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(Un)Packing a Green Box

Moments of Infrastructural Valuation at a Delivery Service for
Alternative Food

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To my grandmother, who loved me a lot, but still made me Spaghetti with Ketchup sometimes.

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Introduction

Markets for *alternative* food products are booming (e.g. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017). Nowadays, consumers can choose between a sheer uncountable number of products all of which promise *alternatives* to the increasing environmental, social, and cultural problems caused by *industrial* agriculture. Besides growing efforts to institutionalize *alternative* food production, most prominently through market-based regulation in form of organic or fair-trade certificates, more and more agrifood businesses strive for service innovations that bridge the gap between producers and consumers of *alternative* foodstuffs. One of these innovations that has become emblematic for *alternative* food markets is the “box scheme”. The exact organization of a box scheme differs from company to company. However, widely associated with the idea of bringing food directly “from farm to table” most box schemes offer subscription based home-deliveries of boxes filled with an individualized selection of *alternative* food products.

The *alternatives* that box schemes offer in contrast to *industrial* food are manifold. To mention a few, the product that box-scheme-companies bring into existence—a product that I call *Green Boxes* throughout this thesis—often contains organic food, regional food, seasonal food, or all at once. Put differently, *Green Boxes* seem to accumulate *good* food, in an era when *bad* food is all around. Besides that, *Green Boxes* offer a convenient *alternative* to driving to the supermarket, squeezing yourself through overcrowded rows of shelves, or doing other things that could risk your inner peace. In short, in many contexts, *Green Boxes* seem like a consumable answer to many of the controversies and problems that characterize nowadays debates concerning the future of food and agriculture.

Nevertheless, many of my readers will know another—more *alternative*—person who now raises the finger to say something like: “Well, you know, this or that product contained in your *Green Box* is actually not so much of an *alternative* product, but for this and that reason much more of an *industrial* product”. And so on, and so forth. I won’t go into details here. My point is simply that looking for truly *alternative* food can quickly turn into a *Sisyphean* task, which is why I will abandon the idea of finding truth in food for the length of this thesis.

Hence, other than looking for truly *alternative* food, my inquiry is with the very notion of *alternativeness* and with situations in which people arrive at the conclusion that this or that product forms a true *alternative* to *industrial* food. In doing so, I presuppose that there is no singular reality of truly *alternative* food. Nevertheless, I also presuppose that the *Sisyphean* task of searching it, has become a key driver of Euro/Western debates concerned with how and what to eat.

Given this, the biggest difference between my research and the inquiry of those who seek to find truly *alternative* food products might be a diverging conception concerning the locus of truth. This is because the idea of truly *alternative* food is often accompanied by the idea that *alternativeness* is a quality that is somehow essential, inherent, or at least materially attached to certain food products. To provide an example, you might have heard people talking about the “soul” of food products like beer, cheese, or bread, which can be interpreted as a somewhat animistic view on food—a view that goes hand in hand with the idea that certain human-made qualities can be translated into an inner essence of what we eat. I do not deny this idea, and think that sometimes it makes sense to think of food as having essential, inherent, or soul-like qualities. However, with regards to the restless character of most debates concerning *alternative* food choices, I think another perspective is more fruitful. Which is why, in this thesis, I take a social-constructionist viewpoint. My research inquiry is with the social construction of *alternativeness*, as a quality that never will be, but is all too often treated as if it was essential to some of the things we eat. In short, my inquiry is with what I call the *Sisyphean* task of searching truly *alternative* food, and with exploring why and how this task is acquiring so much attention these days¹.

This social constructivist stance towards the assumed qualities of things and how they acquire significance in contemporary techno-societies is rooted in an emerging strand of research that has formed around the journal *Valuation Studies*, first published in 2013. Research affiliated with *Valuation Studies* is rooted in two important assumptions: Firstly, scholars assume that the value of things is more complex than widely accepted differentiations between economic value (in the singular), and moral values (in the plural) suggest. Along with that, it is assumed that these different kinds of value(s) cannot be separated as strictly as it is commonly assumed. Instead, scholars presuppose that what is seen to be pure economic value always relies on moral values, and vice versa. Which is why the respective scholars are foremost concerned with studying value(s), as simultaneous entanglements of value and values (e.g. Hennion, 2017), also referred to as “worth” (e.g. Stark, 2009)—approaches that are more suitable for exploring the heterogeneous and hybrid ways in which things, people, or actions are made valuable in contemporary societies. Secondly, valuation studies scholars suggest to study “value(s) as social practices”, “valuation practices”, or simply “valuations”. As

¹ This social-constructivist stance towards food is moreover the reason why I keep italicizing terms like “industrial” and “alternative”. In other words, italicizing these terms is supposed to signify my reluctance to ‘buy into’ these ill-defined labels as accurate descriptors for what is going on in the realm of food and agriculture, while simultaneously acknowledging that the implied dualism or synonymously used dualisms (e.g. *conventional/organic*, *intensive/extensive*, *productionist/sustainable*, and so on) form the dominant way of thinking, talking, and writing about agrifood innovation.

it is argued, studying value(s) in practice is a more fruitful approach, in order not to reproduce simplistic considerations of what value(s) truly, or essentially are. To provide an example, let us think about a food activist who “saves” a conventional apple from a dumpster in front of a supermarket—a practice that is commonly referred to as “dumpster diving”. Whereas the practice of dumpster diving is widely seen as quite an *alternative* thing to do, when exclusively looking at the lacking *alternative* certificate of the apple, most people would describe it as *industrial*. Given this fictional situation, from a *Valuation Studies* inflected perspective, the question to be asked would not be which of these descriptions is right, but how do “their outcomes take part in the ordering of society” (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 3). How come that so many people blame conventional food for being bad, while still buying it? Or, how come that the dumpster diver sees an officially conventional apple as a legitimate *alternative* to other foodstuffs? And so on. Hence from a *Valuation Studies* perspective, it is not the truthfulness of value(s) that is investigated in the first place, but its/their multiple realities, and how some of these co-existing realities, acquire significance in contemporary societies, while others do not.

When translated into the field of food and agriculture, this form of inquiry with value(s) as contingent social practices seems much more interesting and empirically feasible than the *Sisyphian* task of searching truly *alternative* food. This brings me back to my empirical interest with *Green Boxes* as both, a product and an infrastructural element contributing to a valuation of *alternative* food. In pursuing the overall question “*How is food being valued at a delivery services for Green Boxes?*” my focus is on the situated and infrastructurally afforded practices through which actors on the ground acquire certainty about the seemingly objective fact that the different foodstuffs they fill into *Green Boxes* meet adequate requirements of *alternativeness*.

To answer this question, I conducted a two-week ethnographic case study based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews at a delivery service for *Green Boxes* that I gave the fictional name *Green Delivery*. The site of *Green Delivery* is located in the surrounding area of Berlin, a city which is known for its lively *alternative* food movements. I selected *Green Delivery* as my site of inquiry for two main reasons: On the one hand, *Green Delivery* provides an interesting site for studying the process of how a plurality of customer wishes concerning *alternative* food is turned into singularized *alternative* food products, that is *Green Boxes*. On the other hand, the site of *Green Delivery*, seems like a perfect site to explore the infrastructural specificities that are required for generating products that are widely accepted as *alternative*. Hence, as I argue, the site of *Green Delivery* forms a fruitful site to explore what I call “infrastructural valuations of *alternative* food”, and the kinds of *alternativeness* they render durable across space and time.

Hence, besides contributing to rather theoretical problems raised within the journal *Valuation Studies*, my thesis is also targeted at a more far-reaching problem, that is the assumed dichotomy between *good* and *bad* food, and the ways in which this assumed dichotomy influences contemporary techno-societies. This concern with the sometimes-problematic implications of societies increasing concern with *alternative* food, equally corresponds with recent developments in the field of rural studies. As an example, in an article for the *Journal of Rural Studies*, Catherine Phillips (2016) argues that most research concerned with *alternative* food and agriculture “orients around the scale and effectiveness of their *alternativeness* [and] the question of how much of a challenge they do (and can) offer to the neoliberalisation of agrifood” (p. 209). In other words, Phillips criticizes that by taking the dichotomy between *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture for granted, most scholarly research enacts *alternative* agriculture as the antipode of *industrial* agriculture. By this she means that *alternative* agriculture is commonly enacted as a form of agriculture that cannot exist without *industrial* agriculture, and hence as a form of agriculture that is somehow tied to similar logics for generating worth, while diametrically reversing the trajectory of valuation.

To attend to these corresponding developments in the field of rural studies, the field of infrastructure studies, and recent developments in interdisciplinary debates stimulated by *Valuation Studies*, in this thesis I will problematize this dichotomous view on *alternative* and *industrial* food and agriculture. In my empirical argument, I will first carve out the co-existing valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that can be traced at the site of *Green Delivery*, before reconstructing how these valuations and enactments of *alternativeness* relate to the company’s infrastructure. Given this, I do not only see this thesis as a contribution to those theoretical debates within *Valuation Studies* that go beyond the investigation of economic contexts. Instead, I also see it as a more applicable piece of writing, in the sense that it combines the perspectives of agrifood practitioners with an STS inflected theoretical angle that seems capable of providing their shared experiences and criticisms with new momentum.

State of the Art

A study on the processes and contexts in which *alternative* food products are being valued these days must be situated in an understanding of how food acquires the attribution of being *alternative* in contemporary techno-societies. Most public debates concerned with the value(s) certain food products hold—or should hold these days—presuppose a clear distinction between *alternative* and *industrial* food, as two diametrical paradigms that form a seemingly universal dichotomy of agrifood. In this chapter, I challenge this dichotomous view on the value(s) of food and agriculture, by showing that depending on the level of analysis the assumed boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* food becomes more permeable. I show that when scrutinizing practices of food production, distribution, or consumption, what is seen as *alternative* and *industrial* food products share important characteristics. To refine my argument concerning the simultaneous similarity and difference of *alternative* and *industrial* food, I subsequently zoom into contemporary research on infrastructures—a research program that crucially informs my non-binary view of how agricultural practice generates worth in contemporary Euro/Western societies. To add to these strands of thought and to provide a foundation for my empirical investigations, I finally go on to situate the phenomenon of *alternative* food within debates that have emerged around the journal *Valuation Studies*. A shared focus of these interdisciplinary debates is a concern with value(s) as situated practices. In this thesis, I adopt this focus in order to consider *alternativeness* as being constantly in the making, other than a fixed quality.

On the Ambivalent Relation between *Industrial* and *Alternative* Food

Approaching Industrial Agriculture from a STS Perspective

Over the past decades, agriculture and food production have turned into crucially contested and diversely discussed topics within the natural sciences, as well as the social sciences and humanities. The realm of agriculture is vast and multifaceted, comprising a sheer uncountable number of different knowledge cultures, technologies, and ideas concerning what makes *good* or *bad* agricultural practice, and ideas of how future food supply can be guaranteed over the next decades. As Isobel Tomlinson (2013) describes in her analysis of international food policy discourses, “within the emergent international policy arena of ‘food security’, the imperative to double global food production by 2050 has become ubiquitous” (p. 81). According to her study, the need to double food production, in order to feed an anticipated world population of nine billion people by 2050, has turned into a “dominant framing” giving rise to a rather narrow way

of envisioning global food challenges and their resolution. As she puts it, this framing is dominated by what she what she calls a “neo-Malthusian” reasoning, in which the production of more food is rendered an absolute and unquestionable goal. What is interesting about her argument is that it does not rely on the *a priori* differentiation between *alternative* and *industrial* food production, as ill-defined placeholders for ill-defined categories of *good* and *bad* agriculture. Instead, Tomlinson (2013) foregrounds the processual character of agricultural innovation and how it enacts what is considered to be the dominant reality of a global food challenge—in case of her study, by focusing on the performativity of food security debates, as it plays out in political reports, scientific publications, and other relevant documents. Other than presupposing certain forms of agriculture to be categorically desirable and others to be categorically detrimental, Tomlinson provides a fruitful example for a more symmetrical stance towards agricultural development efforts. An example in which *good* intentions may still have *bad* consequences, and vice versa. As such, I use her study as an entry point for trying to think about how to analyze food and agriculture without falling into what Michael Goodman, Damian Maye, and Lewis Holloway (2010), call “unreflexive binaries” (p. 1786) that shape contemporary debates concerning *industrial* food production, and *alternatives* that are envisioned to be more ethical, sustainable, profitable, healthy or all in once.

Another compelling example to think about this rather permeable boundary between *industrial* and *alternative* agriculture, is offered by Les Levidow, Kean Birch, and Theo Papaioannou (2013), and their analysis of the European Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE)—an influential research and development (R&D) agenda within the European Union. One of the core arguments the authors establish is that European efforts to innovate food production are crucially shaped by two conflicting “rival visions of agricultural innovation” (p. 25). Firstly, a “dominant life sciences vision” (ibid.), and secondly, an inferior “agro-ecological” vision. As they argue, both visions link “different paradigms of technoscience and of quality” (p. 25), while enacting agricultural innovation as always aiming to be more productive, sustainable, and therein ethical. This observation complements the point raised by Tomlinson (2013), because it provides an impression of how often quite conflicting opinions concerning how to feed nine billion people by 2050 acquire a status of truthfulness or falsehood, depending on the paradigm in which they circulate. Besides that, the authors raise another point that is crucial for my interest in the permeable boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture. Drawing on the report “Taking European Knowledge Society Seriously” by Ulrike Felt and other co-authors (2007), the authors show how the KBBE provides a “master narrative” for both advocates of the life sciences paradigm, and advocates of the agroecology paradigm. In a paragraph worth quoting at length they explain the consequences this

paradigmatic view on agriculture has on how agricultural knowledge is crafted in the European Union and beyond:

“Each paradigm has distinctive metaphors — e.g., cell factories or organic recycling — which project human activities onto nature. Such metaphors naturalise a technoscientific system which frames resource usage in its own image. As this discursive role illustrates, a master narrative can reinforce ‘taken-for-granted aspects of social order’ (Felt, rapporteur, 2007); here the dominant paradigm’s language reinforces a wider narrative of economic-technological process. As a marginal paradigm, by contrast, agro-ecology somehow must question that social order in order to gain research funds” (p. 26).

It is particularly the last sentence of this quote that is important for my argument concerning the permeable boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* forms of agriculture. The sentence shows that, other than developing independently from one another, the dichotomously opposed realms of *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture seem to co-constitute one another on a level of knowledge, technology, and innovation. Within the continuously re-enacted dichotomy, *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture seem to be more connected than often assumed.

This observation resonates with another strand of social science literature concerned with tracing the historical patterns that turned industrialism into the dominant logic of today’s food production and consumption. The central points of this discourse are the technologically mediated processes of abstraction, simplification, or rationalization that explain both the rapid expansion, as well as the problematic implications of *industrial* agriculture—processes in which natural entities like humans, animals, plants, or fungi are being modified in the course of making them amenable to, or compatible with, an *industrial* logic of maximizing production.

An important precursor of these studies is Sidney Mintz’s (1986) research on colonial sugarcane plantations in the US, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Focusing on the commodity chain of a single food product, Mintz reconstructs the processes that turned sugar cane from a negligible into an indispensable constituent of Euro/Western diets. As such, he establishes the central argument that colonial sugar cane plantations, due to their high level of organization, their reliance on interchangeable labor units, and their rigid separation of production and consumption, served as an inspiration for the organization of later factories in England, in which heterogeneous living worlds of humans and non-humans were forced into a similarly *industrial* logic.

In her recent work on the commodity chain of Matsutake mushrooms, Anna Tsing (2015) picks up this argument. In line with Mintz, she refers to 16th and 17th century colonial sugar cane plantations as an entry point to grasp the pervasive logic of *industrial* agriculture. Tsing argues that the rapid expansion of sugar cane plantations, and respectively *industrial* forms of agriculture, are rooted in the alienating work of crafting interchangeable project units—in case of her example cloned plants, and enslaved workers. What is crucial about both Mintz's and Tsing's accounts and typical for the emerging cross-disciplinary discourse concerned with living in the so called "Anthropocene" (e.g. Latour, 2017; Tsing, Bubandt, Gan, & Swanson, 2017) is the attempt to scrutinize modern capitalism (including *industrial* agriculture), while paying closer attention to the empirically traceable entanglements of humans, non-humans, or more-than-humans, and how they challenge *a priori* distinctions between *goodness* and *badness*. This analytical focus is not to be misunderstood as being in favor of capitalism. Instead, and put into simplified words, it is an attempt not to reproduce a way of thinking in which the only antithesis to capitalism is non-capitalism—or to refer back to the study of Levidow, Birch, and Papaioannou (2013)—it is an attempt not to reproduce a way of thinking in which the only antithesis to the "dominant life science paradigm" remains in the co-constituted inferior "agroecology paradigm". To make this point clear, let me provide you with a description that Tsing (2015) provides in her introductory chapter, that outlines why she chose Matsutake mushrooms as the object of her research inquiry:

"Imagine 'first nature' to mean ecological relations (including humans) and 'second nature' to refer to capitalist transformations of the environment. [...] My book then offers 'third nature,' that is, what manages to live despite capitalism." (p. viii).

Hence, by tracing the more-than-human living worlds Matsutake mushrooms are entangled with in their globalized supply chain, Tsing sets out to create a counter-narrative that evades from reproducing the limiting dichotomy of capitalist or non-capitalist logics of change. Translated into my line of argumentation, this would be a counter-narrative that evades from reproducing the limiting dichotomy of *industrial* and *alternative* agricultures.

An argument that sheds a similar light on the complexities of technologically mediated agricultural production can be found in James Scott's seminal study "Seeing like a state" (1998). As a supplement to Tsing's concern with more-than-human living worlds, Scott puts a stronger emphasis on the role that certain state-driven measuring and visualizing technologies play in making subjects and their "natural possessions" legible. More precisely, Scott establishes the argument that the very process of making nature legible, requires it to fit into

an *industrial* logic in which the heterogeneity and difference of natural entities is turned into interchangeability. A fruitful example of what he means by that is provided in his chapter concerned with the emergence of 18th century forest management in Prussia and Saxony. More precisely, he argues that the scientifically induced innovation of forestry, agriculture, and other forms of land co-constituted a way of describing, defining, and visualizing a nature that is relevant for the trajectory of *industrialization* and another nature that is irrelevant to it—like strikingly captured in the mundane categorization between *good* plants, as crops, and *bad* plants, as weeds.

As a last example, the focus on agricultural technologies, and how they do not only help to physically alter the earth's natural surface, but how they come to define new realities of what is considered to be natural (and what is not) in the process of producing food, is shared in Deborah Fitzgerald's historical study "Every farm a factory" (2003). In line with the other contributions that I outlined in this section, Fitzgerald describes the emergence of an *industrial* agricultural logic, as a process that does not only render plants, animals, and human labor, but also space and time, crucially interchangeable, as vividly captured in her following description:

"From a technical industrial point of view, Montana and the Caucasus are essentially interchangeable because the crops are the same, the geography is similar, and they are both amenable to the same equipment and schedule. Those dimensions that are different—the history, the people, the political and economic situation—are irrelevant to the logic of producing wheat" (p. 188).

Building on this selective overview of research that is either part of, or relevant to, contemporary STS research concerning food and agriculture, I argue to go into this thesis with a flexible and processual understanding of what makes food and agriculture *industrial* or *alternative*. I suggest being more cautious about reproducing a paradigmatic dichotomy in which one side of the agrifood sector is deemed quintessentially *good*, whereas the other side of the agrifood sector is deemed quintessentially *bad*. Instead, I invite you to think about *industrial* and *alternative* food and agriculture in a more symmetrical way—to think about *industrial* agricultures, as potentially imbued with *not-so-industrial* logics and vice versa.

Approaching Alternative Agriculture from a STS Perspective

In order to provide a better impression of what I mean by *not-so-industrial* logics that influence contemporary food production, I would like to shift the attention towards a strand of STS inflected research that focuses on what is widely accepted as *alternative* agriculture. Again,

the reason why I italicize the term “alternative” agriculture, or the reason why I use bumpy expressions like “widely accepted as *alternative* agriculture”, is rooted in my personal, ontopolitical concern with not reproducing commonplace universalisms in writing about the *goodness* or *badness* of this or that agriculture. It is in this ontopolitical concern where I would see the main difference between my research and the research that I will proceed to outline in this section. Nevertheless, even though the scholars whose work I will introduce in this section mention their support for the *alternative* agricultures they investigate more explicitly than I do in this thesis, the reason why their work still provides a rich source of inspiration for my work is that they nicely capture that the rise, or fall, of *alternative* agriculture is by far not an all-natural phenomenon. Instead, and in line with the authors whom I introduced in the previous section, the respective scholars open up discussions concerning *alternative* agricultural knowledge, technology, and practice as societal processes that co-constitute how nature is perceived in contemporary techno-societies.

A good entry point to familiarize oneself with this strand of research is the chapter “Agricultural Systems: Co-producing Knowledge and Food”, in the most recent edition of the STS Handbook (Iles, Graddy-Lovelace, Montenegro, & Galt, 2017). In the chapter, the authors provide a thorough overview of the rather dispersed strands of STS inflected scholarship concerning food and agriculture, while calling for more STS research on how *alternative* forms of food and agriculture could acquire more legitimacy in the light of the dominant influence of *industrial* agriculture.

In line with this call, many STS scholars investigating *alternative* food and agriculture, straightforwardly pursue normative goals concerned with supporting *alternative* agricultures to effectively challenge the social, cultural, and environmental problems caused by *industrial* food production. To provide some examples: Alastair Iles and Robin Marsh (2012) have formulated public policy measures to make “diversified farming systems [in the U.S.] thrive again”. Another insightful example for this applied STS discourse is a publication by Montenegro de Wit and Iles (2016) in which they argue for practical interventions to create more legitimacy for agroecology and *alternative* agricultures. A similar concern is expressed in Montenegro de Wit's (2016) study on the epistemic dimensions of agrobiodiversity conservation, in which she calls for a diversification of biodiversity knowledge, or in Graddy-Lovelace's (2013) analysis of agricultural biodiversity in Peru, calls for decolonizing biodiversity knowledge. Lastly, another insightful example for this explicitly normative strand of STS research trying to foster *alternative* food and agriculture, is Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2015) celebrated publication on soil care, that she ends with expressing her strong support the “permaculture” movement—an institutionalized form of teaching and practicing agriculture and land use that enjoys a

particularly *alternative* reputation. This is because, to provide an example, many permaculture practitioners emphasize the animistic character of food webs, in which humans, plants, animals, fungi, and minerals are framed as a spiritually connected whole.

Given my personal experiences within, and standpoint towards the realm of *alternative* agriculture—including studying organic agriculture and marketing as a Bachelor degree, working on different organic farms, and in different organic market gardens, while acquiring a basic “permaculture certificate” from the international permaculture association—my normative inquiry with *alternative* agricultures is somewhat different. More precisely, what differentiates my normative stance towards *alternative* agriculture from this dominant STS discourses concerned with fostering *alternative* agricultures, is that I am more reluctant to reproduce *a priori* categorizations of what makes agriculture *alternative*. This is because I believe that using pre-defined categories of *alternative* agriculture without caution is likely to turn *alternativeness* into an end in itself—a concern that I will pick up in the subsequent section focusing on food standards and certificates. To sum up, other than trying to find a way to challenge *industrial* agriculture through *alternative* systems, I propose to think about the common grounds, and the permeable boundary, between what I see as two discursively inflated poles of one and the same agricultural paradigms.

On the Ambivalent Success of Organic Food

Given my concern with a more symmetrical consideration of *industrial* and *alternative* agricultures, for this thesis, a third important discourse on *alternative* food and agriculture is of great importance, that is the discourse on the organic food movement, as a market-based countercurrent to *industrial* agriculture.

A seminal contribution to this strand of research is Brian Obach's (2015) publication “Organic Struggle”, in which he traces how the organic food sector in the United States developed over the past fifty years. In this historical approach, Obach reconstructs how organic agriculture turned from a marginalized niche into a flourishing market sector. One of the main arguments he establishes is that this rapid growth of the organic food sector was accompanied by a crucial tension, or as Bradley Jones (2017) nicely summarizes it in his book review: “Obach reveals the fundamentally Janus-faced success of organics” (p. 78). With the notion “Janus-faced success” the reviewer refers to Obach’s observation of an ambivalent relation between the movement’s initial emphasis on environmental or health issues on the one hand, and its increasing market-orientation on the other hand. As he concludes, market-based regulations of organic agriculture like labels, certificates, or standards are highly ambivalent because, while imposing stricter regulations, they are also particularly amenable to the

industrial logic they are designed to undo. Michael Carolan's (2005) study on the adoption of sustainable agriculture methods by conventional farmers in the United States adds to Obach's observation concerning the ambivalent entanglements of *industrial* and *alternative* logics in the course of establishing standards for organic food production. However, this is not to say that these scholars are opposed to organic agriculture. Instead, similar to my line of argumentation, they argue for more symmetrical analyses of the organic food sector—analyses that are open for the eventual co-constitution of *industrial* and *alternative* logics that influence contemporary food production, as nicely captured in Carolan's remark that, "[s]ustainable agriculture has slowly filtered into conventional agriculture and conventional agriculture has slowly penetrated sustainable agriculture, thus transforming both in the process" (p. 335).

