use of pharmaceuticals and other artificial or manufactured substance; alternative, complementary, or homeopathic. Designating or relating to methods of birth control which rely on recognition of the fertile phase of a woman's menstrual cycle, esp. a method in which couples abstain from intercourse during this phase rather than use contraceptives (also called rhythm method). Cf. NFP n.
- 8.
- a. Sc. Having innate abilities and gifts. Obs. rare.
 - b. Having the innate ability to fill the specified role, adopt the specified profession, display a particular character, etc.
- 9.
- a. Theol. Of a person: spiritually unenlightened; unregenerate; having a belief system or world view uninformed by revelation. Obs.
 - b. Philos. and Theol. Of a system of belief, etc.: derived entirely from experience of the natural world; arrived at by reason and observation rather than through revelation or enlightenment. Cf. natural reason n. 2, natural religion n., natural theology n.
 - c. Having only the wisdom given by nature; not educated by study. Obs. rare.
- 10.
- a. Of thought, behaviour, or expression: having the ease or simplicity of nature; free from affectation, artificiality, or constraint; simple, unaffected, easy.
 - b. Of a person: acting in accordance with one's innate character; not dissimulating, deceiving, or affected.
 - c. U.S. Wild, savage. Obs. rare—1.
11. Unaltered, not enhanced.
- a. Of a person, his or her appearance, attributes, etc.: having the normal form, colour, etc.; not disfigured, disguised, or altered in any way. Of a style of hairdressing: having the appearance of being unstyled (see also natural n.1 16).
 - b. Of a fabric: having the colour of its unbleached and undyed state. Of a colour: that of the unbleached and undyed fabric (cf. natural colour n. 1).
 - c. Of a decorative finish: that retains or enhances the colour and texture of the original material. Also of wood, etc.: not painted, stained, or otherwise artificially coloured.
12. Of appearance.
- a. Of pictorial representation or visual effect: closely imitating nature; lifelike, exact.
 - b. (as) natural as life : entirely natural, esp. in appearance or behaviour; appearing as if alive.
13. Music. Designating a note in the western musical system that is uninflected by a sharp or flat or any sign indicating a modification of diatonic pitch. Also of a key, harmony, etc. Cf. natural n.1 10). Also in fig. context. natural horn, scale, trumpet: see Special uses 2.

II. Relating to birth or family; native.

- 14.
- a. Of a person: having a status (esp. of allegiance or authority) by birth; natural-born. Cf. natural subject n. at Special uses 2. Obs. (hist. in later use).
 - b. Of the transfer of a privilege, property, etc.: according to right of heredity. Hence of property, a privilege, etc. (later also a trait): hereditary; possessed by right of birth.
- 15.
- a. Of a person: related genetically but not legally to his or her father; born outside marriage, illegitimate.
 - b. Of a person's child: genetically related (without reference to legal recognition). Formerly also: esp. born in lawful wedlock, legitimate (obs.). Also in extended use.
 - c. Of any other relation: genetically related, related by birth.
- 16.
- a. Observant of familial obligations; appropriately affectionate towards a close relative. Obs.
 - b. Feeling or exhibiting innate or spontaneous kindness, affection, or †gratitude. See also natural-hearted at Special uses 1. Now rare (regional).
 - c. Showing, or behaving so as to show, such a feeling to or towards a person, etc. Obs.
- 17.
- a. Of a country or language: being that of a person's birth; native. Cf. natural language n. 1. Obs.
 - b. Of a person: native to a country; native-born. Obs.
 - c. With names of specific nationalities, as natural Englishman, etc. Also designating words of the specified language. Obs.
 - d. That is a native of the specified place. Obs.

III. Relating to nature as an object of study.

- 18.
- a. Of a person: given to the study of the natural world and natural phenomena. Now only in natural historian n., natural philosopher n., natural scientist n.
 - b. Dealing with, concerned with, or relating to the natural world and natural phenomena as objects of study or research. Now chiefly in natural knowledge and natural history n., natural philosophy n., natural science n.

B. Adverb.

colloq. and regional. In a natural manner; = naturally adv. to come natural (usu. with to): to be a natural or instinctive action; to be achieved without apparent effort or difficulty.