To sum up, I would like to refer back to my personal reluctance of using pre-defined assessments of what makes food production *alternative*. More precisely, I share Obach's and Carolan's concern, that any act of standardizing *alternative* food production (be it in regulatory documents or in scientific texts), implies a risk of misrepresenting what *alternative* means for practitioners on the ground. Besides this consideration, I share their perspective that analyses of agriculture should evade from describing generalized types of *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture, as epitomes of *good* and *bad* agricultural practice. Instead, I propose to approach agriculture as a sphere in which the *good* or *bad* dynamics of knowledge, technologies, and markets are mutually constitutive. Given this thought, the next section will introduce STS informed research on infrastructures as another supplementary strand of research that helps to better grasp what I call the permeable boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* agricultures.

Narrowing Infrastructures of *Industrial* and *Alternative* Food

On the Study of Infrastructures and Markets in STS

In order to open up infrastructures as objects of research many scholars draw on Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder's seminal paper "Steps Towards an Ecology of Infrastructure" published in 1996. An often-used argument the authors establish in this paper is that, when studying infrastructures, the more fruitful question is not to ask, "What is an infrastructure?", but "When is an infrastructure?" (p. 112). In this regard, it is not their concern to provide a fixed definition of infrastructures, but to propose analytical entry points for situated analyses for the occurrence and influence of infrastructures in our world. More precisely, they identify eight dimensions as particularly useful when approaching something as infrastructure. These dimensions are: 1. *Embeddedness* 2. *Transparency* 3. (spatial or temporal) *Reach or scope* 4.

(being) *Learned as part of membership* 5. *Links with conventions of practice* 6. *Embodiment of standards* 7. (being) *Built on an installed base* 8. *Becom[ing] visible upon breakdown*. As Star and Ruhleder argue, the crucial contribution of this analytical differentiation is that it allows to analyze a tension they deem “integral” to most “large scale, dispersed technologies” (p. 111), that is the “tension between local, customized, intimate and flexible use on the one hand, and the need for standards and continuity on the other” (p. 112). Put differently, the authors propose the resolution of tension, between a (more global) infrastructural affordance on the one hand, and (rather local) infrastructure-related practices on the other, as a main indicator for moments in which conglomerates of human and non-human actors become infrastructures. Until today, this analytical focus on structure-agency relations and related tensions, is at the core of most infrastructure studies in the field of STS and beyond.

A fruitful vantage point to better grasp this particular focus of STS inflected infrastructure studies is Langdon Winner’s controversially discussed paper “Do Artefacts Have Politics?” (1980). The primary argument Winner establishes in this study is that built things, like (to stick with a prominent example that he uses in his text) a bridge built in New York, “can contain political properties” (p. 123). Interpreted through Star and Ruhleder’s concern with moments of infrastructural tension, one can read Winner as an early contributor to discourses concerned with the power that built things may have over individual subjects, and the political tensions that arise from it, as nicely captured in his concluding remark that,

“[i]n our times people are often willing to make drastic changes in the way they live to accord with technological innovation at the same time they would resist similar kinds of changes justified on political grounds. If for no other reason than that, it is important for us to achieve a clear view of these matters than has been our habit so far” (p. 135).

Even though Winner’s emphasis on political properties that are (by design) inherent to certain technologies, and individuals’ (limited) capacity to challenge this political power of things, was sharply contested for its deterministic stance towards technology (see for example Woolgar, 1993), Winner’s early concern with the political influence of technology, or “technopolitics”, had a great influence on nowadays infrastructure studies.

Another important precursor of this body of literature is Thomas Hughes, and his seminal publication “Networks of Power” (1993). In line with Winner, Hughes’s focus is on the historical examination of physically built infrastructures. More precisely, he reconstructs the historical development of electricity grids in the United States, England, and Germany. An important notion that Hughes proposes in his study is the term “large technological systems”,

as a way to conceptually grasp the complexity of what today is referred to as infrastructures. The underlying thought behind this concept is that technological systems, and their ways of ordering the physical world, always rely on both physical and non-physical artifacts, that are inevitably intertwined in processes of building and maintaining the respective system. In contrast to Winner, Hughes's argument centers on the reciprocal relation between technological artifacts and human system builders. An example for this difference is nicely captured in another concept Hughes establishes, that is the concept of the "reverse salient". As Hughes argues, a reverse salient is a social or technical system element that prevents the technological system from achieving the development it was designed for. Hence, other than Winner, Hughes provides us with a more symmetrical consideration of social and technical elements, and infrastructural power relations. In this regard, Hughes research can be seen as an important corner stone for a long tradition of STS inflected infrastructure studies, concerned with the symmetrical examination of power dynamics that unfold within sociotechnical networks consisting of both human and non-human actors (see for example Bijker, 1997; Callon, 1998; Latour, 2005).

A more recent example for the technopolitics of physical infrastructures, that greatly influenced my initial research interest in *Green Boxes*, is provided by Alexander Klose (2015), and his research concerning the globalized infrastructure of shipping containers. In his study, Klose analyzes the growing influence of containers in contemporary societies. More precisely, he scrutinizes a variety of "container situations" (p. xi), ranging from first historical documents that describe standardized cargo units, over thick descriptions of logistics processes, to interpretations of artistic installations adapting container-aesthetics. In juxtaposing these situations Klose establishes a strong argument for the sociotechnicality of container infrastructures. More concretely, Klose establishes the argument that the rapid expansion of shipping containers across the globe cannot be reduced to their technical or economic ability to drastically reduce transportation costs, but that the expansion must be seen as the outcome of a co-evolution between standardized transport units, and way of thinking the world—a way of thinking in which time and space are condensed. Put differently, Klose calls for looking behind the (admittedly not very complex) design of shipping containers, while proposing to conceive of them as an "organizational principle", as nicely explained in the subsequent quote:

"All the container-shaped things that I encountered in the most diverse fields of society were constantly spreading, as it seemed to me—from physical storage systems to spatial organizational metaphors—and I became more and more convinced that containerization is more than the transformation of freight traffic to shipment in standard

containers. What it is, in fact is a grand movement comparable to mechanization in the breadth of its applications—a change in the fundamental order of thinking and things that may be spoken of as principle, the material core of which is the standardized container, by which it became fully visible but in which it hardly exhausts itself” (p. x).

In this regard, an important difference between Klose’s examination of built infrastructure and earlier contributions like the ones by Winner (1980), or Hughes (1993), is that Klose puts a particular focus on the “container worlds” that emerge separate from the technical functionality, of shipping containers—a choice of words that nicely resonates with Tsing’s (2015) previously mentioned focus on “third nature”, or “what manages to live despite capitalism” (p. viii).

In line with that, a last insightful example, for studies of built infrastructures, that foregrounds these kinds of unintended outcomes, is provided by Anthropology scholar Brian Larkin and his study on “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure” (2013). Based on a meticulous review of both Anthropology and STS informed infrastructure studies, Larkin argues that “studies of infrastructures tend to privilege the technological even if they qualify it by defining urban spaces as hybrid systems of humans and machines bundled together through infrastructural networks” (p. 339). Hence, in line with Klose (2015), but even more nuanced in his conception of infrastructural realities that emerge separate from their intended functionality, Larkin establishes the argument that,

“[i]nfrastructures also exist as forms separate from their purely technical functioning, and they need to be analyzed as concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addresses. They emerge out of and store within them forms of desire and fantasy and can take on fetish-like aspects that sometimes can be wholly autonomous from their technical functioning. Focusing on the issue of form, or the poetics of infrastructure, allows us to understand how the political can be constituted through different means” (p. 329).

Reading Larkin’s study with my focus on food and agriculture in mind, it does not seem far-fetched to conceive of nowadays infrastructures for the production, distribution, and consumption of *alternative* food (at least partially) as “semiotic and aesthetic vehicles”. To better grasp this semiotic dimension, of the agrifood sector, my study is informed by another, rather distant body of literature, that is concerned with the performativity of the technologies, infrastructures, or devices that shape contemporary markets.

A foundational contribution to this strand of research is Michel Callon’s research on “the embeddedness of economic markets” (1998). One of the key argument that Callon

establishes in this text is that, what neoclassical economists universally entitle as “the market”, while treating it as an object whose true nature could be revealed or predicted through economic theory, should actually be scrutinized as the “performance” (p. 30) of situated economic actions. Hence, other than scrutinizing markets as stabilized spaces for the exchange of singularized goods, Callon calls for analyses that foreground how they are being performed and changed through the “practical activity” (p. 1) within “real markets” (p. 2). Put differently, he describes markets as “true meteorological infrastructure[s] in which economic activities are embedded” (p. 25), other than universal ordering mechanisms. What is in focus when adapting this pragmatist understanding of markets, or market infrastructures, becomes clearer when taking into account a later publication by Micheal Callon, Cécile Méadel, and Vololona Rabearisoa. This is because, as the authors argue,

“[m]arkets [constantly] evolve and, like species, become differentiated and diversified. But this evolution is grounded in no pre-established logic. Nor is it simply the consequence of a natural tendency to adapt. Economic markets are caught up in a reflexive activity: the actors concerned explicitly question their organization and, based on an analysis of their functioning, try to conceive and establish new rules of the game” (2002, p. 194).

As nicely captured in this quote, this particular stance towards the construction of markets is accompanied by a particular sensitivity for the mutual shaping of both human and non-human actors in the course of enabling an ongoing transaction of goods. Hence, in contrast to neoclassical economic theory, in which rational, human actors are commonly deemed to take rational decisions in order to maximize utility (be it as producer or as consumer), this pragmatist tradition of economic sociology considers markets as “organized collective devices” (Callon & Muniesa, 2005, p. 1230), in which heterogeneous assemblages of actors come to negotiate “compromises on the values of goods” (ibid.).

It is this particular focus on the performative action that is implied in the construction of markets, and the accompanying, pragmatist understanding of value(s) as not being inherent to goods, which brings me back to my interest in the permeable boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* agriculture. This is because, as I will proceed to elaborate further in the subsequent section, when considering agrifood infrastructures as performative assemblages, the assumed dichotomy between *alternative* and *industrial* food seems to be rather volatile. Instead, as I argue, scrutinizing this very boundary on an infrastructural level shifts the

analytical focus towards the mutual shaping of *industrial* and *alternative* food markets in interesting ways.

On the Mutual Shaping of Industrial and Alternative Food Infrastructures

In this section I would like to elaborate a bit further on my argument that on an infrastructural level the dichotomy between *industrial* and *alternative* agriculture seems to be more elusive than commonly assumed. This is because, on an infrastructural level, what is often grasped as the demarcated realms of *industrial* and *alternative* agriculture, share important elements.

A first insightful study that addresses this issue, is Lawrence Busch's (2008) seminal work on standards, in which he analyzes the increasing importance of food, health, or trade standards in contemporary societies. One of the crucial arguments he establishes with regard to food standards is nicely captured in the subsequent passage:

"After more than a century obsession with increased production and productivity so as to provide cheap food as the sole goal for agriculture, in recent years we have seen considerable interest in a range of alternatives. These alternatives include a variety of production methods such as organic farming, biodynamic agriculture, 'beyond organic', and the like. They also include more choices with respect to consumption, such as (1) convenience foods, (2) an increase in the range of fresh fruits and vegetables (both species and varieties) available to consumers [...] (3) greater concern for both process (e.g., fair trade, free-range, environmentally friendly) and product (e.g., pesticide-free) standards, (4) a rapid rise in consumption of health foods and 'natural' supplements, and (5) the promise of nutriogenomics" (p. 191).

In short, the above quote nicely captures what other authors describe as the "mainstreaming" (Goodman et al., 2010), or what I would call the industrialization of *alternative* food. As Busch goes on to argue, what is crucial about this development of food markets is that it causes an "oxymoronic pair of extremes" (p. 292) for contemporary consumers: On the one hand, they see themselves confronted with a vast range of economic, ethical, or aesthetic choices to make that are evoked by the overwhelming co-existence of different *alternative* standards. On the other hand, they, as individuals, increasingly become "subject to incessant checking and audit, certification, and accreditation" (p. 292). Interpreted through Star and Ruhleder (1996), this observation strongly corresponds with their focus on infrastructural tensions between global/standardized infrastructures and local/individual choices or practices.

This description of the ambivalence of food standards is mirrored in Xaq Frohlich's (2017) recent study concerning the historical development of food labels in the United States. The main argument he establishes is that the performance of standardized food labels, and their legal regulation, do not only affect how consumers buy food (as often assumed), but more importantly how producers produce food: "The product label thus sits at the center of a legally constructed terrain of inter-textual or hypertextual references, an information infrastructure that reflects a mix of market pragmatism and legal thought" (p. 152). Put simply, Frohlich argues that regulatory changes to food labels are by far no mere informational fixes, in the sense of giving consumers the information they are lacking, but that every "change to the label reaches out across a wide informational environment representing food and has direct material consequences for how food is produced, distributed, and consumed" (p. 146). Hence, Frohlich's study nicely supplements my argument concerning the permeable boundary between *industrial* and *alternative* food, in the sense that certain standards, like nutrition labels for the indication of calories, fat, or protein, are the same for both sides of the assumed dichotomy.

Taken together, these studies nicely capture some of the differences—and more important in case of my research—some of the similarities the infrastructures of *industrial* and *alternative* agriculture seem to rely on. Other than demarcating two strictly separated realms, it seems that, on an infrastructural level, *industrial* and *alternative* agriculture share more qualities, dynamics, or value(s) than commonly assumed. In order to further conceptualize this ambivalent state of nowadays agriculture, in the next section I will proceed to outline emerging debates related to the journal *Valuation Studies*—debates that are devoted to the complex entanglements of value(s) in contemporary societies, and how they come to define the ways in which we assess and generate the value(s) of the things that surround us, including food.

On Valuations of *Industrial* and *Alternative* Food

Until so far, I have argued for, what I call, a permeable boundary between the seemingly dichotomous realms of *industrial* and *alternative* food. In the same vein, I kept italicizing the terms "industrial" and "alternative", in order to demonstrate my reluctance to use these labels as sufficient, or self-contained, categories for describing developments related to food and agriculture. This particular stance towards agrifood is rooted in a body of scholarship that has found a hub in the journal *Valuation Studies*—a journal that is focused on analyzing value(s) and how they are assessed and made in social practices. These practices are synonymously referred to valuation practices, or valuations (e.g. Vatin, 2013). As I will proceed to outline in

this section, the study of valuations offers a particularly fruitful perspective to scrutinize the performative character of food infrastructures, and the value(s) they enact in contemporary societies. Hence, this section serves as the last building block for specifying my research interest, and for defining the problem this thesis is supposed to address.

As an entry point to illustrate my intention behind studying valuations of food in general, and valuations of food that is seen as *alternative* in specific, serves me an observation retrieved from Jens Beckert and Patrik Aspers's seminal work "The Worth of Goods" (2011). In the introductory chapter, the authors argue that three types of markets are particularly suited for the empirical study of valuations: Firstly, markets for financial products, like for example derivate markets. Secondly, markets for aesthetic goods, like fashion, wine, art, or food. And, thirdly, ethical markets, like markets for life-insurances, fair trade products, or respectively organic food. As they specify it, these three types of markets are particularly fruitful spaces for studying valuations because within them "value seems detached from the materiality of the commodity and in very obvious ways socially constructed" (p. 30). Referring back to Callon (1998) one could add that within these types of markets the "performance" of what ought to be valuable might be particularly expressed. As an example, both art markets and markets for organic food share a strong reliance on trained experts that are supposed to assess and certify the authenticity of goods. This authenticity, however, must be seen as a quality that cannot be seen with the naked eye, but only with the trained eye of an expert (maybe using certain technologies to improve the expert vision). In other words, both art markets and markets for organic food crucially rely on the performance of actors' expertise concerning the assumed properties of goods, much rather than on properties that are intrinsic to the goods that circulate within these markets. Having this consideration in mind, my research interest in *Green Boxes* should become a bit clearer. This is because, *Green Boxes* as an emerging agrifood product for young, wealthy, urban, beautiful, healthy, conscious, tasteful, or sustainable consumers seem to hinge upon value(s) that intertwine aesthetic and ethical judgements.

Historically, value(s) have always been a concern of economists, sociologists, or other thinkers. However, within the journal *Valuation Studies*, and in contrast to related discourses that are coined by a Germany based community of scholars who investigate valuations, like Beckert and Aspers (2011), the editors of *Valuation Studies* explicitly emphasize their "efforts to make *Valuation Studies* a site with a scope as broad as possible when it comes to the valuation practices under scrutiny" (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 4). In other words, the editors call for studies of valuations that go beyond merely investigating the economic aspects of valuations. In the same article, the editors provide a compelling outline, that underlines this

interdisciplinary impetus, while specifying the kinds of social constructions of value(s) they are after:

“Is value a social construction? The general agreement is that the answer to this question is: Yes, quite. But it is sometimes unclear what ‘social construction’ means, and social-scientific debate on this is far from closed. The sense of this expression is often associated, in the social sciences, with an idea of something being the outcome of a shared belief: value exists because people think it does. But take a bridge over the river: it is a construction—and quite a social one insofar as it is the outcome of organized social work. This idea of social construction, quite different than the preceding one, could very well be applied to value: value is then the outcome of a process of social work and the result of a wide range of activities (from production and combination to circulation and assessment) that aim at making things valuable” (p. 6).

Taken together, Beckert and Aspers's (2011) emphasis on ethical and aesthetic markets, as interesting sites for studying the social construction of value(s), combined with Helgesson and Muniesa's (2013) programmatic call for the study of valuations as social practices, form the theoretical basis for my research interest in *Green Boxes*—a product that intertwines both ethical and aesthetic properties, while (thereby) being caught in a matrix of valuations that transgresses mere economic value(s).

To provide you with a better impression of what I mean with regard to this latter interesting aspect of *Green Boxes*, as food product, I would like to focus on a contribution to *Valuation Studies* that was provided by Frank Heuts and Annemarie Mol's (2013). In pursuing the seemingly simple question, “What is a Good Tomato?”, the authors interviewed a broad range of Dutch “tomato-experts”, that is people having an opinion concerning what makes *good* tomatoes. Given the explicitly normative character of this primary research question, it is a perfect example of a question that is likely to evoke answers that imply different kinds of valuations, and hence different enactments of *good* tomatoes. This is because, in answering what a *good* tomato is, informants need to decide what the value(s) of *good* tomatoes are, while leaving out value(s) they deem irrelevant. Nevertheless, other informants might assess these irrelevant value(s) as valuable, and so on. In short, the authors nicely demonstrate the multiplicity, and situatedness of *good* food, an argument that crucially inspired my stance towards *alternative* food. Hence, in line with Heuts and Mol, I am interested in how people justify the *alternativeness* of food, while simultaneously trying to understand how these verbal acts of valuation come to enact different realities of *alternative* food.

To sum up, Heuts and Mol's *Valuation Studies* informed stance towards food, seems like a fruitful supplement to Phillips (2016) initially mentioned criticism that "[m]uch scholarly attention to AFIs [that is *alternative* food initiatives] orients around the scale and effectiveness of their *alternativeness*" (p. 209), other than considering the situated contexts and practices through which *alternativeness* is crafted in the first place—two interesting perspectives that outline the problem that I seek to address with this thesis.

Research Object, Questions, and Case

In this thesis, I analyze the valuation practices, or valuing processes, of *alternative* food in a context that is specialized in conducting home-deliveries of designated organic products. More precisely, I focus on a delivery service supplying Berlin based customers with a product that I call *Green Boxes*.

As outlined in the previous chapter, an underlying thought behind this research project is that the *alternativeness* of food cannot be understood as a quality which is essential to some products, or production processes, while being categorically external to others. Instead, and congruent with so called *industrial* food, I conceptualize *alternative* food as a multiple. This means that the *alternativeness* of food cannot be defined once and for all, but that it is enacted and negotiated in situated practices over and over again (see Mol, 2002). To provide an example, when considering *alternative* food as multiple, a piece of non-organic meat may very well be *alternative* food in one situation while being *industrial* in another, depending on the practices at stake. To come back to my earlier example, let us, for example, assume that a hardworking food activist saved a conventional apple from a dumpster standing in front of a supermarket, in which some hours early a hardworking employee sorted out the very same apple for different reasons. In this practical example, the boundary between *alternative* food, and *industrial* food seems to be blurred. By this I mean that when focusing on the practices the apple is involved in, one could argue for it as being both *alternative* and *industrial*, at once, depending on the situation under scrutiny.

This view on *alternative* food as multiple leads to a second thought that is vital for my research project, namely that the *alternative* foodstuffs that we consume, or do not consume every day, possess what could be labeled as hybrid value(s). As mentioned before, in the introductory chapter to their edited volume “The worth of goods”, Beckert and Aspers (2011) propose an analytical differentiation that helps to synthesize my theoretical focus on the multiplicity of *alternative* food, and the market-based efforts to foster *alternative* food production and consumption. Presupposing the analytical three-division of markets the scholars propose, the emerging market for *Green Boxes*, seems particularly interesting as it hinges not only upon aesthetic and ethical, but also upon other, less tangible kinds of value(s) related to ideas of convenience, tradition, or health. A good example of what I mean by that may be the packages of many organic products one can buy these days—packages that varyingly depict romantic rural scenes, happy families, or visual representations of concepts that are inspired by non-western medicine, like drawings of chakras or acupuncture points.

Having this in mind, and as said before, I am not only interest in the different valuation practices of *alternative* food that are undertaken at my field site, but also in how these valuations come to enact different realities of *alternative* food, be they realities that imply romantic rural scenes, happy families, chakras, or all at once. Given this, in the following section I will proceed to narrow these parameters of my empirical analysis by defining my exact research object, by laying out my research questions, and by refining the problem these questions are supposed to target.

The Green Box as Research Object

My research is focused on an agrifood company operating a so called “box scheme”. The term box scheme is not clearly defined. However, as it is commonly used it refers to both a business model and an increasingly popular *alternative* food product. It is for this double meaning that in this thesis I decided to use the term “box scheme” whenever I refer to the business model of selling home-delivered boxes filled with organic products, and the term *Green Boxes* to refer to the product itself—a home-delivered box filled with an individualized selection of organic foodstuffs.

Box schemes are widely accepted as a counter model to *industrial* food supply chains. As such, they form an interesting phenomenon to trace how food enacts *alternative* value(s) in contemporary techno-societies. To give an impression of what I mean by that, I would like to provide you with two examples that imply some hints concerning the valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that I trace in this research project. These examples are publicly available, and quite common, descriptions of the *alternatives* that box schemes offer to *industrial* food. The first of these definitions is a basic definition retrieved from the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*²:

“A vegetable box scheme is an operation that delivers *fresh* fruits and vegetables, often *locally* grown and *organic*, either directly to the customer or to a local collection point. Typically, the produce is sold as an ongoing weekly subscription and the offering may vary week to week depending on what is in *season*.”

In line with this quote, the ways in which the *alternativeness* of box schemes is framed in public debates often implies a variety of attributes that are meant to describe the *alternativeness* of buying a *Green Box*, while simultaneously contrasting it from more *industrial* products. In the

² Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetable_box_scheme [retrieved on June 29th, 2018]

example at hand, I italicized these attributes, in order to make clear what I mean by valuations of *alternative* food. To be more explicit, the author of this *Wikipedia* entry foregrounds the freshness, localness, organic-ness, and seasonality of the foodstuffs contained in *Green Boxes*—attributes all of which work as signifiers for the *alternative* value(s) *Green Boxes* are supposed to contain. What is interesting about this conglomerate of attributes, signifiers, or as I propose to see them—valuations in text form—is their hybridity. Referring back to Beckett and Aspers's (2011) differentiation between financial, ethical, and moral markets, the valuations in the above example seem to form hybrids between ethical and aesthetic ascriptions of value(s). As an example, in most cases, assessing the freshness of foodstuffs does not only rely on aesthetic judgments (*à la*: “Does the apple look, smell, feel, or taste good?”), but also on ethical considerations (*à la*: “Is it healthy, sustainable, or intelligent to eat this or that apple?”). Hence, the above quote can be understood as a real-life example of how different value(s) of food are being hybridized in the course of describing the *alternativeness* of certain food products—like in case of the example at hand, *Green Boxes*. To provide another example for the valuations of *alternative* food that are being used when trying to narrow the *alternativeness* of box schemes, here is another quote retrieved from a peer reviewed journal article from the field of nutritional sciences:

“Boxes are ordered from the farm and *seasonal* produce is delivered to a customer’s home or *convenient* collection point. Most box schemes include *organic* produce in their range with the added benefit of *improved land management* and *biodiversity conservation*” (Brown, Dury, & Holdsworth, 2009, p. 183).

In line with the previous example, I italicized the written valuations of *alternativeness* that are implied in this quote. Again, they hint at complex entanglements of different value(s) that are being mobilized in the course of describing the *alternativeness* of box schemes. In turn, these entanglements seem to enact different realities of what *alternative* food is in contemporary Euro/Western contexts: On the one hand, and in line with the previous example, the quote points at entanglements of moral and aesthetic value(s) of food. As an example, facing the externalities of global food trade, it seems both ethically valuable to eat pumpkins when they are in season, as much as it seems aesthetically pleasing to have a pumpkin standing around in your autumnal kitchen. In addition to this hybridity of moral and aesthetic value(s), the authors’ emphasis on “improved land management” and “biodiversity conservation” hints at an enactment of economic *alternativeness*. This is because, concerns with both “land management” and “biodiversity conservation” come to define *alternative* land use in numerical

terms, and universal categories of species, which in turn can be interpreted as an economization of biodiversity (see Fredriksen, 2017). In other words, the quote provides a first example for potential ambivalences between co-existing valuations of *alternative* food that might arise in practice: What if “improved land management” is not profitable? Or, what if the crops it brings into existence look or taste bad?

In short, these two examples provide a vivid impression of the complex valuations of *alternative* food, the implied enactments of *alternative* value(s), and the potential ambivalences between co-existing valuations, that I study in this thesis. Hence, when I speak of *Green Boxes* as my research object, my inquiry is with empirically traceable valuations of food and how they take part in “ordering [parts] of society” (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 3). This said, in the next section I will proceed to translate this inquiry into concrete questions that define the exact parameters of my research.

Research Questions

Contemporary debates concerned with *alternative* agriculture and food production primarily focus on how this realm can most effectively challenge the negative consequences of *industrial* food. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, my research shifts the analytical attention away from this dichotomous juxtaposition of *alternative* versus *industrial* food, while focusing on a situated context in which *alternativeness* is brought into existence. Hence, other than considering *alternative* food as an inevitable antipode of *industrial* food, my concern is with the contingent practices that make *alternativeness* matter for actors on the ground.

Given the ambivalence of *alternative* food, an increasing number of public debates center on how consumers deal with the different realities of *alternative* food they are confronted with everyday—often leading to defamatory claims concerning untruthfulness, greenwashing, or fraud. In contrast, little is known about how producers who strive to satisfy our increasing lust for *alternative* food deal with this controversial facet of their doings. Are they conscious about it? Do they ignore it? Do they maybe even suffer from it?

With this thesis, I would like to address this problem, by exploring situated valuation practices at a site that is widely accepted as a hub for *alternative* food products—a delivery service for *Green Boxes*. The main research question that I intend to answer in this study thus reads as follows:

How is food being valued at a delivery services for Green Boxes?

In asking this question, my concern is not only with exploring the heterogeneity and multiplicity of value(s) that shape contemporary conceptions of *alternative* food. Instead, I am also interested in how these co-existing valuations of *alternative* food, and their accompanying enactments of what *alternative* food means these days, relate to *Green Delivery*'s physical and informational infrastructures. From an infrastructure studies perspective, it is to be assumed that many of the local valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at my field site build on specific infrastructures that are involved in more globalized valuations of *alternativeness*, like for example organic certificates. Given this concern with the infrastructural embeddedness of the valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery*, my main question is supplemented by a sub-question that reads as follows:

How do actors in different contexts of *Green Delivery* assess and generate the *alternativeness* of the food they are dealing with every day, and what are the valuation practices they perform to do so?

What is crucial about this sub-question is its focus on the different contexts of valuation that can be delineated at my field site. My underlying thought for this analytical subdivision is that by tracing context specific valuations of *alternative* food—like, for example, valuations that are foremost performed in the context of the company's management, and valuations that are foremost performed in the context of its market garden—it becomes possible to interpretively reconstruct the relation between occurring patterns of valuations and the infrastructural embeddedness of the respective contexts. Lastly, in order to carve out the underlying dynamics of how this assumed interplay between valuation practices and infrastructural affordance leads to a situated generation of *alternative* food, I pursue a second sub-question that reads as follows:

How are the co-existing valuations of alternative food organized within *Green Delivery*'s infrastructure?

The important aspect of this second sub-question is its focus on the infrastructural organization of ambivalent food value(s). In other words, the interest that I pursue with this question is to explore how *Green Delivery*'s infrastructural affordance allows to reconcile co-existing, and potentially conflicting conceptions of *alternative* food, while its ongoing valuation. These theoretical considerations will be specified in the subsequent chapter concerned with my conceptual approach.

Sensitizing Concepts: Approaching *Alternativeness* as Worth

My research interest is targeted at valuations of *alternative* food that are performed by the different actors which form part of *Green Delivery's* infrastructure. In this section, I will outline the conceptual framework that guided my research endeavor. Therefore, in the first part of this section, I will proceed to describe how I conceptualized the co-existing valuations and enactments of *alternative* food at *Green Delivery*. More precisely, I will draw together the previously mentioned observation of Beckert and Aspers's (2011) with the concept of “evaluative principles” as established by David Stark (2009), another important contributor to research concerned with valuations. Building on that, the second section of this chapter introduces Maximilian Fochler, Ulrike Felt, and Ruth Müller's (2016) concept of “regimes of valuation”, as an analytical tool for reconstructing how situated valuations of *alternative* food relate to broader patterns of valuation, some of which become traceable on an infrastructural level.

Reconstructing *Alternativeness* through Evaluative Principles

Coming back to Beckert and Aspers's (2011) observation that markets for financial, ethical, and aesthetic goods “hold a special attraction for sociologists” (p. 30), the emerging market for *Green Boxes* seems to be particularly attractive, as it hinges upon the construction of both ethical and aesthetic value(s) in visible ways.

Before I proceed to empirically illustrate this point in my findings chapters, I would like to provide you with a visual example that helps to understand how I interpret Beckert and Aspers's observation concerning the construction of ethical and aesthetic value(s) that are detached from the materiality of commodities, in relation to my concern with an emerging market for *Green Boxes*. Let us therefore take look at *Image 1*—a digital photograph of *Green Boxes* that was taken by one of my former colleagues in the urban gardening project where I learned how to grow vegetables during my Bachelor education³.

³ Source: https://annalinde-leipzig.de/wordpress_relaunch/blog/wochenmarkt/



Image 1: Green Boxes at a market garden in Leipzig, Germany

From my point of view, the *Green Boxes* depicted in this photograph correspond with both the ethics and the aesthetics that are performed in many initiatives concerned with *alternative* food, in the sense that they enact *alternative* food as natural, pure, simple, basic, or original. Of course, this is a personal interpretation, and yet it provides an initial impression of how *alternative* food products take part in constructing food value(s) that seem to evoke both ethical and aesthetic valuations. Like in case of this example, by being reproduced in a digital photograph circulating on the internet, while enacting a certain idea of how *alternative* food ought to look these days. Given this example, it should be easier to follow my concern with *Green Boxes*, as an *alternative* food product that mobilizes more than economic value(s).

In order to further conceptualize and operationalize this construction of value(s), my research is inspired by the conceptual framework David Stark proposes in his seminal contribution “The Sense of Dissonance” (2009). In order to understand the analytical sensitivities Stark’s work holds for the analysis of *Green Boxes*, one needs to clarify his theoretical stance towards value(s): In line with most contemporary scholars of valuations, in his conceptualization of value(s), Stark considers the widely acknowledged dichotomy between economic value, and moral values—in which economists are in charge of the first, whereas social scientists are in charge of the latter—as an analytical shortcoming. In order to not reproduce this dichotomy, Stark calls for the study of “worth”, as “an analytical strategy of

fusing the two notions across this divide” (p. 7). As he goes on to explain, “[t]he polysemic character of the term—worth—signals concern with fundamental problems of value while recognizing that all economies have a moral component” (ibid.). Hence, whenever I used the slightly complicated term “value(s)” in the previous chapters, I was implicitly referring to Stark’s non-binary concept of worth, without spelling it out. Given this clarification, from now on I will use the notions “value(s)” and “worth” synonymously for the rest of this thesis. Stark’s concept of worth complements the differentiation between financial, moral, and aesthetic markets undertaken by Beckert and Aspers (2011), in the sense that it allows to scrutinize the worth of products, while being open to a plurality of qualities that may be considered worthy.

Stark’s non-dichotomous conception of worth is crucially informed by the writings of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, and the analytical framework they develop in “On Justification” (2006). One of the key arguments that Boltanski and Thévenot make is that, when individuals justify their actions, they do not use a binary logic of value and values, but a more complex logic that is rooted in six different “orders of worth”. As Stark (2009) describes it, they define orders of worth as clearly demarcated, in the sense that each can be “epitomized by a particular moral philosopher” (p. 11), while underlying a specific logic, order, or grammar, for the ascription of worth. Hence, orders of worth sensitize researchers to evade from dichotomous analyses in which value is separated from values, while allowing them to move towards analyses of how actors ascribe worth to individuals, objects, or actions, while assessing and generating six different kinds of worth.

Whereas most contemporary research on valuations shares this analytical focus on worth as a non-dichotomous phenomenon, many scholars evade from Boltanski’s and Thévenot’s *a priori* distinction between six orders of worth. Put differently, instead of following Boltanski’s and Thévenot’s deductive framework, most recent valuation studies, including the ones comprised in Stark’s edited volume (2009), shift the analytical attention towards an inductive reconstruction of situated valuation practices, and towards analyzing in how far these situated valuations are specific to the empirical contexts under scrutiny (e.g. Antal et al., 2015; Asdal, 2015; Heuts & Mol, 2013). In line with this strand of thought, Stark’s concept of evaluative principles is to be seen as an analytical tool that lends itself for reconstructing the logics of situated valuations, their interplay, and the heterogeneous kinds of worth they come to enact.

Given this particular concern with the logics of situated valuations, Stark stresses that the exact definition of evaluative principles should be adapted from case to case. For my analysis, I use a definition that has been formulated by Fochler, Felt, and Müller (2016), who conceptualize evaluative principles, as “any logic or set of rules that [informants] explicitly or

implicitly refer to when making a statement about worth in a particular situation” (p. 179). Hence, building on their definition, I define evaluative principles as the logics and sets of rules my informants at *Green Delivery* use when justifying the *alternative* worth of the food contained in *Green Boxes*. To provide a few examples of what I mean by that, in discussing the *alternativeness* of the food contained in *Green Boxes*, my informants may refer to a plethora of performance criteria (for defining *alternativeness*) including its freshness, its organic certificate(s), its convenience, its texture, or its taste. These multiple ways of verbally valuing the food contained in *Green Boxes* point at different logics of what counts as *alternative* food at the site of *Green Delivery*—a site that can equally be interpreted as a nodal point for valuations of *alternative* food that are performed by the company’s Berlin based customers. Given this, these verbal valuations of *alternative* food, and the different evaluative principles they imply, serve me as indicators for the interpretive reconstruction of different realities of *alternative* food that are enacted in the course of *Green Delivery*’s overall efforts to sell *Green Boxes*.

To sum up, I use the concept of evaluative principles for two important analytical steps. Firstly, I use it to scrutinize and describe the valuations of *alternative* food that are captured in my informants’ descriptions and everyday practices of working with *Green Boxes*. In a second step, after having identified the evaluative principles and valuations of *alternative* food that matter at the site of *Green Delivery*, I can proceed to categorize them, in order to identify broader patterns of valuation. However, in order to further analyze how these valuations and enactments of *alternative* food relate to *Green Delivery*’s infrastructure, a supplementary concept is needed.

Interpreting *Alternativeness* through Regimes of Valuation

The second concept I use to examine how food is being valued at *Green Delivery* is the concept of regimes of valuation, as introduced by Fochler, Felt, and Müller (2016). Whereas the analytical reconstruction of evaluative principles allows to identify and delineate categories of valuations and the respective enactments of *alternativeness* they evoke, the concept of regimes of valuation allows for interpreting in how far these categories relate to more durable patterns of societal valuations. As the authors define it for their analysis of career paths in the Austrian life sciences:

“*[E]valuative principles* denote how worth is ascribed and argued for in a concrete situation, and *regimes of valuation* point to the broader discursive, material, and institutional background this concrete evaluation draws on” (p. 180).

Hence, adapting the concept of regimes of valuation allows for an analysis of how situated valuations are both informed by and constitutive of broader patterns of discursive, material, and institutional valuations—an analytical focus that lends itself particularly well for combining the study of valuations as infrastructurally afforded practices. This is because, as the authors specify it, they assume that “regimes of valuation are comprised not only of institutionalized discourses, practices and material and digital infrastructures, but also of people living in, complying with and resisting these very regimes” (p. 180). In relation to my concern with *alternative* food infrastructures, and the respective acts of valuation they evoke, this specification points at two other important sensitivities the concept of regimes of valuation holds for my research. On the one hand, it lends itself for analyzing the processual intertwinement of discourses, institutions, and materiality in both built and informational infrastructures that are required for valuing *alternative* food. On the other hand, it allows to relate Star and Ruhleder's (1996) focus on infrastructural tension with the study of valuations. This is because, corresponding with Star and Ruhleder's emphasis on the importance of studying tensions within infrastructures, many contemporary scholars who investigate valuations point at the importance of scrutinizing what is varyingly referred to as “tension” (Stark, 2009), “controversy” (Dussauge et al., 2015), or “friction” (Heuts & Mol, 2013) as a driver for valuations.

Research Design and Methods

After having defined the conceptual lens that I use in analyzing valuations of *alternative* food at *Green Delivery*, in this section I will proceed to describe the methodology and methods that I used in conducting my research. Hence, this chapter is supposed to operationalize how exactly I went about in producing and analyzing my data concerning the valuing processes at *Green Delivery*. More precisely, in a first section, I will provide further information concerning my exact research design and my field access. In a second section, I will proceed to elaborate how the case of *Green Delivery* applies to my research interest. Subsequently, I go on to explain the specificities of my data collection and analysis. As such, this chapter aims for providing you with a thorough impression of how my research questions led me to formulate answers concerning the specificities of *Green Delivery*'s valuing processes of *alternative* food.

Research Design and Field Access

An increasing number of public debates concerned with food is centered on the effectiveness, truthfulness, or authenticity of its *alternativeness*. As I argue in the previous chapters, many of these debates are somewhat paradoxical, because they treat *alternative* food as a singular issue that could be defined or achieved once and for all. This condition is paradoxical, because most societal valuations of *alternative* food enact *alternative* food and its worth as multiples. Given this ambivalence regarding what makes *alternativeness*, contemporary markets for *alternative* food products show a clear tendency to generate ever more products that are supposed to address the increasingly specialized concerns of nowadays *alternative* food consumers. No matter if one is concerned with a vegetarian, vegan, regional, slow, fair, dolphin-friendly, or gluten-free diet, most shopping facilities in Euro/Western metropolises provide numerous products that promise solutions. As some scholars have strikingly noted, Euro/Western consumers find themselves in a state of "consumer-citizenship" (e.g. Mol, 2009), or "restless consumption" (e.g. Lezaun & Schneider, 2012), in which consuming *alternative* products often seems like an end in itself. In contrast, little is known about how actors in the realm of *alternative* food production deal with the heterogeneous and ever-changing conceptions of *alternative* food that are so present in contemporary discourses. How do producers make sense of *alternative* consumer-citizens? How do they make sense of our restless consumption of *alternativeness*? And, facing contemporary food controversies on an everyday basis, how do they come to define what counts as an *alternative* product?

To contribute to this research program, I set out to answer the research question: "*How is food being valued at a delivery service for Green Boxes?*" To pursue this question, I chose

an ethnographic single case study design. According to a definition by Robert Yin (2009), a single case study design helps to trace “contemporary” phenomena within their “real-life context”. Adapting this definition to my case, the contemporary phenomenon I am after is the worth of *alternative* food, in case of *Green Boxes*. Given this, I treat the site of *Green Delivery* as a “real-life context” in which this phenomenon becomes traceable. By focusing on this intermediary context at the nexus of *alternative* food production and consumption—other than conducting research that is exclusively concerned with producers or consumers—allows me to closely examine the kinds of infrastructural valuations that are required for constructing the worth of a food product that is widely accepted as an *alternative* to *industrial* food. Conceptually, I approach this concern by tracing situated valuation practices of *alternative* food, their underlying evaluative principles, and how both these analytical parameters relate to broader regimes of valuation.

Within the field of STS, ethnographic research has a long-lasting tradition. As Anne Beaulieu, Andrea Scharnhorst, and Paul Wouters (2007) summarize it, ethnographic research methods and their sensitivity for situated practices seem particularly amenable to STS concerns with “deconstructing claims of universality” (p. 673). In this regard, many contributions that have been seminal to the field of STS use ethnographic methods in order to, for example, challenge universalist conceptions of scientific knowledge (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Latour & Woolgar, 1986), disease and medical practice (Mol, 2002), or technology (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). Thus, my analytical focus on *Green Delivery* as an ethnographic field site is crucially inspired by this tradition, in the sense that I seek to unsettle universalist conceptions of *alternative* food.

As my research interest centers on a product, and how its worth is constructed in practice, the design of my case study is additionally inspired by Isabelle Dussauge, Claes-Frederik Helgesson, and Francis Lee's (2015) methodological considerations concerning so called “valuographies”, that is ethnographies concerned with valuations. As the authors summarize it, “[t]he central valuographic starting point is to investigate values as enacted in specific sites and situations, rather than assuming that they are fixed, constitutive forces” (p. 274). Put differently, their call for merging STS informed ethnographic research and valuation studies, is to be understood as an attempt to challenge universalist conceptions of worth. As they go on to elaborate, “[b]y questioning the taken-for-granted value enactments in society, we wish to bring to light the political nature of valuation, desire, and values” (p. 280). Accordingly, my attempt to question the taken-for-granted *alternativeness* of *Green Boxes* is not to be misunderstood as aiming to unveil fraudulent intentions *à la* greenwashing. Instead,

I am interested in the ontopolitical implications of selling a product that is so obviously packed with *alternativeness*, as *Green Boxes* are.

My initial interest that finally led me to this thesis was centered on the role that standardized transport units play in urban spaces concerned with DIY-culture and *alternative* food, like urban gardens, public cooking events, or maker-spaces. More concretely, my interest was sparked by the observation that standardized transport units designed for international trade of goods, like EU-containers, or EU-pallets, have become emblematic for a counter-culture that, at least partially, attempts to challenge the dynamics of an increasingly globalized exchange of goods. In other words, I was interested in the simultaneous valuation and devaluation of globalized trade. Given this, I engaged in a broad literature review concerning standardized technologies and infrastructures for the transport of goods, like shipping containers (Klose, 2015), shopping carts (Cochoy, 2008) or food packaging (Hawkins, 2012; 2011). Along with that, another starting point for my research project was immersing myself into the places where standardized transport units are being used. More precisely, I conducted first observations at Vienna's weekly markets, spent a night at a fruit and vegetable wholesaler in Berlin, and (re)visited some of the urban gardens where EU-containers are being used as raised beds, worm-boxes, or upcycled seats. It was through these encounters between what I would characterize as quite visible spaces of a hip, urban, DIY-culture, and the rather invisible spaces at the margins of contemporary food supply chains, that I became interested in the phenomenon of box schemes—as both extremely visible and infused with all kinds of ideas of how to live an *alternative* life, and as vastly invisible with regard to the lived realities and value(s) that influence the respective supply chains.

Once this focus on valuations at the nexus of *alternative* food production and consumption was set, I started my data collection with three exploratory interviews at farms outside of Vienna and Berlin, all of which operate with box schemes. The preliminary analysis of these interviews yielded interesting and thought-provoking data, in the sense that all my interviews pointed at the plurality and heterogeneity of the evaluative principles at stake when discussing what exactly makes *Green Boxes* *alternative*. Based on these insights, I decided to focus my thesis on the in-depth analysis of one of these farms. The owner of the farm had forwarded my E-Mail to the manager of *Green Delivery* who came back to me one day later. After shortly talking on the phone, we immediately fixed the dates for my fieldwork, and agreed that I would call him again shortly before its onset. When I called the manager from Berlin two days before our fixed starting date, he seemed almost as confused as I felt at that point, right before the prospective start of my field work. “What are you expecting to do, exactly?”, he wanted to know, and whether my stay was meant as an internship. Inside I was panicking,

seeing my fieldwork go down the drain. However, in trying to be professional, and in referring to my E-Mail, I re-explained my research interest in “practitioners’ evaluations of organic food”, and we agreed on a meeting at his office, where my fieldwork should finally start two days later.

The Case of *Green Delivery*

Due to my interest in valuations of *alternative* food, in sampling my field site three criteria seemed important to me: Firstly, I was looking for a site where a wide range of different *alternative* products circulate. As I describe it in the previous sections, the different valuations of different *alternative* food products are likely to enact multiple realities of what constitutes *alternative* food these days. Hence, in sampling a site with a wide and deep *alternative* range of products, I was aiming for a context that would allow me to trace a heterogeneous spectrum of valuations and enactments of *alternativeness* that come to matter in Germany’s organic food sector (e.g. different organic certificates, different labels, food from different geographical regions). Secondly, I was looking for a site with a high number of employees, and respectively a high number of potential informants. Thirdly, I was looking for a farm with high sales of boxes, since I presumed this would cause a higher frequency and increased heterogeneity of empirically traceable valuations.

After initial difficulties at a different farm, the manager of *Green Delivery* granted access to me. *Green Delivery* is an independent business segment of *Green Farm* (fictional name), and the site where I spent most of my field work. Founded in 1991, *Green Farm* is located about sixty kilometers outside of the city of Berlin, Germany. This location makes *Green Farm* an important supplier for Berlin’s rapidly growing *alternative* food market. To meet the city’s growing demand for *alternative* food, *Green Farm* cultivates around 1.300 ha of agricultural lands according to the guidelines of the *Demeter* association—one of Germany’s organic farming associations.

The *Demeter* association is an internationally operating organization for the certification of organic food. The *alternative* concepts and standards that are pursued by *Demeter* producers are commonly entitled as “biodynamic agriculture”, and date back to the spiritual teaching of Rudolf Steiner, who is better known as a key figure in the establishment of “Waldorf education” or “Steiner education”. Besides the *Demeter* association, Germany’s organic food sector comprises eight other so called “organic farming associations”, all of which define requirements that are meant to supplement the requirements of the EU-Eco-regulation in ways that are specific to the agenda of each association. To provide an example that captures the

biodynamic impetus of the *Demeter* association, in official statements the association puts a particular emphasis on the cyclical interplay of humans, animals, and plants on farms, proclaiming that *Demeter* farmers conceive of their farms as “one organism”⁴. Hence, due to this particular approach to farming, it is to be assumed that the valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that can be traced at a company that is affiliated with the *Demeter* association differ from the valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that are undertaken at other companies in interesting ways.

Besides being part of a *Demeter* certified farm, *Green Delivery* purchases and sells products that cannot be produced at *Green Delivery*, and products that do not necessarily possess a *Demeter* label. In other words, besides being an important marketing channel for farm-own products, *Green Delivery* operates as a wholesaler for a wide spectrum of *alternative* products that are available on *alternative* food markets. Given this complexity, the organizational structure of *Green Farm* is threefold. It is subdivided in an agricultural segment, a dairy segment, and a sales segment. The agricultural segment comprises several working areas including arable farming, vegetable gardening, livestock, forestry, and nature protection. The dairy segment is subdivided into dairy-sales and dairy-processing. Lastly, the sales segment includes a farm café, a farm shop, and the delivery service that I call *Green Delivery*.

Green Delivery is not located at the main site of *Green Farm*, but around 20 minutes car drive away from it, in the industrial zone of a nearby small-town. The building of *Green Delivery* consists of two main areas which I call the “administrative area” and the “processing area”. The administrative area consists of four offices, a communal kitchen as well as changing- and restrooms. The processing area consists of the so called “green area” (for the packing of vegetables and packaged products) and the “white area” (for the packing of dairy and meat products), different storage rooms, cooling units, and an industrial kitchen (for the preparation of ready meals). Some of these contexts are more relevant to my analysis than others. Hence, I decided to selectively provide more detailed descriptions of these contexts in the respective sections of my findings. In total, *Green Delivery* has about 50 employees including purchasers, cooks, employees in charge of marketing, people working in the customer services, drivers and packers. As I was told during my field work, *Green Delivery* sells about 2000 *Green Boxes* per week. Furthermore, in a multi-annual overview, the sales per customer and the number of *Green Boxes* sold, as documented by *Green Delivery*’s staff, underlie a constant growth since the foundation of the company. As such, *Green Delivery* generates approximately a third of *Green Farm*’s total sales.

⁴ Source: <https://www.demeter.de/biodynamisches>

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The first important part of my data consists of eight interviews that I conducted with different employees of *Green Delivery* throughout the two weeks of my fieldwork. I used interviews to deepen my understanding of *Green Delivery*'s business model, to learn about my informants' view on what makes *Green Boxes* worthy, and to be able to better contextualize my simultaneous participant observation (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). As Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007) summarize it, interviews and other oral accounts can help ethnographers in two important ways: On the one hand, they can provide information "about the phenomena to which they refer" (p. 97). On the other hand, they can be analyzed "in terms of the perspectives they imply, [and] the discursive strategies they employ" (ibid.). In line with this definition, I conceive of my interview data as simultaneously descriptive and constructed.

As I conducted my interviews within a fixed organizational context, I decided to interview as many informants as possible, in order to generate rich, and potentially contrasting data concerning the valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery*. In total, I was able to conduct eight interviews, including one interview with the manager, two interviews with employees in charge of marketing and public relations, two interviews with the company's purchasers, one interview with the chef working in *Green Delivery*'s industrial kitchen, one interview with one of the company's deliverers, and a last interview with *Green Farm*'s vegetable gardener. As I moved between these different contexts of *Green Delivery*'s value chain, I continuously adjusted my interview guidelines. Therefore, my basic interview guideline was structured along six primary sections that I could refine before every interview in relation to the data that I had already gathered: The first of these interview sections was focused on biographical data. The second section was formed by a narrative-generating entry question centered on my informants' personal approach to *alternative* agriculture. In the third section, I asked for concrete descriptions of everyday tasks, followed by a forth section in which I asked my informants to describe and assess the product of *Green Boxes* in particular. Subsequently, in the fifth section, I asked for closer descriptions of the foodstuffs my informants deal with every day, and what they appreciate or do not appreciate about them. Lastly, in the sixth section, I invited my informants to supplement aspects that were not covered by my questions. Hence, other than differentiating between experts and non-experts concerning the *alternativeness* of *Green Boxes*, following Heuts and Mol's (2013) example, I tried to consider all informants as "experts [of *alternativeness*] in relation to the practices they were routinely involved in [...], be it professionally or privately" (p. 127).

All interviews were conducted face to face and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. In all cases I was allowed to record the interview with a digital recorder that I placed visibly on the table between the informant and me. Every evening after conducting an interview, I immediately revisited the recording, implemented the notes that I took during the interview into a document, and wrote memos concerning the aspects that seemed particularly interesting, disturbing, or confusing to me. Once my fieldwork was finished, I transcribed all interviews while successively refining the memos that I wrote during my field work stage.

Data Collection: Participant Observation

To acquire a better understanding of the everyday practices and routines at *Green Delivery*, I tried to gather as much data as possible through participant observation. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) put it, qualitative interviewing and participant observation lend themselves particularly well as complementary methods for ethnographic research, in the sense that “the data from each can be used to illuminate the other” (p. 102).

Before any illumination started, I felt terribly clueless. More precisely, I had no idea how my daily research at *Green Delivery* would look like. I did not know any of the people working at the company. I did not know whether they would like me, or whether they should like me at all. I did not know how they would react to me walking around with my little notebook writing down stuff. Last but not least, I was not even sure what to write down, since I had the impression that I had already forgotten everything I was looking for. Given this, the first day I tried to hide behind my catchphrase, “Hello, I am writing a Master Thesis on how practitioners evaluate organic food, would you mind if I have a look at what you are doing?” Most people did not mind, nonetheless by my second day I came to realize that the actual purpose of participant observation may be rooted in participating, which lead me to an adaptation of my observation practices.

As I was neither an intern, nor an employee, and nobody (including myself) really seemed to know what I was after, *Green Delivery*’s administrative staff and me silently agreed that there was no need for participating in the administrative work of the company. As a result—and as it seemed to our all relief—on my second day I was equipped with a pair of working gloves against blisters, a *Green Farm* fleece jacket against the cold in the cooling units, and disposable shoe covers against germs. Subsequently, I was maneuvered into the processing, storage, and packing rooms of *Green Delivery*, where I quickly found my niche in the green area. In the green area, I soon learned my way around. I learned not to stand in the way. I learned to do helpful stuff. And, I learned how to pack *Green Boxes*, after I terribly failed a

couple of times, slowing down the entire packing process. The packers were very patient with me, which I, in all my initial uncertainty, appreciated a lot. In turn, the more time I spent in the green area, the more I had the impression that my presence was appreciated to a certain extent—as a welcome distraction from the monotonous everyday work of packing *Green Boxes*. Hence, in referring to the green area as “my niche”, I mean that during my time at *Green Delivery*, I had the impression that I could always return there, whether to do something useful or to simply stand next to one of the packers and chat.

To come back to my concrete observation method, before I started taking notes, one of the employees of *Green Delivery*’s administrative section introduced me to the packers, which gave me the chance to shortly introduce my research endeavor, and to make sure that none of them would object to being part of it. Once I was given this verbal consent, I tried to jot down as many impressions as I could. Sometimes, when I was overwhelmed by my role as participant observant, I withdrew myself to the community kitchen, that was normally empty during working hours, or to my car that always parked in front of *Green Delivery*. In the evening, after returning to my flat, I took about two hours every day to translate my jottings into a structured field diary, and to reflect on the events of the day. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), describe reflexivity as both a core responsibility and a core strength of ethnographic research by stating that, “including our own role in the settings under study as researchers, we can produce accounts of the social world and justify them without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism, of either positivist or naturalist varieties” (p. 18). Thus, in adding to my field diary, I successively tried to refine the focus of my participant observation, beginning with chronological reconstructions of entire days (towards the beginning of my field work), and shifting towards more incident driven descriptions and interpretations (towards the end of my fieldwork). This continuous practice of observing and reflecting also crucially informed the focus of my interviews, and vice versa. Given that my participant observation was relatively short in time, my field diary helped me to assess the depth of the observations that I wrote down every day. In the first days of my ethnography, I wrote several hundred words each day. Later, when my reflections became shorter, I tried to think of different angles from which I had not considered my case before. The longer I stayed at *Green Delivery*, the more repetitions and patterns I could identify in my field notes. Together with my interview data, these recurrent patterns form the second important body of data that I base my analysis on.

Data Analysis: The Inductive Reconstruction of Valuing *Green Boxes*

Within the design of my data analysis, I combined grounded theory-informed initial and focused coding, as defined by Kathy Charmaz (2006), and the inductive reconstruction of evaluative principles (Stark, 2009), and regimes of valuation (Fochler et al., 2016), as conceptualized in the previous chapter. In accordance with the structure of subsequent findings chapter, in this chapter I will proceed to explain the three primary steps of my data analysis.

In the first step of my data analysis, comprising multiple, successive rounds of open coding, I reconstructed the valuation practices, and their underlying evaluative principles, from the interview data that I gathered within and about the six different contexts of *Green Delivery's* value chain. In a second step of focused coding, I engaged in a process of tracing, analyzing, and categorizing patterns of valuations and evaluative principles within and across the six different contexts. Through this iterative step, I defined three empirically distinguishable regimes of valuation, that I went on to refine during the subsequent steps of my analysis. Given their distinct specificities, that I will proceed to describe at the beginning of my findings chapter, I decided to call them the *liberal market regime*, the *regime of good agricultural practice*, and the *institutional regime*. It is important to underline, that in describing these three regimes, I do not aim for a complete representation of what *alternativeness* essentially signifies at *Green Delivery*. Instead, the regimes of valuation that I identified throughout my inductive analysis are supposed to condense and ultimately label the most relevant patterns of valuing *alternative* food that I see in the data that I produced at *Green Delivery*. As such, they are supposed to open up new avenues for discussing the worth of *alternative* food at *Green Delivery*, and beyond.

Building on this first analytical step, targeted at narrowing the most relevant valuations of *alternative* food at *Green Delivery*, their underlying evaluative principles, and the regimes of valuation they seem to relate to, the second part of my analysis was centered on what Stark (2009) describes as “creative frictions” between co-existing valuations of *alternative* food. In operationalizing these frictions, my focus was on ambivalent, or conflicting, logics for evaluating food that can be identified in my data. To provide an example that I pick up in my findings chapter, an informant may be torn between a consumers’ opinion that enacts the consumption of organic meat as *alternative*, and another consumers’ opinion that enacts a vegan diet as *alternative*. In the example at hand, the respective informant finds himself/herself in an ambivalent situation, because what is *alternative* for one consumer, is ethically unacceptable, and hence not *alternative* for the other consumer. Given this, in line with Dussauge, Helgesson, and Francis's (2015) argument that “[c]ontroversies are prime arenas for surveying the articulation of various conflicting values, [...] because central registers of

value often are at stake in such situations” (p. 271), in my second analytical step I focus on these kinds of conflicts between co-existing valuations of *alternative* food, while carving out my informants ways to cope with these ongoing evaluative ambivalences. In other words, in analyzing these kinds of empirical situations, I focused on delineating the regimes of valuation (Fochler et al., 2016) and evaluative principles (Stark, 2009) that form part of the conflicts that are grasped in my data, while simultaneously analyzing the “creative recombinations” (p. 147) that are performed by the actors at *Green Delivery* in order to “fix” these conflicting situations. I use the term “fixing” conflicts, because, as I will proceed to demonstrate in my findings chapter, the most relevant ambivalences that are experienced by my informants, are rooted in incommensurable evaluative logics. To stick with the above example, valuing organic meat and valuing veganism in a singular act of valuation, is impossible, because meat consumption and veganism rely on two incommensurable evaluative principles with regard to productive livestock. Given this, in their everyday work of attending to customers’ wishes concerning *alternative* food, my informants confront many ambivalences they cannot solve once and for all, which led me to refer to their resulting actions as creative fixes. Given this, in the second step of my analysis I identified two important kinds of creative fixes that transgress the different contexts of *Green Delivery*.

Subsequently, in the last step of my analysis, I shifted from tracing creative fixes within my interview data to analyzing creative fixes within my observational data. More precisely, by providing a theoretically informed thick description of some of the observable valuation practices in the processing area and the community kitchen of *Green Delivery*, this last analytical step was targeted at generating insights with regard to the visible and the rather invisible reconciliations of the co-existing, and partially conflicting, valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that are afforded by *Green Delivery*’s infrastructure.

(Un)Packing a Green Box

Reconstructing Valuations of *Alternative Food at Green Delivery*

In this first part of my empirical findings, I will show how actors in six different contexts of *Green Delivery* ascribe worth to the food they deal with every day. Simultaneously, I demonstrate how these situated acts of valuation enact different realities of *alternative* food.

In analyzing the six different contexts, including *Green Delivery's* management, marketing, purchase, market garden, kitchen, and delivery, I inductively identified three *regimes of valuation*, that I decided to call the *liberal market regime*, the *regime of good agricultural practice*, and *the institutional regime*. In line with Fochler, Felt, and Müller's (2016) conceptualization of regimes of valuation, these three regimes differ not only with regard to their “discursive, material, and institutional background” (p. 180) but also with regard to the “patterns of valuation [that they make] durable” (ibid.). Hence, in presenting my empirical findings, I foreground three closely related facets of *Green Delivery's* valuing processes: Firstly, I reconstruct how the three regimes of valuation that influence valuations of food at *Green Delivery* are grounded in different discursive, material, or institutional backgrounds. Secondly, I demonstrate how valuations that are grounded in different regimes of valuation enact alternativeness (differently). And thirdly, I delineate the kinds of valuations that are made durable in relation to these three regimes of valuation. However, before moving on to the presentation of these findings, let me provide you with a brief summary of the most relevant characteristics of the three regimes:

The first regime of valuation that I identified in my analysis is what I call the *liberal market regime*. In line with the name that I gave to it, I conceive of the *liberal market regime* as grounded in the different discourses, materialities, and institutions that take part in organizing liberalized markets, or liberalized economies. Hence, the respective set of actors that proved as indicative for the presence of the *liberal market regime* is relatively broad reaching from “sales” or “profits” that are mentioned in my interviews, over references to “statistics” or “calculations”, to descriptions of more universal dynamics like the “structural change” in agriculture or the influence of “big concerns”. In line with this observation, valuations that are rooted in the *liberal market regime* seem to enact *alternativeness* as a kind of worth that is primarily economic, detached from the materiality of food, and determined by a rather linear network of (market) actors. Furthermore, valuations that are grounded in the *liberal market regime* enact individual consumers as ultimate proofs of worth.

The second *regime of valuation* that I identified in my analysis is the *regime of good agricultural practice*. In contrast to valuations that are grounded in the *liberal market regime*,

valuations that are grounded in the *regime of good agricultural practice* are rooted in the different discourses, materialities, and institutions concerned with defining what *good* and *bad* agriculture is these days. Hence, in analyzing the narratives of my informants, I interpreted judgements concerning the ethical or aesthetic *goodness* or *badness* of agricultural actors as indicators for the presence of the *regime of good agricultural practice*. In contrast to the *liberal market regime*, valuations that are grounded in the *regime of good agricultural practice* enact *alternativeness* as an essential quality of certain food products. In other words, within the *regime of good agricultural practice* it is assumed that *alternative* food products are imbued with an ‘inherent’ ethical and/or aesthetic worth. Given this specificity, valuations that are grounded in the *regime of good agricultural practice* enact individual food experts as ultimate proofs of worth.

The third and last *regime of valuation* that I identified in my analysis is what I call the *institutional regime*. In contrast to the two previous regimes, valuations that are grounded in the *institutional regime* can be traced back to broader patterns of valuing *alternative* food that are defined and (re)produced by official stakeholder organizations in the realm of organic agriculture—like most prominently the different institutions concerned with organic certification. With regard to how valuations within this last regime enact *alternativeness*, the *institutional regime* seems to constitute a middle ground between the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. This is because, on the one hand, and in line with the *regime of good agricultural practice*, valuations that are grounded in the *institutional regime* enact *alternative* food products as goods that are imbued with essential qualities. As an example, when focusing on the performativity of different organic labels, a *Demeter* label on a carrot evokes other presumptions concerning its essential qualities than an *EU-Eco* label, or the complete absence of any organic label. Put differently, organic labels take part in enacting the essential incommensurability of food products. On the other hand, and in line with the *liberal market regime*, institutional valuations of organic food, simultaneously enact *alternative* food as something that can be produced more efficiently by standardizing its qualities, which is to be interpreted as an economic or market based logic. Hence, organic labels seem to enact *alternative* food products as simultaneously incommensurable and commensurable with one another. Given this ambivalence, valuations within the *institutional regime* seem rather undecided with regard to the worth they are supposed to generate. In other words, depending on the empirical situation, the *institutional regime* seemed to mediate between economic, ethical, or aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food, depending on the influence of the other two regimes of valuation. As to be assumed, valuations that are grounded in the *institutional regime* enact broader institutional valuations as ultimate proofs of worth.

Management

My interview with the manager provided interesting examples for all three *regimes of valuation* that I identified in analyzing *Green Delivery's* valuing processes. However, when scrutinizing the evaluative principles and valuation practices that are indicated by my informant's answers, it seems like the *liberal market regime* bears a dominant influence on *Green Delivery's* management. Furthermore, within the context of management, the *regime of good agricultural* often appears to suggest valuations of *alternative* food that seem antagonist to the valuations suggested by the *liberal market regime*—a condition that I experienced as an interpersonal tension during the entire length of my interview with the manager (as further examined below). Typically, the *institutional regime* seemed to obtain a mediating role, in the sense that it allowed the manager to combine seemingly ambivalent valuations of *alternative* food evoked by the co-existence of the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*.

To begin with the *liberal market regime*, and how it influenced my interview with the manager, it seems interesting to mention that during the entire length of our interview, and during most of our off-record conversations, the manager seemed quite eager to convince me that “numbers”, “sales”, and “profits” are imperative criteria to successfully run an *alternative* business. The manager knew that I did my bachelor degree in *Organic Agriculture and Marketing* at a nearby university, whose students hold some kind of regional reputation for supporting the rather anti-corporate spectrum of Germany's *alternative* farming community, while being rather critical with regard to the more corporate spectrum of it (including *Green Farm*). Hence, as I noted in several of my memos, whenever talking to the manager, I had the impression that many of his answers were addressed to me, as an imagined member of an *alternative* farming community, my informant did not identify with. This latent feeling of tension characterized many of the experiences that I made during my field work, and hence crucially informed my entire analysis, which is why I decided to start the presentation of my findings with the context of *Green Delivery's* management.

In line with this observation, in our interview the manager kept explaining the success of *Green Delivery*, and the personal fulfillment he finds in his work, by referring to the company's “size”, “scope”, or “profitability”. Whereas mentioning these performance criteria does not seem particularly surprising for a company's manager, they serve as a fruitful entry point to better understand what I mean when I claim that the *liberal market regime* seemed to have a crucial influence on my informant's evaluative principles and on his valuations of *alternative* food. To provide a more concrete example, in the following quote the manager reflects upon potential reasons for *Green Delivery's* growing numbers of customers:

“And, certainly, one of the reason why our customer numbers grow so fast, are the marketing efforts of our competitors—in quotation marks [referring to other companies selling *Green Boxes*]. [...] And, another reason, is that we are still a niche of zero point something per mil [most likely in relation to other farms in Brandenburg], who supply the Berlin based market, at all. This is why we grow so fast. For example, in Munich the boxes do not grow so fast anymore. However, in Munich, with 1 million inhabitants, between 25.000 and 28.000 *Green Boxes* are sold every week. And in Berlin only 10.000, even though you have 3.5 to 4 Million inhabitants.” (Management_1, 245-251)

What is interesting about the quote—and, as I will proceed to argue, typical for the *liberal market regime*—is that the valuations my informant expresses seem to be grounded in an imaginary of the market as a superordinate reality. In other words, his answer enacts the worth of *alternative* food as detached from the actual food products that are being sold by *Green Delivery*, and instead determined by a reality of the market that is external to food itself.

Moving on to the *regime of good agricultural practice*, the manager’s valuations, and the accompanying enactments of *alternative* food, differ fundamentally. Towards the second half of our interview, my informant increasingly discussed the worth of *alternative* food, by referring to qualities such as “originality”, “tradition”, or “simplicity”. In contrast to the valuations implied in his primary narrative concerning the importance of thinking *alternative* food economically, the valuations that are grasped through the above notions seem to have a different end in view. More precisely, instead of enacting *alternative* worth as a reality of the market, terms like “originality”, “tradition”, or “simplicity” seem to foreground the ethical-aesthetic worth of *alternative* food—as a kind of worth that is essential to food itself. To provide an example, in the following anecdote the manager tells me about how his ability to appreciate *alternative* food was passed on to him by his parents and grandparents:

“It’s not about organic in the first place. [...] It is about appreciating food, and this is how I grew up. For my grandparents and parents, food has always been in the center, okay? Not in the sense of gluttony, but simply, in the sense that a peeled potato with a piece of butter can also be something wonderful, okay? And every good piece of meat was appreciated by us, hence it is not that I learned this here, but this is the reason why I am here.” (Management_2, 180-185)

As noted before, what is interesting about the above quote is how the manager's anecdote enacts the *alternativeness* of food as a quality that is 'essential', or 'inherent', to certain food products, and the respective eating practices. Furthermore, I argue, that in contrast to the economic valuations that are suggested by the *liberal market regime*, the valuations at hand are to be understood as ethical-aesthetic valuations. To begin with the ethical component, the most illustrative indicator for this interpretation is my informant's use of the word "gluttony", one of the seven cardinal sins, and a strong way to classify between eating habits that are deemed ethical and eating habits that are deemed unethical. With regard to the (accompanying) aesthetic valuations that are suggested by the *regime of good agricultural practice*, another quote of the manager, in which he talks about his personal appreciation for the taste of "artisanal" food products, seems particularly insightful:

"A salami does not have to taste the same all the time, even though it comes from the same butcher, because milk also does not taste the same all the time. There are seasonal differences and that is the interesting thing." (Management_3, 430-433)

As nicely captured in the quote, my informant's evaluative repertoire to think and talk about *good agricultural practice* seems to imply an important aesthetic component. This is because, similar to an answer one might expect from a person who describes a painting, a song, or a poem, the manager's answer, concerned with salamis and milk, enacts himself as an expert in noticing the essential aesthetic worth of the cultural artefact at hand—in his case *alternative* food. In other words, the manager's answer enacts himself as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*.

I chose the two previous examples, because the implied valuations lend themselves to differentiate between the two components of what I call ethical and aesthetic valuations that are suggested by the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Nevertheless, as I argue, these ethical and aesthetic valuations go hand in hand, in most situations, which is why I often speak of "ethical-aesthetic" valuations when referring to the *regime of good agricultural practice*. To make this point a bit clearer, when juxtaposing the performance criteria of *alternative* food that are implied in the two previous examples—like "originality", "tradition", "simplicity", "gluttony", "artisanality", or "taste"—it is difficult to clearly differentiate whether the performance my informant refers to is ethical or aesthetic. Nevertheless, I will proceed to establish this point in the subsequent sections.

Shifting the analytical focus towards the *institutional regime*, throughout the entire length of our interview, my informant referred to institutionalized discourses and

infrastructures, in order to create a clear hierarchy of *alternativeness* with regard to the products sold by *Green Delivery*:

“Important is for us that regional food comes in the first place, *Demeter* is second, then the other organic farming associations—*Naturland*, *Bioland*, whatever—and then in the very end *EU-organic*, okay?” (Management_4, 372-374)

However, what is crucial in relation to the strict hierarchy of *alternative* worth that is enacted by the above quote, is that, when focusing on the actual application of the rule in *Green Delivery*’s daily routines, it seems rather flexible. As the manager told me at another point of our discussion, neither do the employees of *Green Delivery* work with a fixed definition of “regionality”, nor are they obliged to buy a fixed percentage of *Demeter* products. Hence, the *institutional regime* seems to provide a rather loose framework to match broader patterns of institutional and infrastructural valuations of *alternative* food, with both economic valuations and/or ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food. To make this point a bit clearer, it would not be inaccurate to say that the employees of *Green Delivery* are free to purchase and sell all kinds of *alternative* products, as long as long as *Green Delivery*’s customers demand them. Hence, in contrast to the institutional proofs of *alternativeness*, that are expressed in the above rule, neither *Green Delivery*, nor other organic institutions, have the last word when it comes to deciding what counts as *alternative* food in the context of *Green Delivery*’s management. Instead, when considering the entirety of valuations that are implied in the manager’s narrative, it enacts the behavior of *Green Delivery*’s customers ultimate proof of worth, or as I prefer to call it, as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*.

This insight concerning customers as ultimate proofs of *alternativeness* is crucial for understanding how the *liberal market regime* acquires its dominant influence with regard to *Green Delivery*’s management. To provide another clarifying example, in the following quote the manager talks about *Green Delivery*’s quality requirements concerning food products that can be sold in *Green Boxes*:

“The things we deliver have to be 150 percent flawless, alright? That is the goal. The goal is that the customer receives flawless goods. We do not always achieve this, but relatively frequent, alright? That is the goal, and what he buys, I don’t care.” (Management_5, 324-327)

To me, this example bears two important implications: On the one hand, it nicely illustrates how valuations that are rooted in the *liberal market regime* dominate valuations that are rooted in the *regime of good agricultural practice* or the *institutional regime*—the foodstuffs contained in *Green Boxes* need to be “flawless” in order to compete with the foodstuffs sold by other companies selling *alternative* food. On the one hand, it seems to explain the tension that I mentioned at the beginning of this section. This is because the manager seemed to be perfectly aware of the sometimes-ambivalent valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery*. To stick with the above example, the manager was perfectly aware that the necessity to always deliver visually “flawless” food runs counter to his personal ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food. However, in his professional role as the official spokesperson of the company, and barely knowing neither me nor my research focus, he (understandably) did not seem particularly interested in saying something that could mess up the *alternative* integrity of *Green Delivery*.

Marketing

During my time at *Green Delivery*, I conducted two interviews with two different informants who are in charge of the company’s marketing and public relations. The marketing employees form an important link between *Green Delivery* and the company’s customers. As such, they are not only in charge of advertising products but also perform a vast number of heterogeneous tasks that they tend to frame as “good customer care”. I enjoyed the interviews because both my informants seemed quite open to discuss the co-existing and partially ambivalent concepts of *alternativeness* they confront in their everyday work. Again, as I will proceed to demonstrate in this section, the *liberal market regime* seemed to have a dominant influence on the evaluative principles and valuation practices that are captured in my informants’ answers. Nevertheless, given their explicit concern with “good customer care”, it does not seem surprising that the majority of their answers seemed to be grounded in the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Besides that, and in line with my interview with the manager, the *institutional regime* primarily served my informants as a framework for reconciling economic valuations and ethical-aesthetic valuations in their narratives.

A first insightful example for how the *regime of good agricultural practice* informed my discussions with the marketing personnel is grasped in their recurrent descriptions of *Green Delivery* as being part of a “real”, “true”, or “natural” farm. In the same vein, they kept dissociating *Green Delivery* from “anonymous” delivery services for organic food, while highlighting their company’s ambition of “giving the whole thing a face”, as nicely captured in the following statement:

“This is an aspect that distinguishes us from all other delivery services, I mean including the other box schemes. Our advantage is that we are a farm. We are not just an anonymous delivery service, like all these online retailers *Amazon*, *Bonativo*, *Bring-Meister* and all that. That’s not what we are. Instead, we have a farm to rely on, you can visit us, you can discover a lot of stories about *Green Farm*. I mean this is also what I deem important with regard to our marketing, this storytelling.” (Marketing_A_6, 185-190)

In line with the influence that the *regime of good agricultural practice* seemed to have in the manager’s narrative, the above quote nicely captures the ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food my informant’s conception of a being part of a “real farm” is tied to. To make this point a bit clearer, on the one hand, my informant’s statement of not being an “anonymous delivery service” seems to correspond with the widely acknowledged ethical assessment that contemporary supply chains are not transparent enough. On the other hand, his emphasis on the “stories” one can “discover” at *Green Farm* clearly corresponds with what I would label the “happy-farm-aesthetics” or “back-to-nature-aesthetics” that are quite present in Berlin’s *alternative* food sector, and beyond. In line with these labels, my informants mentioned many different practices that provide a vivid impression of the valuations it takes to maintain *Green Delivery*’s ethical-aesthetic worth, as a “real farm”. To mention some of them, my informants are in charge of organizing an annual farm fest, creating regular newsletters, designing etiquettes that comply with the “rustic” corporate identity of *Green Farm*, or taking photos of farm own products, animals, and the surrounding landscape, in order to embed them into *Green Delivery*’s online shop. Hence, as a supplement, this enumeration of valuations nicely captures how my informants’ practices are not only informed by but also constitutive of broader ethical-aesthetic debates concerning *good* and *bad* agriculture.

In line with this finding, many of my informants’ answers enacted contemporary consumers as having a knowledge deficit with regard to the real worth of *alternative* food products. In this regard, in talking about their marketing efforts, they tended to underline their educational/ethical impetus, while downplaying the economic logic implied. As an example, in the following quote one of my informants provides me with a vivid explanation concerning the educational worth of not being able to provide farm-own eggs all the time:

“Yes, we are educational, you could put it like this. Well, we have to be honest with our customers. Recently there was this discussion for example. Here in Brandenburg [the

federate state in which *Green Delivery* is based], every second egg is from a henhouse with more than 30.000 animals, I mean every second organic egg. EU-organic prescribes a maximum of 3.000 animals, and the farmer simply builds a couple of walls, and immediately has multiple henhouses. That was a huge scandal here in Brandenburg. And all customers came to us and, all of a sudden, wanted to buy our eggs. But the thing about our eggs is that they are very, very rare. And then, some customers got angry, and wanted to know why they couldn't get our eggs. And then you have to explain the customers, well if you want an organic-egg that is constantly available and that at best is also cheap, then you have to buy the eggs from the factory farms, that's the way it is. But when you want to have an egg, from which you know that the animals have been kept in an extremely good way, an egg that is expensive, then you have to be prepared that the egg is not available." (Marketing_A_7, 760-770)

What is interesting about my informant's explanation is that it provides fruitful hints concerning the relation of all three regimes of valuation, and how they relate in the context of *Green Delivery's* marketing. Firstly, my informant problematizes the market-centered, or unethical, imaginary of contemporary consumers, who want to be able to buy eggs of a certain quality all year through. Secondly, he proposes a solution, that is educating consumers with regard to the real meaning of *good* eggs, while simultaneously enacting himself as legitimate proof of *alternativeness* when it comes to defining what counts as *good* and *bad* food. In line with this enactment of him being the ultimate proof of *alternativeness*, his answer simultaneously enacts institutionalized valuations of *alternative* food as blind to the actual practices of *alternative* food production, which seems to further increase his legitimacy with regard to the *regime of good agricultural practice*. This interpretation also corresponds with how both my informants framed the criticism they sometimes have to deal with on the company's *Facebook* page. More precisely, both my informants described their motivation for engaging in sometimes controversial *Facebook* debates, as trying to be as "honest", "transparent", or "open" as possible, while, again, foregrounding the educational/ethical worth of these doings.

This dominant emphasis on the ethicalness of *Green Delivery's* valuations of *alternative* food is equally present in my informants' ways of framing the company's customer service. As such, both my informants kept referring to working in the company's customer service as an opportunity to demonstrate "real customer care". This aspect is nicely captured in the following quote in which one of my informants summarizes his idea of how *Green Delivery's* customer hotline should work ideally: "[I]f there are customers who need three quarters of an hour or an hour to place an order, they shall get that time". As I am told, the

responsibilities of *Green Delivery's* customer service reach from reclamations, over additional information concerning the ingredients or availability of products, to personal advice for making holidays in the region. As I am told, some customers even send private photos of how they unpack, prepare or eat the food contained in *Green Boxes*. Hence, the majority of *Green Delivery's* explicit marketing efforts enacts the *alternativeness* of food as something that is essentially grounded in *good* intentions, and human care.

However, despite these omnipresent references to the *regime of good agricultural practice*, the *liberal market regime* still seemed to be the dominant influence in my informants' answers. As I demonstrate in the previous paragraphs, my informants' intention to take care of individual customer wishes as *good* as they can, demands a complex choreography of different valuation practices. Nevertheless, in order to guarantee a fluent work flow, even the marketing personnel sometimes needs to think in terms of economic efficiency. As an example, the following quote nicely captures how the employees of *Green Delivery* classify their customers in the course of imagining the *alternative* worth *Green Boxes* might hold for them:

"Well we have those classic organic buyers, those who already bought our organic products in the early 90s—those who by conviction, consciously, pursue an organic diet, and regional, and also do not want to have plastic in their box, and all that. So, you really recognize that. Then we have the customers who, let's say, the middle-class-to well-off-families in Berlin, well higher middle-class to very well-off. For them it is also a bit of prestige to order from us, or they simply want to do themselves something good, well they want to treat themselves for the efforts they make, let me put it like this. And then we have all those people from the Berlin based food scene, well the classic Foody-*Instagram*: 'I drink my flat white with milk-foam from *Green Farm*, and take a photo of it, and post it on *Instagram*.'" (Marketing_A_8, 723-731)

As one of my informants explained to me, the classification of customers within the above quote resulted from a master thesis that has been written by a student from a close by university. As I am told, besides this thesis, *Green Delivery* does not conduct regular customer surveys. Nevertheless, both my informants kept underlining that the company's sales "go through the roof", while referring to the company's compliance with the wishes of these three imagined groups of customers. As they do not conduct regular customer surveys, they cannot know about this compliance for certain. Nevertheless, as *Green Delivery's* sales seem to be more than satisfactory, they do not need to know about this compliance. Hence, when using this observation to draw a conclusion regarding the dynamics between the three regimes of

valuation, the important implication of the above quote is that it enacts the company's growing customer numbers as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*. An observation that crucially differs from the marketing staffs' self-presentations as legitimate spokespersons for the assessment of really *alternative* food.

Purchase

During my stay at *Green Delivery*, I conducted interviews with two of the company's purchasers. At *Green Delivery*, the purchasers are in charge of ordering the products and produce that consumers order from the wholesaler or smaller cooperating producers. Besides that, the purchasers take a major role in checking the quality of the incoming goods and surveying the company's stock of products. Interestingly, both interviews seemed to resemble one another almost identically with regard to the valuations and enactments of *alternative* food that were implied in the answers. More precisely, the answers of both my informants seemed to be primarily grounded in the *liberal market regime*. Along with that, both informants recurrently drew on the *institutional regime*, in order to assess, or affirm, the ethical worth of their primarily economic valuations of *alternative* food. In the same vein, the *regime of good agricultural practice* seemed to play a subordinate role in the context of *Green Delivery's* purchasing.

With regard to the *liberal market regime*, both my informants seemed to presuppose an imaginary of the *alternative* food market as a market that is supposed to provide for all customer needs at each point of the year. Put differently, their answers seemed to imply an evaluative logic in which the general availability of *alternative* products and produce at a certain time of the year forms an inevitable condition for economic valuations of *alternative* food. Furthermore, in both interviews this taken-for-granted-ness of the *liberal market regime* seemed to be crucially informed by *Green Delivery's* digital purchasing system, in the sense that both provided me with rather short descriptions of their everyday work—descriptions in which *Green Delivery's* built and information infrastructure was framed as a sufficient explanation for buying certain products and not buying others. In short, most of the purchasers' answers seemed to be free from ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternativeness* as essential quality of food, while enacting *alternativeness* as an economic quality that is defined by the market. To provide an example, in the following quote, one of the purchasers shortly summarized how he selects fruits and vegetables throughout the year:

“Now, in the winter, you have one supplier, basically, the wholesaler. And, our market garden. In summer, of course, other suppliers come as well. Like, our small regional

suppliers, who deliver, maybe, once per week, zucchini, bush beans, or savory.”
(Purchase_A_9, 131-134)

As mentioned above, what is interesting about the valuations implied in this quote, is that the purchaser does not judge the qualitative difference between products that are delivered by the wholesaler and products that are delivered by regional suppliers. What counts for him is the general availability in a given market infrastructure.

This interpretation of the predominantly economic valuations undertaken by the purchaser corresponds with other parts of our interview, in which he described how the products that end up in *Green Delivery's* permanent product range are being selected. As my informant described it, when new products become available in the product ranges of the wholesaler or smaller producers, he adds them to *Green Delivery's* online shop. Over the next weeks, he traces the sales of the products, and if enough customers buy a certain product, it remains in *Green Delivery's* product range. As my informant went on to explain, *Green Delivery* constantly seeks to expand its product range no matter if the respective products come from the organic wholesaler or from regional producers. Hence, also with regard to *Green Delivery's* purchasing practices the company's number of customers, and sales per customer, seem to stand in as ultimate proofs of *alternativeness*. Again, this enactment of *alternativeness* is crucially grounded in the *liberal market regime*.

Furthermore, when it comes to *Green Delivery's* purchasing practices, valuations that are grounded in the *institutional regime* seem to be perfectly aligned with the predominant economic logic that I describe in the previous paragraphs. This is because *Green Delivery's* purchasing infrastructure (including my informants) does not make a difference between the different standards, labels, or certificates the company's product range is imbued with. In other words, *Green Delivery's* purchasing infrastructure affords to translate a multitude of different standards, labels, or certificates into one singularized product—*Green Boxes*—while not affording the assessment of how effective these standards, labels, or certificates really are. Again, this assessment, is outsourced to *Green Delivery's* customers, who unknowingly serve as ultimate proofs of *alternativeness*.

This tendency to enact *alternativeness* as a foremost economic worth, and consumers as ultimate proofs of this worth, is mirrored in my informants' explanations of how to select the foodstuffs that can be sold in *Green Boxes* with regard to the issue of quality. To provide an example, in one of the interviews I asked my informant about the quality requirements that are important when sorting out fruits and vegetables that can be sold to *Green Delivery's*

customers. My informant seemed rather surprised by this question, as if the answer to this question seemed somewhat self-explanatory to him:

“I always say: ‘Would you buy the products yourself?’ If they [the packers] say ‘no’ I say: ‘Then you don’t have to put them in the box. There is no point in it.’”
(Purchase_A_10, 403-404)

What is interesting about this rule of thumb is that—as I will proceed to demonstrate in one of the subsequent sections—it is not necessarily the packers’ individual opinion that matters when applying it. Instead, when standing at the assembly line and packing *Green Boxes* the packers are required to imagine and perform a selective behavior of *Green Delivery*’s customers—a behavior that does not necessarily correspond with the selective behavior they personally have. As I argue, here we have an insightful example for the power of the *liberal market regime* in transforming, or at least messing with, individual and embodied ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food.

Another interesting example for the ethical-aesthetic transformations that sometimes seem to be evoked by the *liberal market regime* was captured in a different interview situation, when one of the purchasers described how *Green Delivery* seeks to address societal concerns with waste:

“We try to use as little wrapping material as possible, unless there is no other way, or we get it delivered like that. For example, the soup vegetables, they are always in these little bowls. What’s the point of that? I mean we cannot unpack all of them. Or for example the pears, when we get them, they are wrapped into paper. But we do not deliver paper to our customers, we leave it here. That’s the way it is. We try to pass on as little wrapping material as possible.” (Purchase_11, 529-534)

Hence, what is interesting about the above statement is that my informant seems to be primarily concerned with reducing the wrapping material that reaches the customer (as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*), other than considering waste as a more far reaching problem. Again, this episode provides an illustrative example for how the dominant influence of the *liberal market regime* plays off in local acts of ethical-aesthetic valuation, like in this case targeted at the issue of waste.

Market Garden

Again, my interview with the gardener implies fruitful examples for all the three regimes of valuation that I identified in the course of my analysis. However, what seems particular about the context of the market garden is that the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice* seem to be much more intertwined (on the level of the valuations that are being mentioned), than in the other contexts that I present in these findings. Given this overall impression, it seems important to mention that the market garden forms an independent business segment of *Green Farm*. This means that the market gardener is not directly responsible for what the people at *Green Delivery* do, and vice versa. In the same vein, the gardener does not only grow vegetables for *Green Delivery*, but also for *Green Farm's* farm shop, and the organic wholesaler. Hence, it is important to keep this particular organizational status of the market garden in mind, when considering the valuations of *alternative* food that are implied in my informant's answers.

As I mentioned above, one distinctive feature of the valuations that are traceable in the narratives of the market gardener, is that they often seem to be grounded in both the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice* in a quite explicit way. To provide an initial example, during our interview, the gardener provided me with numerous explanations of how his way of farming combines economic efficiency and social responsibility. As such, he kept drawing relations between his "record breaking sales" (which I interpret as indicative for the influence of the *liberal market regime*), and the "social impact" of his market garden (which is to be interpreted as a valuation of his efforts that is rooted in the *regime of good agricultural practice*). In line with that, he recurrently mentioned his deep interest with creating jobs that are both "economically stable" and "good" or "healthy", which again can be interpreted as an indicator for a simultaneous influence of the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Another example for this kind of hybrid-valuation is provided by the gardener's recurrent emphasis on the importance of implementing a lot of manual labor into the everyday routines of growing vegetables. This is because, as he went on to explain, this strategy would allow him to employ many people, while resulting in a "high", "consistent", and "reliable" quality of vegetables, which in turn would provide him with the financial means to pay his employees a "fair" salary. In the same vein, the gardener recurrently underlined that he is not interested in growing "niche products", or "delicacies", but in "growing food" that is "affordable". The important and shared feature of all these examples is that combining valuations that are grounded within the *liberal market regime* and valuations that are grounded in the *regime of good agricultural practice* seems to be relatively easy for the gardener. By this I mean that in the context of the market garden, combining economic and ethical-aesthetic

valuations of *alternative* food does not seem to cause the same tensions this combination causes, for example, in the context of *Green Delivery's* management. Bluntly speaking, combining the intentions of making money and doing *good* with *alternative* food production do not seem to cause the market gardener a lot of inner dispute, which seems at least partially related to the infrastructural and organizational specificities of his working environment.

Another example that encourages this interpretation of the gardener's valuations of *alternative* food is implied in his descriptions of what makes his market garden cost-efficient. In line with the previous examples, he describes growing vegetables as a process that should be "as simple as possible", and he strongly relates the success of his business to the assessment that he "does not cultivate too many varieties". In case of his market garden this means sixteen crops. In our interview, he names these crops by heart, while pointing into the direction of their respective part of the field. As he went on to explain, he only goes for the "basic varieties". Again, I interpret my informant's concern with "basic varieties" as indicative for the simultaneous influence of both the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Having professional experience in growing vegetables myself, I know about the work and experience it takes to grow a "perfect" carrot, a "flawless" cabbage, or a "tasty" tomato. Hence, it would seem reductionist to me to reduce the gardener's concern with growing "few" varieties with a lot of care, to a mere economic valuation of *alternative* food. Instead, it seems that the physiology of the domesticated vegetable varieties that are grown these days, demand growers to perform economic, and ethical-aesthetic valuations at the same time. A last insightful example for the smooth co-existence of these two *regimes of valuation* in the context of the market garden, is provided in the following quote, in which my informant talks about his quality requirements concerning the vegetables he grows:

"Well, they have to be crunchy, look fresh, and I also like when the goods are a bit bigger, because this causes less waste when processing them. I also believe that when a plant is full-grown, it has more maturity and taste." (Market Garden_12, 321-323)

As I argue, what is particularly interesting about the above quote is the heterogeneity and hybridity of the performance criteria he refers to, and how they blur the boundary between the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*: On the one hand, he refers to many different performance criteria including crunchiness, freshness, size, waste/processability, maturity, and taste. On the other hand, all of the mentioned performance criteria seem to matter with regard to how worth is being created in both the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. To provide a more concrete example, if

one considers the notion of “freshness” it seems difficult to deny that it may indicate both economic, and ethical-aesthetic worth at the same time.

Besides these observations concerning a seemingly fluid boundary between the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice* in the context of the market garden, my interview with the gardener implies other telling passages with regard to the intertwinements of the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime*, as experienced by my informant. More precisely, and in contrast to most of the other interviews that I analyzed, many of the gardener’s answers point at an important influence of the *Demeter* association in his ways of assessing *good agricultural practice*, and the *alternativeness* of food. More precisely, the gardener was the only informant who made explicit references to the “philosophical” or “spiritual” foundations of the *Demeter* association, while recurrently emphasizing how these foundations influence his perception of *good agricultural practice*. As an example, at one point of our interview the gardener mentioned the importance of the “humanist values” he gained throughout his education at a *Demeter* farming school, and how these values still help him to find “spiritual meaning” in the work he does. Even though the gardener was rather implicit about the details of his spirituality, to me it seems that the following quote provides a vivid impression of the kind of *alternative* worth he finds in the institutionalized valuations of “philosophy” or “spirituality” the *Demeter* association supports:

“The cauliflower grows very fast, develops gigantic leaves, and then all of a sudden, the flower is there. And this is like, well you open the plant and this treasure comes out. And it only succeeds under best conditions, and if it can grow quick in one go. So, it is a very challenging culture. [...] And it is just the feeling when you cut the cauliflower, and then, tack, tack, tack [imitates a cutting gesture with his hand]. That is something presentable, the crowning somehow.” (Market Garden_13, 550-557)

What seems particularly telling about the above quote is my informant’s choice of words. As such, he refers to harvestable cauliflower as “treasure” or “the crowning”, which I interpret as an illustrative indicator of how the institutionalized ethics of anthroposophical farming inform my informant’s valuations of *alternative* food. Hence, when compared to the majority of the valuations undertaken at the site of *Green Delivery*, the *institutional regime* seems to unfold a different influence when it comes to growing food (at least for my informant). Another example for this altering influence of the *institutional regime* is captured in my informant’s description of how he chooses the seeds of the varieties he grows. As he explains it to me: “In this regard I am quite pragmatic. I choose a variety and if it is available in organic quality, good. If not, then

so be it". Hence, as it seems, the gardener does not care too much whether the seeds of a certain variety are available in certified *Demeter* quality or not, because, to him, the actual process of growing is much more important with regard to the *alternativeness* of food. Hence, when compared to most of the valuations of *Demeter* products at the site of *Green Delivery*, we see a discrepancy between valuing *Demeter* products and valuing *Demeter* processes. Given this, it seems important to focus on the site-specific differences that seem to cause these site-specific valuations of *alternative* food. As the gardener went on to explain, his primary concern is that the "physiological adaptation" of the varieties he grows matches the environmental conditions of his field site. Hence, as I see it, my interview with the gardener provides the clearest impression of what it means to consider actual vegetables, and not imagined consumers, as ultimate proofs for the worth of *alternative* food. Given that, the gardener is able to actually observe the entire process of vegetable growth, other than merely sorting them out before placing them into *Green Boxes*. His particular way of proofing or testing the worth of *alternative* food thus seems like a feature that crucially distinguishes the context of the market garden from almost all contexts at *Green Delivery*.

Industrial Kitchen

My interview with the chef differed from the other interviews that I conducted for this research project, in the sense that I did not speak to him while sitting at a table, but while standing next to him in *Green Delivery's* industrial kitchen. With regard to *Green Delivery's* valuing processes of *alternative* food, the chef is primarily responsible for preparing ready dishes like salads, sandwich spreads, stews, or bouillons that are sold to both *Green Delivery's* private customers and a growing number of corporate clients. Besides that, in the morning, before the packing begins, the chef and his team are in charge of slicing, weighing, and prepacking cheese- or meat products that require these particular processing steps. The chef is a very extrovert and talkative person, which may be one of the reasons why he also represents *Green Delivery* at public food events, from time to time. In the same vein, he sometimes helps with the guided tours at the company's site. As it seemed to me, the chef is a multitasker: While answering my questions, he prepared several dishes at the same time, which had an interesting influence on the valuations he could perform throughout the interview. Again, the *liberal market regime* seemed to bear a dominant influence on my informant's answers.

Despite this dominant influence of the *liberal market regime*, in re-reading my interview with the chef for the first time, the most present or obvious *regimes of valuation* that are captured in his answers seemed to be the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime*. Bluntly speaking, from all my informants the chef seemed to identify the

most with *Green Delivery's Demeter-certified goodness*, which provided most of his answers with a somewhat missionary touch. As an example, throughout the entire interview the chef emphasized how coming in touch with “the basic concept of *Demeter*” changed his life, while illustratively describing how the production methods that are prescribed by the *Demeter* association lead to the superior quality of *Demeter* products—as nicely captured in the following quote, in which the chef tells me about his first encounter with a piece of *Demeter* roast beef:

“I still remember my first day when I had this piece of *Demeter* roast beef in front of me. [...] Then I cut off a slice and saw this fat texture. At our farm, the average-cow grows 6.8 years old. They are not killed after 1.8 years like in conventional beef production, okay? But after 6.8 years. This is why, the cow builds up an enormous fat-content. The meat is extremely juicy, nicely veined with fat.” (Industrial Kitchen_14, 397-403)

What is crucial about the above quote is that it provides excellent examples for the influence of both the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime*. With regard to the first, the quote is filled with ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food, like the chef's reference to the beef's “fat texture”, and how it is caused by a longer cow-life. With regard to the latter, as the chef frames it, this particular *alternativeness* of *Green Farm's* roast beef is unquestionably related to the *Demeter* association and its regulations. As such, the above quote provides a vivid example for how the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime* evoke mutual, or symbiotic, valuations of *alternative* food in the context of *Green Delivery's* industrial kitchen.

In line with this interpretation, throughout the entire length of our interview, the chef used the *Demeter* association and its certification procedures as important reference points to assess and justify the worth of the food he prepares every day: On the one hand, the chef recurrently described the superior inherent qualities of the *Demeter* products he processes in his kitchen. On the other hand, he kept underlining the meticulous work it takes to comply with the *Demeter* association's requirements concerning the exact composition and labelling of *Demeter* products. Hence, as I see it, the chef's conviction of the *Demeter* label, as a proof of *alternativeness*, does not so much derive from a blind trust in the association's regulations, but much rather from an ongoing work with the materiality of food. At this point, it needs to be mentioned that it is not my concern to assess whether the chef's strong belief in the superior quality of *Demeter* products is justified or not. Instead, it seems much more important to notice that being able to creatively shape the actual materiality of *alternative* food products, according

to one's personal taste, seems like the strongest, or most resilient, proof of worth that I encountered throughout my fieldwork. In other words, and similar to my interview with the market gardener, the fact that the chef is able to manually generate the ethical-aesthetic worth of *Demeter* products seems to crucially influence his ways of valuing *alternative* food. Other than merely justifying the worth of *alternative* food through abstract numbers or statistics, both the gardener and the chef, given their particular working environments, seem to be capable of performing a much broader repertoire of valuations than the rest of my informants—as nicely indicated by their vast repertoire of ethical-aesthetic performance criteria they used in describing their everyday work, like “juiciness”, “crunchiness”, “taste”, “texture”, “freshness”, “physiology”, “size”, “shape”, “smell”, “feel”, and so on.

Nevertheless, sometimes the chef's performance of *Green Delivery's* goodness seemed simply exaggerated, to me. Yes, sometimes the interview seemed like a *bad* sales event (reference to the *liberal market regime* intended). In line with his continuous emphasis on the essential worth of *Green Delivery's* products, throughout the entire interview the chef seemed particularly eager to highlight the company's concern with “saving” food that would “normally” go to waste, as vividly captured in the following quote in which the chef describes his practice of reusing some of the vegetables that are cannot be sold in *Green Boxes*:

“So, we don't produce any waste, here, nothing is going to waste, nothing. Even if there is only a single pepper, I take it and throw it into my vegetable stock, or in some kind of sauce.” (Industrial Kitchen_15, 191-194)

By referring to the above quote as bad-sales-event-like, it is not my intention to defame the chef's doings. Nevertheless, when contrasting it with *Green Delivery's* routine practice of returning entire crates of fruits and vegetables to the organic wholesaler because they do not match the ethical-aesthetic valuations of the company's imagined customers, the chef's act of saving “single pepper[s]” and the like seemed somewhat helpless (at best), and hypocritical (at worst). One would have every right to ask something like: “What's the worth of this action?”

The reason why I am being slightly polemic at this point is that I want to underline my argument that, in line with the other contexts that I analyzed at the immediate site of *Green Delivery*, the *liberal market regime* seems to bear a dominant influence on the chef's valuations of *alternative* food. To make this point a bit clearer, whereas during most of our interview, the chef seemed quite eager to convince me of the essential worth of the *alternative* food he prepares every day, while enacting the materiality of food as ultimate proof of worth, in some moments his answers enacted *Green Delivery's* consumers as ultimate proofs of worth. In line

with that, his enactments of *alternative* worth shifted from enacting it as essential worth, to enacting it as external worth, that is crucially determined by consumers in a pretty standard imaginary of markets. As my informant explained to me, he has different ways to test whether the dishes he prepares meet the requirements of his customers. Firstly, every time he develops a new dish, he walks through the different areas of *Green Delivery* asking the other employees to try it. As he puts it, “if twenty people give you their opinion, you have something you can work with”. Secondly, the chef relies on the feedback of his customers:

“We sell these steaks, in this particular marinade, and lately one of the customers told us, that it was too salty. [...] But the other one hundred customers who bought it in the last half of the year did not think it was too salty, so I can orient myself along this feedback, saying ‘okay, one customer did not like it, the other hundred customers liked it.’ So, it is okay for me. I can live with that.” (Industrial Kitchen_16, 139-145)

What is interesting about this way of valuing the taste of *alternative* food, is that it enacts taste as a quality which is perfectly quantifiable, or easy to objectify, an idea that does not always seem to align with essentialist valuations of *alternative* food that are tied to the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Hence, as I see it, the quote provides a good example for the dominant influence of the *liberal market regime* within the chef’s efforts to frame his doings as particularly moral.

This said, the chef is perfectly clear about the economic dimensions of his doings. Hence, he does not try to hide them, and can therefore not be accused of fraudulent intentions. As an example, he straightforwardly explained me that his current kitchen does not have the capacity to handle the growing number of *Green Delivery*’s customers to his satisfaction, and he excitedly told me about the company’s plans to expand the kitchen:

“I already planned my new kitchen in my head. I already sketched it basically. We simply have to get bigger, we need more, bigger devices, we need more work area [...]. And this is the problem, and this is why we built the industrial kitchen.” (Industrial Kitchen, 234-239)

Given this last, almost stereotypical example, for valuations of food that are rooted within the *liberal market regime*, and its logic of scaling-up, expanding, making processes more efficient, and the like, the conclusive statement I would like to draw with regard to the context of the industrial kitchen aims for a different message. As I see it, my interview with the chef, and my

reconstruction of the valuations that are undertaken in *Green Delivery's* industrial kitchen, again, provides an illustrative impression of the tensions that the employees of *Green Delivery* encounter in their everyday work. More precisely, I take the interview with the chef as an example for some of the incommensurable valuations of *alternative* food that can be traced back to the nexus of the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Given this, I would like to end this section by excusing me for my sometimes-polemic comments on the chef's answers. I guess, the interview was tense for both of us: For him, because he had to provide me with a coherent performance of the sometimes-contradictory valuations of *alternative* food that emerge from the different regimes of valuation that influence *Green Delivery's* doings. And for me, because I had to find a way to make sense of this performance without being overly gullible on the one hand, or overly suspicious on the other hand.

Delivery

One of the marketing employees was so kind to arrange an interview with one of the company's deliverers. As he told me, my prospective informant is generally known as a very motivated and talkative employee. My interview with the deliverer confirmed this opinion. Every day the company's deliverers pick up the readily packed *Green Boxes* from *Green Delivery's* cooling units, and distribute them in a specific area they are in charge of. The time this distribution of *Green Boxes* takes differs from deliverer to deliverer. At the day of our interview, my informant returned around noon to the main building of *Green Delivery*. As it was a sunny day, we were sitting on a little bench in front of the building of *Green Delivery*, and my informant seemed quite content about the chance to share some impressions of his everyday work with me. A particularly interesting aspect about my interview with the deliverer was that, when compared to the narratives of other informants such as the chef or the marketing personnel, his answers did not seem to imply as many ethical valuations of the *alternative* food contained in *Green Boxes*. Nevertheless, this is not to be misunderstood as an absence of morality. In contrast, the deliverer seemed like an enormously loyal employee with high personal standards concerning the quality of his work. Hence, it seems more appropriate to say that his answers were characterized by the absence of *Green Delivery's* dominant, or visible, ethical valuations of *alternative* food. As I interpret it, the deliverer's narrative implies many hints concerning the rather invisible valuations of *alternative* food that *Green Delivery's* infrastructure relies on.

To begin with the *institutional regime*, out of all informants, the deliverer seemed to be the most determined in considering the *Demeter* certificate a legitimate proof for the *alternative* worth of food. This observation is vividly captured in the following quote, in which he opposes

how some people criticize organic food, while expressing his respect for all the paperwork undertaken at *Green Delivery* in order to fulfill all the necessary certification requirements:

“In terms of the price it is a bit more expensive than conventional stuff, but let me put it like this, it’s worth it, and [the owner of *Green Farm*], has to comply with a lot of requirements to make use of this certification, this is what he told us back then. Because if you hear all these prejudices on the Internet: ‘organic that’s all crap’ and, and, and ‘everybody can have this certificate.’ No, no, that’s not the case. Yes, this is what he explained to us. He has loads of document files in his office where all these requirements and regulations are in.” (Delivery_18, 367-373)

Even though the deliverer considers organic food “a bit more expensive”, and hence does not buy it on a frequent basis, he is certain that organic products in general, and *Demeter* products in particular are worthier than “conventional stuff”, which can be read as indicative for a simultaneous influence of the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime*. Besides that, what also seemed interesting about the above quote is how the deliverer grounds his valuations in crucially local administrative practices. Hence, similar to some of the valuations I remarked in my interviews with the chef and the gardener, the respective valuations of the deliverer seemed to be crucially grounded in his immediate material working environment, other than in more elusive economic, aesthetic, or ethical debates.

Another insightful moment for understanding how both the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime* seemed to influence the deliverer’s valuations of *alternative* food was when he talked about the taste of *Green Farm*’s products. More precisely, at several points of our interview, the deliverer underlined the “good quality” of the food contained in *Green Boxes*, while emphasizing that it “taste[s] better than conventional stuff”, or that it is “definitely fresher”. Again, these statements can be read as ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food. And, again, it was an embodied experience—in this case having eaten some of *Green Farm*’s products—that seemed to evoke the particular conviction, or decisiveness, in my informant’s valuation. And, again, from my pragmatist perspective, it does not matter whether his statement concerning the taste of the *alternative* food sold by *Green Delivery* is true or false. Instead, it is more about how he talks about it. And, as I said, when talking about the taste of some of *Green Delivery*’s products, the valuations of my informant seemed to be pretty empathically.

In line with this conviction concerning the inherent worth of the products he is responsible for, the deliverer’s descriptions of his everyday work indicated a high level of

respect for the products contained in *Green Boxes* as well as for *Green Delivery's* customers. As he put it, some of *Green Delivery's* customers are quite sensitive with regard to the outer appearance of food, which is why he always has to be very careful that the fruits and vegetables do not take any harm during delivery:

“For example, it is important that we do not place the milk on top of the vegetables, if there are single bottles. So, what I do is, if the box is not filled until the top, I lift the vegetables a bit, put the bottle in the corner, and make it look tidy again. Otherwise, [...] I place the bottles next to the box.” (Delivery_19, 404-411)

As this quote suggests, the deliverer performs a lot of invisible valuations that are required for maintaining the satisfaction of *Green Delivery's* customers. More precisely, the quote provides a vivid impression of the invisible work it takes to make the ethical-aesthetic worth of the *alternative* food contained in *Green Boxes* count as economic worth. Put differently, if it was not for the deliverer's individual, and extremely local practices of care, *Green Delivery's* overall success strategy to provide the company's customers with food that is not only *alternative* but also “flawless”, would be endangered. Given this, the deliverer also seems to experience a certain frustration with regard to a lack of appreciation on the side of some customers:

“Well, sometimes, all these amounts of food that some people order, in particular those who live higher in the buildings. Then, I sometimes think to myself: ‘Is this really necessary.’ [...] In these moments, I think: ‘Man, nobody would ever buy so much food, when you go shopping, if you would have to carry it up the stairs. This is what annoys me sometimes. Also, when we have new customers, and I see that they only order a crate of milk, or a crate of water, I can be certain that they live on the third or the fourth floor, and, normally I am right about that.’” (Delivery_20, 293-244)

What is important about the above quote is that it reminds us of the strong influence the *liberal market regime* holds in the working context of *Green Delivery's* deliverers. When reading this quote, one even gains the impression that, when it comes to the valuation practices related to delivering food, the three regimes of valuation seem to stand in a symbiotic relation. This is because, the strong influence of both the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime* in the deliverer's narrative, seem like an important driving force for his economic efficiency.

Fixing *Alternative Food* at *Green Delivery*

As indicated in my previous findings section, the valuations of *alternative* food that are suggested by the three co-existing regimes of valuation at *Green Delivery* do not always fit together smoothly. Instead, they often seem to stand in an ambivalent relation. Put differently, as I have noticed in some situations, the evaluative principles that I grasped in my informants' answers seem to imply different, and often conflicting, conceptions of *alternativeness*. Building on Stark's (2009) suggestion that conflicts between evaluative principles are to be understood as "creative friction", in this section I will proceed to focus on some of the recurrent conflicts that I noticed throughout my analysis, while paying particular attention to the creative activity they seem to evoke. By this I mean that I will concentrate on describing how recurrent conflicts between co-existing valuations of *alternativeness* result in creative recombinations⁵ of the evaluative principles that are at stake in the respective moments of "friction". As I will demonstrate, the conflicts that I describe in this section transgress the different contexts of *Green Delivery*, which is why I decided to structure my writing along two distinct patterns of creative recombinations that I identified throughout my analysis: Firstly, I will focus on conflicts that create what I call "discursive fixes"⁶. Secondly, I will proceed to focus on conflicts that are constitutive of what I call "infrastructural fixes".

Given this, the purpose of this second part of my findings is to illustrate the reflexive dynamics that emerge through the co-existing regimes of valuation that shape how my informants at *Green Delivery* arrive at valuations of *alternative* food. Moreover, it is meant to show how these reflexive dynamics materialize in relation to *Green Delivery's* infrastructural affordance. Hence, whereas the previous section opened up the complexity of the situated ways of valuing *alternative* food in the different contexts of *Green Delivery*, this section is supposed to provide a better understanding of how these complex processes are simultaneously informed by, and constitutive, of more durable patterns of valuing *alternative* food—patterns that are likely to exceed the spatial and temporal boundaries of *Green Delivery* both discursively and infrastructurally.

⁵ Following Stark's approach, these recombinations can be seen as "creative" actions, because they do not follow strictly organized patterns, or as he puts it, because they are no "business as usual" (p. 17).

⁶ As mentioned before, the reason why I chose the term "fixes", is that my informants' behavior does not seem to 'solve' the respective conflicts, but rather to change their trajectory.

Fixing Alternative Food Discourses

None of the interviews that I conducted at *Green Delivery* was free from conflicting valuations of *alternative* food. As an example, most of my informants used to switch between enactments of *alternativeness* as an essential ethical-aesthetic quality of food, and an external reality of food markets. As such, the interviews implied a conflict concerning the actual locus of *alternative* worth. In this section, I will proceed to demonstrate that these conflicts, and the conflicting valuations they evoked in my informants' answers, are not to be misinterpreted as fraudulent intentions *à la* greenwashing. Instead, I propose to conceive of them as a consequence of the co-existing regimes of valuation my informants' have to cope with in their valuations of *alternative* food—coping mechanism that, as I argue, result in discursive fixes of *Green Delivery's* imperfect infrastructure for valuing *alternative* food.

The particular conflict that I will focus on in order to clarify this point, is tied to the controversial issue of breeding, slaughtering, and eating animals. To provide a better understanding of the conflicting valuations of *alternative* food that emerge around this issue, I would like to draw on a situation that occurred during my interview with the market gardener, in which he tells me about a typical criticism the employees of *Green Delivery* encounter on the company's *Facebook* page:

“Well, critique is relatively rare. Obviously, there is some critique. I mean they can call at *Green Delivery*, no? And there also is a Facebook-page, where indeed is a lot of negative critique, especially from the vegan corner. [...] Because we are quite active when it comes to selling meat. And this critique is ugly, sometimes really ugly, you know? That you really think: ‘Hey, I am doing a good thing but they think you are a murderer.’” (Market Garden_21, 295-304)

The conflict implied in this quote seems to result from two different ways of valuing *good agricultural practice*. On the one hand, the quote implies the gardener's way of valuing *good agricultural practice*. To him, it is obvious that *Green Farm* and *Green Delivery* are “doing a good thing”, even though they sell meat. On the other hand, the quote implies a description of how a distinct group of consumers (“the vegan corner”), interprets the *regime of good agricultural practice*, while advocating a complete abolition of domestic livestock in agriculture. As such, the quote points at a conflict between two irreducible evaluative principles concerning the issue of selling meat. If one now speculates about the reasons for this conflict, while using my conceptual vocabulary, the most sensible explanation seems to be a differing influence of the *institutional regime*. This is because, as we have seen in my initial analysis of my interview

with the gardener, he strongly identifies with some of the institutional patterns of valuations that are defined by the *Demeter* association including a strong concern for the circular interplay of humans, domestic livestock, and plants. Members of the anticipated “vegan corner”, however, seem to ground their ways of valuing *good* agricultural practice in more *alternative* animal rights discourses aiming for the complete abolition of using domestic livestock in agriculture. Hence, if both parties of the described conflict would insist on their evaluative principle, this would result in a problem for *Green Delivery*’s efforts to sell *alternative* food, as they might lose some of their customers—the company’s most important proof of *alternativeness*.

In discussing the controversial issue of meat consumption with one of the marketing employees, she points at the same conflict between *Green Delivery*’s stance towards meat consumption, and a vegan stance towards meat consumption. Nevertheless, in contrast to the previous quote, her answer provides a better impression of how the employees of *Green Delivery* cope with these situations, this is by recombining their evaluative repertoire:

“The classics are: ‘Do you also separate your calves from their mothers after birth, and why do you slaughter your animals, if your farm is foremost a dairy farm?’ For example, these are the classics. So, you are always being accused of cruelty and greed for money, as a farmer. And then I always say, okay, basically it’s quite simple to argue there. Because, I’d really love to see the person who shows me a farmer with a golden watch.” (Marketing_B_22, 271-275)

In order to cope with the criticism of “cruelty” my informant comes up with a counterargument: “I’d really love to see the person who shows me a farmer with a golden watch.” What is important about her counterargument, is that it recombines the evaluative principles that are at stake in the imagined conflict, by introducing a third evaluative logic. More precisely, she shifts from discussing the initial conflict, that is the ethics of harming animals (“cruelty”), to discussing the ethics of dealing with money (“greed”). Hence, in crafting her counterargument, she creatively shifts the imagined conflict into a new direction. If we now imagine a discussion between her and one of the animal rights activist, we would potentially notice a shift from a situation of impasse (two irreducible evaluative principles confront one another), to a situation that provides new avenues for discussing the worth of *alternative* food. We would potentially notice how the dispute, or discourse, shifts into a more economic direction.

A similar situation, in which the issue of meat consumption equally seemed to evoke a creative recombination of the evaluative principles at stake, occurred during my interview with

the manager. More accurately, having in mind that discussions about veganism easily get a bit heated at *Green Delivery*, I straightforwardly asked the manager about his opinion on the fact that some consumers are particularly concerned with animal rights. In line with the previous example, his answer seemed to shift the trajectory of the initial conflict into another direction:

“People always confuse two things. Everybody knows that meat consumption has to be reduced. At home, we only eat meat once per week. Otherwise, even I eat vegan sometimes, I don’t know, when my wife does not throw butter in it, then it is vegan. And that is then the important thing, yes? Because if everybody only eats meat once per week, the discussion whether we could feed the world with animal products would be solved, because then it would be enough. But as long as we import soy from South America to fatten our pigs, I totally agree with the vegan. That cannot work.”
(Management_23, 506-512)

In line with the previous example, the manager describes a conflict between an interpretation of the *regime of good agricultural practice* that is in favor of meat consumption, and an interpretation of the same regime that is against meat consumption. Again, these different interpretations seem to be explainable on the basis of other *regimes of valuation* that inform how the described parties value *alternative* food. What is important, however, is that in line with the example of the marketing employee, the manager’s attempt to overcome this conflict consists of introducing a third evaluative principle. As such, he shifted from the initial conflict of harming animals *versus* not harming animals at *Green Farm*, to discussing the sustainability of breeding animals on a global scale. Hence, in line with the previous example, instead of taming the initial conflict, the manager recombines the evaluative principles at stake and creates a situation that is characterized by new discursive avenues.

A last example for such a discursive coping mechanism is implied in my interview with the chef. As usually towards the end of my interviews, I asked my informant whether he would like to supplement something to our discussion that we missed so far. As it did not seem to be covered in sufficient depth by my interview questions, after a short moment of reflection, the chef provided me with an elaborate counterargument for why, in his view, organic food could not be criticized for being too expensive. In line with the previous examples, what seems particularly interesting about this passage is how the chef recombines the evaluative principles at stake in order to create an argument in favor of consuming *alternative* meat:

“When I hear: ‘Organic is too expensive, too expensive, too expensive.’ Basically, people who have a healthy diet can also afford organic food, even if they live on unemployment money. This is how I see it. You know, the average German wants to eat meat every day. For a family of four this makes one kilo of meat per day. So, one kilo of meat costs between let’s say eight and fifteen Euros. Let us calculate with thirteen Euros per kilo, seven days per week, then we are at 91 Euros per week, that makes 364 Euros per month. If I now eat meat once per week, this means every Sunday my Sunday roast. On Friday, I eat a bit of fish. Tuesday, Thursday, I put a bit of sausage on my sandwich, and apart from that I eat vegetarian- then I have what I save every day from these thirteen Euros for meat, ultimately. I can shift it to vegetables. And I bet with you, from the thirteen Euros, something will be left over at the end of the day. This means, when you eat properly and consciously and healthy, you can afford organic and it won’t be too expensive. And then you hear the proletariat: ‘Hey organic is shit! Nobody can afford that!’ That is nonsense. Who eats properly and consciously- that’s the way it is.” (Industrial Kitchen_24, 479-490)

Again, the initial conflict implied in the quote seems to rely between the chef, who thinks that the *alternative* meat sold by *Green Delivery* is not too expensive, and a group of anticipated customers who think that *alternative* meat is too expensive. Even though the quote is not directly concerned with the issue of veganism, it crucially resembles the other examples with regard to how the chef recombines his evaluative principles concerning *alternative* meat. In line with the other examples, the initial conflict can be seen as a situation in which two irreducible evaluative principles for assessing the worth of *alternative* meat collide. Nevertheless, in recombining his evaluative repertoire, my informant seems capable to perform what I call a discursive fix for the conflict: He comes up with a counterargument that enacts a third reality of *alternative* meat—a reality in which those consumers who do not buy *alternative* meat for monetary reasons are described as less rational. More precisely, he describes the consumption of *alternative* food as tied to a “conscious”, “proper”, or “healthy” diet, while referring to a divergent diet as “proletarian”. Hence, in this last case, the chef’s way of fixing *alternative* food discourses does not only imply a justification of *Green Delivery*’s efforts to sell meat, but also a defamation of those who willingly or unwillingly do not participate in the *alternative* food markets his employing company is a part of. As I see it, a problematic way of valuing *alternative* food.

Fixing Alternative Food Infrastructures

Another relevant pattern of creative recombinations that I identified in my interview data seems to grasp what I call *infrastructural fixes of alternativeness*. The difference that I see between *discursive fixes* and *infrastructural fixes*, as two ways of coping with co-existing regimes of valuation, is that the latter seem to aim for material changes of the conflicting evaluative principles that are made durable in *Green Delivery's* infrastructure. Again, my interview with the gardener provides an interesting entry point for specifying what I mean by infrastructural fixes: At one point of our interview, while explaining me how he selects the seeds for the different vegetable varieties that he grows on his fields, the gardener pointed at the problem of bottlenecks in the supply chain for certified *alternative* seeds:

“Well they [*Demeter* association] would like it [that the gardener always uses certified *Demeter* seeds], but fundamentally we have to comply with the EU-organic regulations. This means, when the variety is available, we have to take EU-organic, otherwise untreated conventional seeds. And in case of some varieties, for a couple of years, there are only category-1 seeds [prescribed EU-organic quality], so there is no way to take something different, I think cucumbers for example, they always have been there in organic quality. Beetroots, yes beetroots, a bad example, because they are always category-1, but the seeds are not there. Yes, and at some point, you are allowed to grow them anyways, yes. But I am quite pragmatic about that, if a crop is available in EU-organic that's good, if not, then so be it.” (Market Garden_2_25, 705-713)

The quote points at an interesting conflict between the *institutional regime* (suggesting certified *Demeter* seeds) and the *regime of good agricultural practice* (suggesting seeds that match the gardener's requirements concerning their physiological adaptation to his field-site). As the gardener puts it, in order to cope with this conflict, he has to make a “pragmatic” choice. In the example at hand, this pragmatic choice seems to consist of weighing up the worth that can be generated by following the valuations that are suggested by the two conflicting *regimes of valuation*, in order to decide which of the two paths would generate more worth for the gardener: On the one hand, when performing the valuations suggested by the *institutional regime* the gardener would not be able to grow certain varieties of *alternative* food, as soon as there is an impasse in the supply infrastructure for *Demeter* seeds. On the other hand, following the valuations suggested by the *regime of good agricultural practice*, the gardener sees himself capable to counterbalance the lack of institutional worth—caused by the lacking *Demeter* certification of certain vegetable varieties he decided to grow—through his expertise

in *alternative* growing practices. In the example at hand, the gardener decides for the latter option. What is interesting about the example is that this pragmatic decision does not seem to affect how he assesses the *alternativeness* of fully-grown vegetables. Hence, the situation points at a creative recombination of the gardener's evaluative repertoire. A recombination that allows him to preliminarily fix bottlenecks in the supply infrastructure of *Demeter* seeds, while allowing him to confidently continue with his valuations of *alternative* food.

Another example for such a creative fix was mentioned in my interview with the deliverer. During most of our interview, the deliverer seemed quite satisfied with his job, his colleagues, and his good relation to the owner of *Green Farm*. In discussing his everyday work, he kept emphasizing the positive aspects of his work as a driver, or how nice it was to establish a closer relationship to some of the customers. Nevertheless, some of his answers indicate that his everyday work is not entirely free from conflicts, as strikingly captured in the following quote, in which he re-narrates his encounters with particularly demanding customers:

“Or, I also have these big mouths, who stand there like this [folds his arms in front of his chest], and they are like, ‘well, you rang the bell half an hour ago, what took you so long all the way up?’ [...] But I mean, I have some experts, who say things like, I mean they don’t say it, but you see that they are like: ‘You fat- you fat animal.’ Or something. Like, like, you can really see their derogatory view, but then I try to get out there quickly.” (Delivery_26, 239-249)

In line with the previous example, this touching episode seems to point at a recurrent conflict within *Green Delivery's* infrastructure for the valuation of *alternative* food. More precisely, it points at a conflict between some customers who seem to particularly value the convenient home-delivery of *Green Boxes*, and the driver who thinks that these very customers overstretch his function as the person who is in charge of this convenient service. Nevertheless, the management of *Green Delivery* seems to be aware of these conflicting conceptions of *alternative* food that are entangled in the company's infrastructure, and, similar to the previous example, came up with a pragmatic solution. More concretely, during our interview, the deliverer smilingly mentioned the invention of so called “crate money”, a monetary bonus of one extra Euro for every crate of water, milk, or other beverages that needs to be carried higher than the third floor (even if there is an elevator). Hence, other than taming the tension by confronting the respective customers with the inaccuracy of their wishes, or confronting the driver with the inaccuracy of his complaints, the management of *Green Delivery*

has found a monetary fix that (at least temporarily) seems to maintain the valuation of *Green Boxes*, while assumingly generating more worth for all actors involved.

A last insightful example for such an infrastructural fix of *alternative* food was indicated in my interview with the manager. As mentioned before, the manager seemed to have a strong opinion with regard to the ethical-aesthetic worth of certain *alternative* food products (e.g. artisanal salami), which I interpret as indicative for the presence of the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Nevertheless, he also seemed to be quite eager to convince me that the success of agrifood businesses like *Green Delivery*, is primarily determined by valuations that are grounded in the external reality of organic food markets—hence, in what I call the *liberal market regime*. In this regard, the following quote does not only seem to grasp another example for an infrastructural fix undertaken by the employees of *Green Delivery*. Instead, it simultaneously seems to illustrate my informants' discomfort with the condition that *Green Delivery's* solution does not meet his ethical-aesthetic conception of *alternative* food:

“[T]he customers simply want something for their money. It is not cheap. I mean the entire organic sector is not cheap, and that is quite right. But for this money they simply want flawless goods, and, for certain, this was entirely different fifteen or twenty years ago. But in this regard the entire organic sector changed completely. That is to say, the apples that you got in the organic shop twenty years ago, you can't sell today anymore in the organic shops, not in a single one you can sell them.” (Management_27, 355-361)

As it seems, the manager is well aware that his ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food do not match the ethical-aesthetic valuations he assumes *Green Delivery's* customers to have. Put differently, the manager seems well aware, that imperfect apples do not match contemporary aesthetics of morality. Nevertheless, my point here is not to criticize the manager's individual behavior, but to point at the ambivalence that is evoked by the company's infrastructure for valuing *alternative* food. In the situation at hand, it seems like the manager does not want to accept, or admit, that the *alternative* food which is demanded by the entirety of *Green Delivery's* customers matches his personal conception of *alternative* food. Nevertheless, given the strong influence of the *liberal market regime* within *Green Delivery's* infrastructure for valuing *alternative* food, the company finally depends on the customers' and not on the manager's opinion as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*. Given this, it seems as if the manager cannot blame the customers for demanding “flawless goods”, even though he would like to because “flawlessness” does not match his personal ethical-aesthetic conception of

alternativeness. As a result, he blames it on the “organic sector” and its dependence on the *liberal market regime*. A creative fix of the actual conflict between his conception of *alternativeness* and his customers’ conception of *alternativeness*, that is supposed to maintain the *alternative* integrity (or *alternative* self-worth), of all actors involved, while justifying the entirety of their valuations of *alternative* food. Nevertheless, the new situation, that is the situation after the manager’s recombination, seems paradoxical, because within it the manager’s static reliance on the *liberal market regime* confronts the customers’ static reliance on the *liberal market regime*. Hence, judging from the ambivalence of the manager’s behavior, it seemed as if his arguments to convince me of the *liberal market regime* ultimately unsettled him more than they unsettled me.

The Ambivalent Outcomes of Green Delivery’s Alternative Efforts

Within *Green Delivery*’s infrastructure, customers serve as ultimate proof of *alternativeness*, whereas these very customers trust in *Green Delivery*’s infrastructure in trying to fulfill their individualized desires for *alternative* food—a condition that understandably results in a certain ambivalence within my informants’ answers to my sometimes-provocative interview questions. Nevertheless, this very ambivalence also characterizes the observational data that I gathered at my field site. Hence, in this section, I will continue with my analysis of conflicting valuations of *alternative* food, while slightly modifying my focus. Other than describing the creative recombinations that lead to moments of valuation, as I did in the previous section, in this section I will focus on describing two of the outcomes of *Green Delivery*’s valuing processes of *alternative* food: Products and Eaters.

In line with my interview with the manager, the interesting aspect about these outcomes is their ambivalence, in so far as they seem to be crucially affected by the co-existing, and sometimes conflicting, enactments of *alternative* food that *Green Delivery*’s valuing processes rely on. Hence, in the first part of this section, I describe how the different valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery* materialize in what I call “ambivalent products”. Subsequently, in the second part of this section, while closing the argumentative circle with regard to my analysis of the manager’s evaluative behavior, I take this consideration a bit further, by showing how *Green Delivery*’s valuations of *alternative* food seem to create what I call “ambivalent eaters”.

Creating Ambivalent Products

My point in this section is that the worth of *Green Boxes* is not only to be grasped in terms of *alternativeness*, but also in terms of ambivalence. In other words, I argue that all *Green Boxes* that leave the site of *Green Delivery* are to be seen as the ends of conflicting valuations of *alternative* food, as much as they are to be seen as the means of conflicting valuations of *alternative* food, which is why I propose to conceive of *Green Boxes* as ambivalent products. To make this point a bit clearer, I will describe how *Green Boxes* are being packed at the assembly line of *Green Delivery*. In so doing, my analytical focus is on how *Green Delivery's* infrastructure for valuing *alternative* food succeeds and fails in reconciling the ambivalent evaluative logics of the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*. Due to its intermediate function, the *institutional regime* is of minor importance for this analytical step.

On the one hand, the assembly line of *Green Delivery* affords a variety of valuations that seem to correspond crucially with the dominant logic of the *liberal market regime*: The assembly line of *Green Delivery* is divided into five individual packing stations. Each of these packing stations is equipped with a computer, a scale, and a stock of products and produce. This stock is renewed by the packers on a daily basis. That means that every day, before the packing starts, the packers walk through the storage areas and cooling units of *Green Delivery* in order to collect the goods that are assigned to their packing station. This step is facilitated by the company's computer system that links customer orders to the company's stock of products, allowing the administrative staff to generate and print a list with the fresh produce and packaged products that are required at each packing station. As one of the packers explains to me, the distribution of fruits and vegetables across the packing stations depends on their physical robustness: *Station 1* is equipped with "insensitive" produces such as cabbages, pumpkins, or potatoes. *Station 2* is equipped with "more sensitive" produces like oranges, apples, or beetroots. *Station 3* is equipped with "sensitive" produces such as kiwis, mandarins, or celery, and *Station 4* with even "more sensitive" produces like salads, tomatoes, or mushrooms. Lastly, the person at *Station 5* is in charge of adding the products from the white area (foremost cheese, meat, and ready meals), before stacking the completed *Green Boxes* on a trolley that can be stored in a cooling unit, until the drivers pick them up for delivery. Besides that, the daily routine of packing is sub-divided into different "tours", different "customer numbers", and different "position numbers". The different tours are organized in relation to the respective areas of distribution. The customer numbers (in form of a sticker) assign a customer to a box. Since some customers order more than one box, the position numbers (in form of another sticker) help not to confuse the customers while the boxes wander

through the different stations of the assembly line. All computers at the packing stations are equipped with a software that is programmed for the operation of box schemes. As mentioned above, the main function of this software is to split and distribute the individual orders of each customer across the different packing stations. Furthermore, the software links the digital scales to the general data base of *Green Delivery*, so that the exact amount of each produce contained in the boxes can be administered. When packing the boxes, the person at *Station 1* starts by sticking both the customer and the position number on a box. In a next step, the software indicates, for example, that a customer ordered one head of cabbage, 500 grams of potatoes, and a bottle of wine. When all produces are placed in the box, weighed, and confirmed it is pushed further to the next packer, who performs the same procedure. Besides these elements that render the efficient packing of *Green Boxes* possible, *Green Delivery's* infrastructure engenders other elements that additionally increase individualized *alternativeness*. The company proposes different pre-composed variants of *Green Boxes*—all of which enact different *alternatives* that seem perfectly adapted to the desires of contemporary consumers. To provide some examples, the online shop of *Green Delivery* offers “regional-boxes”, “raw-food-boxes”, “blend-diet-boxes”, “office-boxes”, and “single-boxes”. However, if these pre-composed conglomerates of *alternativeness* should not meet customers’ wishes, they are free to place entirely individual orders.

Astonishingly, working at one of the packing stages, this abundant proliferation of individual customer choices does not cause problems. As it seems, *Green Delivery's* infrastructure is perfectly adapted to—almost automatically—translate the humongous evaluative repertoire of the entirety of their customers into valuations of *alternative* food that match the evaluative repertoires of individual customers. As I argue, all the valuations that I describe in this paragraph seem to be primarily rooted in the *liberal market regime*. This is because they enact the worth of *alternative* food as grounded in individual customer choices on the one hand, and a “perfect” visual-textual quality on the other hand—two performance criteria that are inevitably linked with the *liberal market regime*.

On the one hand, the assembly line of *Green Delivery* affords a variety of valuations that seem like an attempt to reconcile the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice* in the course of valuing *alternative* food: In case of some customers, a red window pops up on the desktops of the packing stations. The window says: “Never plastic!” Hence, the packers are particularly careful not to put any fruits or vegetables that are delivered in additional wrapping material into the box. Besides that, the little plastic bags that are used to shield moist bunches of herbs from the rest of the products contained in the *Green Box* (some of which come in cardboard, and hence not moisture resistant, packages), are

exchanged with paper bags. In the same vein, the plastic inlay that is used in winter to prevent that the fresh produce in the *Green Boxes* suffer from frost damages, are exchanged through a brown paper inlay. As one of my informants tells me, “[t]his might diminish the quality of the fruits, but if this is what the customer wants he can have it.” In case of another customer a different red window pops up that says: “Please, a wooden box!” This wish seems to be rather unfamiliar, as the packer at *Station 1* shouts out loud: “Please, a wooden box! Do we have wooden boxes?”. Simultaneously, two other packers (who might already have experience with this customer) shout back: “No, just take a banana box”. As mentioned before, another example for these kinds of ambivalent practices that seem to create *alternativeness* for *Green Delivery’s* customers, while appearing rather worthless, or at least, worthy in quite a different way, when being observed at the assembly line, is observable when it comes to sorting out fruits and vegetables that are unlikely to meet the individual demands of *Green Delivery’s* customers: Every morning before the packing starts, one of the purchasers inspects the incoming deliveries in the storage rooms of the green area. As mentioned before, when talking about how to properly assess the material quality of the fresh produce, a recurrent rule of thumb is that “you should sort out the things you would not buy yourself”. Spending my mornings in the green area, every now and then I had the possibility to observe how my informants incorporate this rule of thumb into their everyday doings. In one situation, a packer sorts out a crate of broccoli because it has a slight brownish discoloration. In another situation, the packers together with the purchaser decide to return several crates of apples to the wholesaler, because they have pressure marks. In a third situation, the packers sort out large amounts of kale because they turned soft during their night in one of the cooling units. Hence, the inconspicuous rule of sorting out the things “you would not buy yourself”, or rather how my informants turn it into practice while working in the green area, can be seen as an important material test to make sure that the fruits and vegetables contained in *Green Boxes* meet the *alternative* expectations of *Green Delivery’s* customers. Once returned to the wholesaler, these “reclaimed” fruits and vegetables will turn into waste, or compost, but not be eaten—an aspect that is not talked about at *Green Delivery*. Nevertheless, if single produce, or crates of fruits and vegetables from the previous day lost their flawless appearance overnight, the packers put them on the so called “kitchen trolley”, a trolley on which all produce that can be “saved” by the chef are collected—an aspect that is talked about quite a lot at *Green Delivery*.

To sum up, the main function of *Green Delivery’s* infrastructure seems to consist of reconciling valuations of *alternative* food that are rooted in the *liberal market regime* and valuations of *alternative* food that are rooted in the *regime of good agricultural practice*. However, as to be seen in the previous paragraph, this reconciliation does not always succeed.

Nevertheless, if we imagine the happy customer who receives a banana box instead of a wooden box, or the cook who actually “saves” some vegetables from being thrown away, it does not seem accurate to speak of failure either. This is because the respective practices do not fail in valuing an *alternative* concept of food. In the same vein, it seems unfair to speak of ‘greenwashing’, or to use other equally denunciating terms, because the respective valuations of *alternative* food are clearly rooted in *good* intentions. Still, as I argue, the most accurate term to grasp the valuations at stake seems to be ambivalence, because they doubtlessly create worth. Nevertheless, when standing next to the assembly line, it seems questionable whether the *alternativeness* of the rolling past *Green Boxes* corresponds with the *alternative* worth the employees of *Green Delivery* had in mind when answering my questions, or the *alternative* worth the customers of *Green Delivery* had in mind when paying for their food.

Creating Ambivalent Eaters

In this last section of my findings, I would like to shift the analytical attention towards the packers’ conception of *alternative* food—a conception of *alternativeness* that did not find place in the previous parts of my findings. I did not conduct interviews with the packers, because it seemed more sensible to me to talk to them while participating in their everyday routines of commissioning, packing, chatting, and eating. In reconstructing this last conception of *alternative* food, my point is that valuing *Green Boxes* does not only seem to enact ambivalent food products—that is, products that seem to have quite some *alternative* worth in some situations, while being worthless in others—but also in enacting ambivalent eaters—that is, eaters whose diet seems to be of *alternative* worth in some situations, while being worthless in others. I chose the notion of “eaters”, because it does not differentiate between my informants at *Green Delivery*, the company’s customers, myself, or other people who eat. As such, this last section of my findings is meant to dissolve the analytical boundaries that I created between *Green Farm*, *Green Delivery*, the different context(s) of *Green Delivery*, the company’s built and informational infrastructure, and other contexts that are shaped by a concern for the ambivalent issue of *alternative* food:

One morning, two of the packers and I stand in front of a shelf filled with canned jackfruit, a spiky fruit that I only knew from television so far. While pointing at the cans, one of the packers tells me that she could never eat “such a thing.” And, the other packer, complements her comment by shouting out, “Bah! That’s so disgusting. It looks like meat but it does not taste like it.” At another point of the same day, while standing in front of a shelf with organic egg liquor, another informant declares her incomprehension for the product, by saying: “I don’t know why people would spent so much money on this. I mean everybody knows

that alcohol is unhealthy. Why would you buy organic alcohol?" Yet another day, a situation that seemed similarly humorous occurred. While unpacking a case of organic champagne bottles, one of the packers lifted one of the bottles over her head, while empathically asking: "Hey ladies, which one shall we drink today?". The packers giggle, I giggle. But what exactly is funny about these episodes from the storage room? As I cannot speak for the packers, I can only clarify my personal sense of humor here. What is funny for me is that, taking the company's rule of thumb of "sorting out the things you would not buy yourself" seriously, many of the products to be found in the storage room including the canned jackfruit, the organic egg liquor, or the organic champagne would not reach *Green Delivery's* customers—they would be sorted out, because it would never occur to the packers to buy these products themselves. To me, the ambivalence of these moments of talking and joking about eating, not eating, drinking, or not drinking the *alternative* products that are sold by *Green Delivery* is that my informants have to stand in for a customer, while not being the customer. In other words, they have to pretend to perform a particular valuation of *alternative* food, while actually not seeing any *alternative* worth in the respective food products. Bluntly speaking, to them the worth of certain *alternative* food products will always remain humoristic (at best).

Nevertheless, and more important for the argument that I would like to establish in this final section, their behavior could also be interpreted as a sort of protective mechanisms, against enactments of *alternative* food that do not include the food they value. This interpretation of the packers' evaluative behavior is strengthened by some of their comments concerning the more mundane, or less pricy *alternative* products they have to deal with every day. As an example, sometimes, when I did not know what to do with myself, I started noting down the different varieties of fruits and vegetables the different packaging stations were equipped with, while speaking out loud the names of the fruits and vegetables that I wrote down in my little notebook. One day, while standing in front of a batch of black salsify, one of the packers passed by asking: "Have you actually ever eaten black salsify? Well, I don't. I have no idea how they taste. They say it's like asparagus though." A similar situation occurred at a different day. While I was standing in front of some crates filled with black radishes, a different packer passed by. Having the black-salsify-moment in mind, I mentioned that I had no clue about the taste of black radish. As she let me know, neither did she. As a consequence, she took out her cutter, peeled one of the roots, and cut off a piece for each of us. We ate it, and both of us wonder about a taste that was sweeter than we expected. To me, these two examples point at the fact that the packers' reasons for resisting the *alternative* worth of some of *Green Delivery's* products may be more complex than simply not being able to afford them.

Another fruitful context that supports this interpretation of the packers' devaluations of the company's *alternative* product range was the daily lunch in *Green Delivery's* community kitchen. In eight out of ten working days, I spent at the delivery service, the chefs prepared a lunch out of leftovers or byproducts of *Green Delivery's* daily business. This lunch normally comprised a meat or fish dish and a vegetarian dish, and the shared lunch time turned out to be an interesting occasion for discussing how the packers valued food when not being involved in *Green Delivery's* infrastructure for generating *alternativeness*. Hence, over lunch we debated whether oyster mushrooms always taste bitter, or if this taste was granted to the fact that they were too old to be sold. We praised the tomato sauce with chopped sausages, the melted cheese on the vegetable casserole, and worried about the fish bones of the smoked pike. Some of us preferred drinking cheap filter coffee, others preferred drinking organic instant coffee, others drank tea. Some of my informants talked about their low-carb diets, others about their vegetarian diets, and every now and then somebody complained about the lack of salt, the lack of a particular spice, or about eating pasta the second day in a row. Other informants preferred to eat dishes they brought from home. Yet other debates that started over lunch were concerned with the foodstuffs my informants would eat or prepare at home. Everyone knew that the husband of one of the packers worked as a professional hunter, and that the parents of *Green Delivery's* intern were running a delivery service for game meat. As a consequence, there was a lot of talking about deer meat, boar meat, and the advantages of packaging and delivering meat instead of fruits and vegetables. The intern told me: "Meat is more thankful to deliver. I mean some of the fruits you only have to touch once and they get a pressure mark." A different day, one of the packers told me about the pork lard she prepared the day before out of the back fat of a domestic pig her neighbor slaughtered a couple of days ago. Yet another day, the packers discussed a recipe for "After-Eight-Liqueur", made of chocolate, egg, and cheap peppermint-liqueur (a common beverage in many parts of Germany). The last day of my stay at the delivery service, I brought a carrot cake I made out of large quantities of sugar, cream cheese, carrots, and organic eggs. We ate it together with most of the packers, and a few members of the administrative staff. Everybody seemed to like it, some asked me for the recipe, and others told me that they would miss me when I was gone. Even though I was flattered by this warm goodbye, I also felt a bit homesick, not knowing what to make out of all these valuations of *alternative* food that seemed to be so different from mine.

Nevertheless, the more important implication of these last of observations is another one, namely that they seem to provide a better understanding of why the packers do not consider products like canned jackfruit, organic egg liquor, or black salsify as being particularly *alternative*. As it seems, they seem to have other legitimate ways for testing the worth of food

than the ones that are foreseen in *Green Delivery's* infrastructure. As I try to show in the short description above, in their everyday lives the packers seem to perform valuations of foodstuffs that, despite their divergence from those undertaken in the professional contexts of *Green Delivery*, seem like legitimate *alternatives* to what is commonly framed as *industrial* food. Furthermore, these valuations seem to have little to do with “unhealthiness”, “unconsciousness”, or “improperness”, like the chef put it in our interview (not directly referring to the packers though). In contrast, the valuations that are mentioned by the packers seem to be heavily reflexive in the sense that they imply valuations of *alternative* food that are rooted in the three regimes of valuation that I identified at *Green Delivery*, as well as they seem to rely on valuations of food that are grounded in regimes of valuation that are absent from *Green Delivery's* valuing processes. In my strong moments, I tend to interpret these valuations at the invisible margins of *Green Delivery's* infrastructure as valuations that are freed from the evaluative corset that seems to influence most other valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery*. In my weak moments, I tend to interpret them as a sort of collective choreography the employees perform to shield themselves from the ambivalence of the products they deal with day in and day out, that is a to shield themselves from valuations of *alternative* food that enact their embodied ways of eating as worthless. In these moments, the packers, my other informants, you, me, we all seem like crucially ambivalent eaters.

Conclusions: Ambivalent Food Futures?

In this thesis, I analyzed how an *alternative* product is being valued at a delivery service for designated organic food. In this conclusive section, I will try to summarize what I see as the most relevant insights my thesis has brought to life. Therefore, in a first section, I will focus on the relation that I see between my findings, and research at the nexus of infrastructure studies as well as *Valuation Studies*. Subsequently, in a second section, I will take these considerations further by reflecting on the difference between *good* food, *alternative* food, and *fetish-like* food, as heuristics to reconsider the past, present, and future worth of food and agriculture. Put differently, the first section of this conclusive chapter is meant as a rather catholic reconciliation of my findings and the existing body of literature my thesis is based on, whereas the second section is written in a more associative, and maybe, provocative manner.

From *Alternative* Food Infrastructures to *Good* Food Infrastructures

My primary inquiry in this thesis was to explore infrastructural valuations of *alternative* food, at a company that is specialized in conducting home-deliveries of a product that I call *Green Boxes*. As I sought to demonstrate in establishing my empirical argument, *Green Delivery's* infrastructure is quite effective when it comes to reconciling economic, ethical-aesthetic, and institutional valuations of *alternative* food. As I argue, this is because the situated, infrastructurally afforded, valuations of *alternative* food undertaken at *Green Delivery* correspond with broader societal patterns for valuing *alternative* food—patterns that I grasp as regimes of valuation. However, as I show, this co-existence of valuations also enacts different realities of what *alternative* food really is these days, which causes an ongoing evaluative ambivalence in the company's efforts to sell *Green Boxes*. Given this, in this first section of my conclusions, I would like to reflect in how far these insights concerning the ambivalent case of *Green Delivery* add to the existing bodies of research my thesis is based on.

As I demonstrate, the infrastructural affordance of *Green Delivery* allows it to reconcile valuations of *alternative* food that are rooted in three regimes of valuation—three regimes that I decided to call the *liberal market regime*, the *regime of good agricultural practice*, and the *institutional regime*. Furthermore, my findings indicate that the *liberal market regime* has more normative power within my informants' valuations of *alternative* food, while the *regime of good agricultural practice* and the *institutional regime* seem to have less influence. As I argue, this asymmetry in my informants' valuations of *alternative* food can be explained on an infrastructural level. More precisely, it seems as if most of the evaluative principles my informants' draw on in referring to the *liberal market regime* are inscribed into those

infrastructural elements that are targeted at standardizing *alternative* food production and consumption across infrastructural space and time. In contrast, most of the evaluative principles rooted in the *regime of good agricultural practice* seemed to correspond with what Star and Ruhleder (1996) call the “local, customized, intimate and flexible use” (p. 112) of infrastructures. Hence, the ambivalence my informants experience between *alternative* food and its *industrial* antipode seems to result from a shared infrastructural trajectory between these two poles of an assumed dichotomy. More precisely, as I show in my findings, *alternative* and *industrial* agricultural infrastructures, seem to share the trajectory of setting global food standards. For my informants, this sameness of *alternative* and *industrial* agricultural infrastructures, or as I prefer to see it the imperfection of a seemingly perfect *alternative* food infrastructure, results in the relentless task to perform local valuations, or fixes, that undo the *industrialness* of the *alternative* food infrastructure *Green Delivery* relies on.

Given this important finding, I see my thesis as a critical side note to those STS inflected debates that more explicitly call for supporting an inquiry with *alternative* food than I do (e.g. Iles et al., 2017). More precisely, I would like to add to these debates, by underlining that the minor importance that *alternative* agriculture still holds these days in relation to its ill-defined *industrial* antipode, is not only to be explained on the basis of a lacking legitimacy of the respective knowledge cultures, but also on the basis of what I call infrastructural valuations that reduce *alternative* agriculture and its concern with *good agricultural practice* to an effort of undoing *industrial* agriculture and the *liberal market regime*. Put differently, and in line with Phillips (2016), I hence argue that more research should be dedicated to the utopian thought of food systems that are both discursively and infrastructurally detached from *industrial* agriculture.

As I see it, the paradoxical state of *alternative* food infrastructures, as mere negatives of *industrial* food infrastructures, is nicely captured in the role the *institutional regime* plays in my informants’ valuations of *alternative* food. Until so far, I always spoke of the *institutional regime* as obtaining an “intermediate function” within my informants’ valuations, because it did not seem to follow a coherent pattern. However, one could equally say that the only coherence of the *institutional regime*, in relation to the *liberal market regime* and the *regime of good agricultural practice*, seems to be that it is incoherent. As it seemed, and in contrast to its regulatory appearance, the *institutional regime* allowed my informants to pragmatically switch between economic valuations and ethical-aesthetic valuations of *alternative* food, whenever it was required. In other words, the undecidedness of my informants whether valuations within the *institutional regime* ought to be aligned with valuations that are rooted in the *liberal market regime*, or aligned with valuations that are rooted in the *regime of good agricultural practice*,

seems symptomatic for the lacking autonomy of designated *alternative* food infrastructures. Given this, I believe that, in order to transform the inquiry of valuing *alternative* food into something different than a mere negative of *industrial* valuations, the actual focus of this inquiry should shift from trying to value *alternative* food to trying to value *good* food.

In referring back to Heuts and Mol's (2013) article concerning *good* tomatoes, the primary difference that I see between an inquiry with *alternative* food and an inquiry with *good* food is that an inquiry with *good* food seems to be more open to the idea that food production and consumption cannot always be "150 percent flawless." To clarify this point, Heuts and Mol draw the conclusion that,

"[a]s eaters chew, swallow and digest tomatoes, they perform them as good, but also finish them off. Hence, in the case of tomatoes valuing, does not only go together with caring (improving, adding worth), but also with destroying (killing, metabolising, decomposing). [...] Exploring 'good' tomatoes is not just a contribution to valuation studies, but also suggests that devaluation studies are equally relevant to do." (p. 142)

Given the findings that I produced in this thesis, I strongly support this conclusion. Additionally, I would like to add that more research should abandon the idea that future food should form the exact opposite of *industrial* food. Instead, it seems much more fruitful to shift societal concerns with *alternative* food products, systems, networks, institutions, infrastructures, *et cetera*, towards concerns with *good* food products, systems, networks, institutions, infrastructures, *et cetera*. Hence, drawing together Heuts and Mol's inspirational study concerning situated valuations of *good* tomatoes, and my research concerning infrastructural valuations of *alternative* food, I argue that thinking in terms of "*good* food infrastructures" seems to offer an interesting avenue for future research on food and agriculture—an avenue that is open to exploring the undeniable ambivalence, hybridity, and perversion of what we deem *good* to eat, while relating it to the spatial and temporal tensions of food infrastructures.

Between Good Food, Alternative Food, and Fetish-Like Food

To me, another important function of this thesis is to address some of the rather unspoken realities that form around *alternative* food infrastructures—realities that find no or little space in our societal debates centered on *alternative* food futures. As I see it, these unspoken realities are both highly political, and extremely touching, because they tell a story of how lively approaches to food, agriculture, and eating are being buried under individualist imperatives à

la “vote with your fork.” In order to make this personal gut feeling a bit clearer, in this last section of my thesis, I would like to come back to Brian Larkin's (2013) proposition to focus on the “fetish-like” aspects of infrastructures, that is aspects of infrastructures that “can be wholly autonomous from their technical functioning” (p. 329).

Drawing on my findings, I conceive of the technical function of *Green Delivery's* infrastructure as generating a maximum of individualized *alternativeness*—a technical function that is deeply rooted in what could be labeled as “liberal market fetishism”. In the light of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) argument that all orders of worth are to be seen as proper economies, the case of *Green Delivery* seems to demonstrate that an explicit concern with generating *alternativeness* can no longer be understood as an act of subversion within contemporary Euro/Western food markets. By this I mean, that the logic of maximizing our flows of *alternative* food, should not be misunderstood, as a way of reversing neoliberal tendencies within contemporary food systems. In contrast, as I have argued in this thesis, when focusing on the infrastructural level of how *alternativeness* is being valued these days, many actors in *alternative* food infrastructures seem to depend on the same logics, suffer from the same ambivalences, and generate the same evaluative dynamics, that one might expect to find in less *alternative* contexts of our food infrastructures. Bluntly speaking, when looking at the evaluative principles that characterize the respective infrastructures, the seemingly *alternative* act to choose between *alternative* meat, *alternative* vegetables, or any other *alternative* product, while trying to figure out which choice would generate a maximum of *alternativeness* in one's personal microcosm, does not seem to differ greatly from an act of choosing between an *industrial* pizza, an *industrial* burger, or any other seemingly *industrial* product, in order to maximize some other kind of worth—both evaluative logics seem to be rooted in what I call the *liberal market regime*.

I believe that many of my readers might be able to identify with, or at least be able to follow this line of thought. Even though it seems like a line of thought that does not seem to be as handy as the thought that we could fix the miserable state of our global food and agriculture systems through buying *alternative* products, or supporting *alternative* knowledge cultures, here and there. However, as I tried to show in my empirical findings, the ambivalences of the *alternative* food solutions that surround us these days are not necessarily hidden. In fact, when wandering through my local wholefood shop, when talking to some of the rather dogmatic *alternative* food activists that I know, or when thinking back to some of my *Organic Agriculture and Marketing* fellow students, who used to shoplift organic products on a regular basis, because they could not afford them (a practice they creatively called “einklaufen”), many of these ambivalences seem rather obvious, to me. However, I also have the impression that few

people want to talk about them, because what I call the ethical-aesthetic worth that accompanies most of these solutions seems too soothing to be considered as a problem. Hence, as I see it, the ambivalence of what I call our infrastructural valuations of *alternative* food and agriculture is both extremely visible, and pervasively invisible at the same time. This complicating thought, that ripened while producing this thesis, brings me back to Larkin's proposition to study the "fetish-like" aspects of infrastructures.

According to a definition retrieved from the *Oxford Dictionaries*, a fetish can be defined as, "[a]n excessive and irrational devotion or commitment to a particular thing."⁷ Drawing on this basic definition, many of my informants' answers seemed to enact their customers' valuations of *alternative* food as somewhat irrational. Let us for example think about the manager's intentional exaggeration that the products that can be contained in *Green Boxes* need to be "150 percent flawless", the packers' incomprehension for "canned jackfruits", or the deliverer's anger about the amounts of *alternative* food that some people order. Even though my informants sometimes were quite explicit that distinct valuations of individual customers do not make sense, I prefer to interpret these enactments as informed by an imaginary which is nurtured by the entirety of *Green Delivery's* customers. In other words, by conceiving of *Green Delivery* as a nodal point for many of the valuations of *alternative* food that co-exist in contemporary societies, I interpret my informants' enactments of customer irrationality as indicative for a broader societal excess with regard to the restless search of *alternative* food solutions.

Given this thought, and as a supplement to the conclusion that I drew in the previous section, I suggest adding the notion of "*fetish-like* food" to our vocabulary for scrutinizing contemporary valuations of food and agriculture. In case you still think it is somewhat inappropriate to intermingle the issue of food with the sexually connoted notion of "fetish", I invite you to think about the viral Hashtag "foodporn" (or as commonly spelled out: *#foodporn*)—a synthesis of food and the, still stigmatized, but yet omnipresent practice of watching or doing porn. As indicated by the virality of *#foodporn* in fora like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, or *Twitter*, having a so-called fetish for food is by far not an unusual thing to have these days. Instead, it is *en vogue*. It is a thing you show, a thing you share, a thing that does not only expose the worth of what you eat, but equally the worth of who you are. Given this, in case you still require me to provide you with a take-home-message concerning what to eat in the future, I would propose to start by differentiating between valuations of *good* food, valuations of *alternative* food, and valuations of *fetish-like* food.

⁷ Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fetish>

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Appendix

Original Interview Quotes

- _1 Ähm und es liegt mit Sicherheit daran- also warum wir im Moment- die Kundenanzahl so schnell wächst, liegt mit Sicherheit an der Werbung unserer Konkurrenten in Anführungsstrichen. [...] Und da wir noch immer eine Nische sind von ich weiß nicht null Komma irgendwas Promille, die überhaupt nach Berlin reinliefern, ja? Deswegen wachsen wir auch so schnell. Also in München die Kisten wachsen lang nichtmehr so schnell aber in München mit einer Million Einwohner, da sind mittlerweile 25.000 oder 28.000 tausend Kisten wöchentlich unterwegs, Biokisten. Und in Berlin sind es 10.000 bei 3,5 bis 4 Millionen. (Management, 245-251)
- _2 Das hat mit Bio erstmal Garnichts zu tun. Es hat was damit zu tun das man Lebensmittel. [...] Das man das erstmal schätzt und so bin ich groß geworden. Von meinen Großeltern von meinen Eltern. Das man Lebensmittel- bei uns war das Essen immer der Mittelpunkt, ja? Also jetzt nicht im Sinne von Völlerei, sondern einfach man kann auch eine Pellkartoffel und eine Butter kann was Wunderbares sein, ja? Aber das hat man geschätzt, ja? und jedes gute Stück Fleisch hat man bei uns geschätzt und deswegen habe ich das hier nicht gelernt, sondern das war- deswegen bin ich hier. (Management, 180-185)
- _3 Und auch eine Salami kann ruhig mal anders schmecken vom gleichen Metzger- muss nicht immer gleich schmecken, weil die Milch schmeckt auch nicht immer gleich. Das ist ja auch von jahreszeitlichen Unterschieden- die habe ich auch überall drin und das ist ja das Interessante. Und der Wein schmeckt auch nicht jedes Jahr gleich. (Management, 430-433)
- _4 Wichtig ist bei uns, an erster Stelle steht regional, an zweiter Stelle steht *Demeter*, dann kommen die Verbände also *Naturland*, *Bioland*, sonst was und ganz zum Schluss kommt *EU-Bio*, ja? (Management, 372-374)
- _5 Die Sachen die wir rausschicken müssen 150 prozentig einwandfrei sein, das ist das Ziel. Das Ziel ist das der Kunde einwandfreie Ware bekommt. Schaffen wir nicht immer,

ja aber doch relativ häufig, ja? Das ist das Ziel. Und was der einkauft das ist mir egal.
(Management, 324-327)

_6 Was wir halt allen anderen Lieferanten also auch den meisten Biokisten gegenüber als Vorteil haben, ist das wir halt ein Hof sind. Also wir sind nicht einfach nur irgendein anonymmer Lieferant, wie eben irgendein Online Handel *Amazon*, *Bonativo*, *Bring-Meister* und alles sowas, das sind wir halt nicht. Sondern wir haben einen Hof in der Hinterhand, man kann uns besuchen, man kann über *Green Farm* etliche Geschichten erfahren, also das ist ja auch so wo wir beim Marketing bisschen drauf wertlegen, eben dieses Story-Telling. (Marketing_A, 185-190)

_7 Ja wir sind aufklärerisch unterwegs, also das kann man schon so sagen. Also wir müssen ehrlich mit unseren Kunden sein. Wir hatten jetzt hier die Diskussion beispielsweise in Brandenburg soll jedes zweite Ei aus einem Stall kommen mit mehr als 30.000 Tieren. Also jedes Bio-Ei. Bio schreibt ja vor maximal 3000 Tiere. Der Landwirt zieht einfach ein paar Wände ein und hat dann mehrere Ställe. War ein riesen Skandal in Brandenburg und alle Kunden sind zu uns gekommen und wollten jetzt plötzlich unsere Eier kaufen. Jetzt ist das bei unseren Eiern so, dass sie halt wirklich sehr, sehr rar sind. Äh und dann sind da halt einige Kunden doch schon recht sauer geworden. Warum sie denn jetzt unsere Eier nicht bekommen? Und dann muss man den Kunden schon erklären, also wenn sie ein Bio-Ei haben wollen das permanent und immer verfügbar ist, und dann am besten noch wenig kostet, dann müssen sie halt die Eier aus Massentällen kaufen, so. Aber wenn sie halt unsere Eier haben wollen, wo sie wissen das die Tiere verdammt gut gehalten werden und das das Ei halt auch viel kostet, dann müssen sie halt auch damit rechnen das das nicht verfügbar ist. (Marketing_A, 760-770)

_8 Also wir haben diese klassischen Bio-Käufer, also die schon seit Anfang der 90er Jahre bei uns Bio-Produkte kaufen, die sich aus Überzeugung, bewusst, Bio ernähren und regional ernähren und auch kein Plastik in ihrer Kiste haben wollen und alles sowas, also das merkt man schon. Und dann haben wir diese Kunden die praktisch ich sag mal so die mittelständischen bis sehr gut situierten Familien in Berlin, also gehobener Mittelstand bis sehr gut situiert, für die es teilweise etwas Prestige ist bei uns zu bestellen, oder eben auch weil sie sich für sich was Gutes tun wollen. Also sich auch selber belohnen wollen für die Leistung die sie bringen sage ich mal, und dann haben

wir praktisch diese ganzen Szene Leute in Berlin also dieses klassische Foody-*Instagram*: ‚Ich trink meinen flat-white mit Milchschaum von *Green Farm* und mach davon ein foto und poste das bei *Instagram*.‘ (Marketing_A_8, 723-731)

- _9 Jetzt im Winter hast du in der Regel einen Händler, sag ich mal den Großhandel, und unsere Gärtnerei. Im Sommer kommen dann natürlich andere Händler dazu. Also unsere kleinen regionalen Händler, die dann vielleicht einmal die Woche- und liefern dann Zucchini zum Beispiel ab oder Buschbohnen zum Beispiel, Bohnenkraut. (Purchase_A, 131-134)
- _10 Ich habe schon immer gesagt: ‚Würdet ihr die Produkte kaufen?‘ Wenn sie ‚ne‘ sagen, sage ich: ‚Dann brauchst du sie auch nicht reinpacken. Das bringt doch sonst nichts.‘ (Purchase_A, 403-404)
- _11 Wir versuchen eigentlich so wenig wie möglich Verpackungsmaterial zu nutzen. Es sei denn es geht nicht anders oder wir kriegen es jetzt nicht anders geliefert. Zum Beispiel das Suppengrün jetzt momentan ist halt im Schälchen. Was nutzt uns das? Wir können das ja nun jetzt schlecht auspacken. Das ist schwierig sag ich mal. Ansonsten gibt's auch bald wieder ohne Folie oder hier zum Beispiel die Birnen. Wir kriegen sie angeliefert, die sind eingeschlagen in Papier. Papier schicken wir unseren Kunden nicht mit, lassen wir bei uns dann. Oder, ja ist halt so. Also versuchen also wirklich so wenig wie möglich Verpackungsmaterial weiterzugeben. (Purchase_A, 529-534)
- _12 Naja, muss knackig sein, frisch aussehen, und ich habe gerne Ware die etwas größer ist, also da ist dann beim Aufbereiten wenig Abfall. Also, ich bin auch der Meinung wenn eine Pflanze richtig ausgewachsen ist, dann ist grundsätzlich mehr Reife und Geschmack da. (Market Garden, 321-323)
- _13 Der Blumenkohl wächst sehr schnell. Der macht gigantische Blätter und dann plötzlich ist die Blume dort. Und das ist ja wie, naja, man macht die Pflanze auf und dann ist dann da dieser Schatz der da rauskommt. Und der gelingt auch nur, wenn der die besten Bedingungen hat und zügig in einem Zug wachsen kann. Also es ist eine sehr anspruchsvolle Kultur, ist auch sehr empfindlich für Umweltbedingungen [...] Und das ist einfach so ein Gefühl also, wenn man dann den Blumenkohl schneidet und dann

zack, zack, zack und da kannst du auch mit ankommen. Das ist, naja, die Krönung irgendwie. (Market Garden, 550-557)

- _14 Ich kann mich an den ersten Tag erinnern als ich hier einen Roastbeef-Strang von *Demeter* vor mir liegen hatte. [...] Dann einmal eine Scheibe runtergeschnitten und habe diese Fettmaserung gesehen. Jetzt ist das bei uns so, dass unsere Durchschnitts-Kühe so circa 6,8 Jahre alt werden und nicht nach anderthalb Jahren spätestens so wie in der konventionellen Fleisch Zucht geschlachtet werden, ne? Sondern nach 6,8 Jahren. Und da baut die Kuh natürlich einen Mords-Fettgehalt auf. Das heißt unser Fleisch ist super-saftig, schön fettdurchwachsen (Industrial Kitchen, 397-403)
- _15 Also wir produzieren keine Abfälle. Bei uns fliegt nichts weg, Garnichts. Und wenn da nur eine Paprika ist dann nehme ich diese eine Paprika und schmeiß die in meine Gemüsebrühe, oder ich schmeiß die irgendwo in eine Soße mit rein, ja? (Industrial Kitchen, 191-194)
- _16 Wir verkaufen diese marinierten Steaks und da kam halt zurück von einer Kundin, dass es ihr zu salzig war. [...] Aber die andern hundert Kunden die im halben Jahr das gegessen haben. Da kam nichts. Also kann ich mich daran orientieren und sagen ja okay jetzt hat es einer Kundin mal nicht geschmeckt aber den andern hundert Kunden hat es geschmeckt und somit ist das für mich okay. (Industrial Kitchen, 139-145)
- _17 Ich habe meine neue Küche schon im Kopf geplant. Ich habe mir das schon aufgezeichnet, so grundweise. Na wir müssen einfach größer werden wir brauchen mehr größere Geräte, wir brauchen mehr Arbeitsflächen [...] Und das ist halt ein Problem und deswegen machen wir die Großküche. (Industrial Kitchen, 234-239)
- _18 Ist zwar eben vom Preis auch teurer als konventionelle Sachen, aber ich sag mal so, das ist seinen Preis wert, und [der Besitzer von *Green Farm*] muss da eine ganze Menge von Auflagen erfüllen, das der überhaupt dieses Bio-Siegel tragen darf. Das hat der uns ja damals erzählt. Weil wenn man so hört die ganzen Vorurteile und so immer Internet und alles. Da hört man dann immer: „Ja und ist doch alles Quatsch mit dem Bio, das ist doch alles Mist und, und, und das kann doch jeder haben dieses Zeichen. Nein, nein das kann nicht- das muss nicht- da muss er schon einige Auflagen

erfüllen, um dieses Bio-Siegel tragen zu dürfen. Ja, das hat er uns auch damals erklärt alles. Der hat da etliche Aktenordner stehen in seinem Büro, wo diese ganzen Bestimmungen und Verordnungen und alles drin ist. (Delivery, 367-373)

_19 Ja also wichtig ist zum Beispiel, dass wir die Milch nicht auf das Gemüse drauflegen, also wenn jetzt einzelne Flaschen sind. Ja also ich mach das halt dann so, dass ich entweder, wenn nicht viel drin ist, wenn die Kiste jetzt nicht voll ist bis obenhin, dann heb ich zum Beispiel das Gemüse an, stell die Milch so in die Ecke rein und mach das dann eben wieder so, dass das ordentlich aussieht. Und ansonsten eben die Milch, [...] stell dann eben die Milchflaschen daneben. (Delivery, 404-411)

_20 Das sind dann so ne Sachen wo man auch denkt: ‚Hach muss das nun sein.‘ Oder so. Wenn dann ein Kunde nun wirklich viel hat. Das ich dann denke ich: ‚Hach, Mensch, keiner würde sowas freiwillig, wenn er einkaufen geht, so viel Zeug hochschleppen. aber wir müssen das machen. Also solche Sachen. Das ist das was mich manchmal so eben nervt dieses, dieses, auch wenn viele Neukunden dazu kommen wo ich dann genau weiß: ‚Aha bestimmt Dritte, Vierte, ja klar Kasten Milch, Kasten Wasser, kann nur Dritte oder Vierte sein.‘ Und da liege ich richtig, meistens. (Delivery, 239-244)

_21 Ja also Kritik kommt selten. Es gibt natürlich schon Kritik. Also die können ja anrufen, also bei *Green Delivery*. Es gibt auch einen *Facebook*-Auftritt, also wo durchaus auch viel sehr negative Kritik kommt. Gerade aus dem veganen Bereich [...]. Weil wir doch auch im Fleischbereich recht aktiv sind. Ja und auch, auch hässliche Kritik, richtig hässlich also, dass man echt denkt: ‚Eh, ich mach was Gutes aber die meinen du bist ein Mörder.‘ (Market Garden, 295-304)

_22 Die Klassiker sind: ‚Trennt ihr auch eure Kälber direkt nach der Geburt von den Kühen und warum schlachtet ihr eure Tiere überhaupt, wenn ihr ein Milchviehbetrieb seid?‘ Zum Beispiel, das sind so die Klassiker. Also es wird einem immer Grausamkeit als Landwirt unterstellt, und Geldgier. Wo ich mir immer sage, okay, ist ja eigentlich eine relativ einfache Sache dort zu argumentieren, weil ich möchte wirklich mal denjenigen sehen der mir einen Landwirt mit goldener Uhr zeigt. (Marketing_B, 271-275)

_23 Und es werden ja auch immer zwei Sachen vermischt. Das der Fleisch Konsum runter muss weiß jeder. Wir daheim essen nur einmal die Woche Fleisch. Sonst es sogar ich

auch mal vegan keine Ahnung, wenn meine frau keine Butter reinschmeißt dann ist es sogar vegan. Und das ist dann das wichtige dabei, ja? weil wenn jeder nur einmal die Woche Fleisch essen würde, dann wäre die Diskussion ob wir die Welt mit der Tier Produktion ernähren könnte oder nicht wäre dahin, weil dann würde es nämlich langen. Ja, aber solange wir aus Südamerika Soja einführen um bei uns die Schweine zu mästen, da gebe ich dem Veganer vollkommen recht das kann nicht funktionieren. (Management, 506-512)

_24 Ja es gibt halt immer so Sachen, wenn ich höre: ‚Bio zu teuer, zu teuer, zu teuer.‘ Ist das einfach grundlegend mal so gesagt, wer sich gesund ernährt kann sich auch Bio leisten. Auch wenn du ALG-II beziehst, meiner Meinung nach. Weißt du der deutsche im Durchschnitt will jeden Tag sein Fleisch fressen. Für eine vierköpfige Familie ist das ein Kilo Fleisch. So, ein Kilo Fleisch kostet im Durchschnitt so acht bis sagen wir mal 15 Euro. Sagen wir mal, rechnen wir mal, mit 13 Euro das Kilo. Das jetzt jeden Tag mal sieben, sind wir bei 91 Euro in der Woche. Das sind 364 Euro im Monat. Wenn ich jetzt einmal die Woche Fleisch esse, das heißt sonntags meinen Sonntagsbraten. Auf den Freitag esse ich mal Fisch. Dienstag, Donnerstag gibt's ein bisschen Wurst auf die Stulle, ansonsten ernähre ich mich vegetarisch. Dann habe ich das was ich jeden Tag an diesen 13 Euro an Fleisch spare, im Endeffekt. Kann ich aufs Gemüse umlegen und ich wette mit dir von den 13 Euro bleibt am Tag noch was übrig. Ja, das heißt wenn du dich ordentlich und bewusst und gesund ernährst, kannst du dir Bio leisten. Und es wird nicht zu teuer sein. Es ist halt bloß einfach, wenn du dann das Proletariat da hörst: 'He, Bio-Scheiße! Kann sich keiner leisten!' Blödsinn. Wer sich ordentlich und bewusst ernährt ist halt so- (Industrial Kitchen, 479-490)

_25 Och die hätten das schon gerne. Aber, also grundsätzlich müssen wir uns an die Öko-Verordnung halten. Das heißt, wenn eine Sorte verfügbar ist, ist sie Öko zu nehmen und wenn nicht, dann unbehandelt konventionell. Und es gibt ein paar Sachen seit ein paar Jahren kategorie-1. Also da musst du schon- also da gibt's eigentlich keine, keine, also keine Möglichkeit mehr was Anderes zu nehmen. Also ich glaube das geht um Gurken, zum Beispiel. Aber die haben wir doch immer schon in Öko-Qualität gehabt. Rote Bete, ja rote bete ist ein schlechtes Beispiel, weil das ist eigentlich immer Kategorie-1 aber die Ware ist nicht da. Ja und dann irgendwann ist es dann doch wieder freigegeben also, ja. Aber da bin ich recht pragmatisch. Ich such mir die Sorte

aus, und wenn die dann Öko vorhanden ist, dann ist gut, und wenn die nicht Öko vorhanden ist dann ist das eben nicht so. (Market Garden_25, 705-713)

_26 Oder dann diese ganzen- wir haben- ich habe manchmal auch solche Klugscheißer dabei die stehen so oben so [verschränkt die Arme] nach dem Motto: 'Ja, sie haben doch vor einer halben Stunde geklingelt. Was haben sie denn so lange gemacht jetzt den weg hier hoch?' [...] Aber ich hab eben ein paar Experten bei, die dann eben wirklich so dann eben sagen, naja nicht das sagen aber die dann eben wo man sieht so da stehen so: ‚Ach naja du fettes-, fettes Tier.‘ So nach dem Motto. So wo man dann schon so sieht diesen abfälligen Blick und so, aber da sehe ich dann auch zu das ich da dann schnell wieder wegkomme. (Delivery, 239-249)

_27 Die Kunden wollen einfach für das Geld was haben. Es ist ja auch nicht günstig. Also die ganze Bio-Branche ist nicht günstig, ist ja auch richtig so. Aber für dieses Geld wollen sie einfach eine einwandfreie Ware haben, und das war mit Sicherheit vor 15 Jahren noch anders und vor 20 Jahren noch ganz anders. Aber da hat sich ja die ganze Bio-Branche komplett gewandelt. Also die Äpfel die man vor 20 Jahren noch im Bio-Laden bekommen hat, die kriegen sie heute nicht mehr verkauft im Bio-Laden. In keinem einzigen kriegen Sie die noch heute weg. Also da hat sich ja die ganze Branche komplett gewandelt von einer Nische hin zur ja bisschen mehr als einer Nische. (Management, 355-361)

Abstract Deutsch

Märkte für *alternative* Lebensmittel boomen. Nichtsdestotrotz stellt die Frage was Lebensmittel heutzutage *alternativ* macht, öffentliche und wissenschaftliche Debatten vor anhaltende Kontroversen. Während ein Großteil dieser Kontroversen auf die entsprechenden Konsequenzen für Konsument*innen abzielt, ist nur wenig darüber bekannt wie Akteure, die Teil von *alternativen* Lebensmittelinfrastrukturen bilden, mit koexistierenden Konzeptionen von *Alternativität* umgehen. Um diese Perspektive zu beleuchten, widmet sich die vorliegende Arbeit einer zweiwöchigen Ethnographie in den Räumlichkeiten eines Lieferdienstes für Biokisten—einem Produkt das emblematisch für eine zunehmende Besorgnis mit *alternativen* Lebensmitteln zu sein scheint. Basierend auf einer analytischen Herangehensweise, angelehnt an Infrastrukturforschung innerhalb der *Science and Technology Studies* (STS), und konzeptuell verankert in einer pragmatischen Betrachtung von Wert(en) als sozialen Prozessen, widmet sich die vorliegende Arbeit dem Phänomen *alternativer* Lebensmittel als einem Objekt infrastruktureller Wertschöpfung und Bewertung. Die Arbeit zielt nicht darauf ab eine akkuratere Definition *alternativer* Lebensmittel zu formulieren, stattdessen veranschaulicht sie die alltäglichen Wertschöpfungs- und Bewertungspraktiken von Akteuren innerhalb *alternativer* Lebensmittelinfrastrukturen. Durch die Herausarbeitung dieser Praktiken, problematisiert die vorliegende Arbeit die gemeinhin angenommene Dichotomie zwischen *alternativen* und *industriellen* Lebensmitteln, um im gleichen Zug neue Wege für die Betrachtung zukünftiger Lebensmittel und Landwirtschaften anzudeuten.

Abstract English

Markets for *alternative* food products are booming. Yet, in public and scholarly debates the very question of what makes food and agriculture *alternative*, is an ongoing source of controversy. Whereas most contemporary debates focus on the implications these controversies hold for consumers, little is known about how actors who form part of *alternative* food infrastructures cope with co-existing conceptions of *alternativeness*. In order to explore this perspective, the present thesis draws on a two-week ethnographic case study at a delivery service for *Green Boxes*—a product that seems emblematic for increasing concerns with *alternative* food. Analytically inspired by *Science and Technology Studies* (STS) informed research on infrastructures, and conceptually anchored in pragmatist inquiries with studying value(s) as social processes, this thesis explores the phenomenon of *alternative* food as an object of infrastructural valuations. It is not meant to provide a more accurate definition of *alternative* food, but to show how actors within *alternative* food infrastructures, come to assess and generate the ambivalent worth of the products they handle every day. By tracing these situated valuations, this thesis problematizes the assumed boundary between *alternative* and *industrial* food, while calling for new avenues in approaching the future of food and agriculture.