INVESTIGATING AN ARTIFACT: FOOD

“The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss described the work of civilization as the process of transforming the raw into the cooked—nature into culture.”

(Michael Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma, 264)

In his book, Pollan does this work as well in identifying the natural origins of the three meals he consumes in the book: the McDonald’s meal, the organic meal(s), and the foraged meal. It will be your job to tackle the same thing as what he calls an “ecological detective.”

Identify a natural product and trace its development from its raw origins to a processed artifact with cultural significance. Use the work of narrative, observation, field research, and library research to develop this investigation. Identify controversies in this process. What sorts of conflicts arise? What can you expose in your inquiry?

In other words, make transparent the process in translating how something natural becomes something cultural.

• Look at Cambridge Encyclopedia and other resources Caroline Hopkinson recommends. Consider your history book, Trading Tastes. Who first discovered this natural product? How did this object become a commodity? How was its economic value determined?
• Furthermore, consider how that product was transformed. How was it manufactured, produced, or processed? What did it become? How is it utilized today?
• Envision the semiotics of this artifact. What cultures value it in what ways? What does it signify or symbol or represent in culture? Engage in what Roland Barthes describes as “demystification” in making visible the myths of this artifact.

Consider the work Edge does with the pigs lips, Chef Sean Brock does in “True Grits” with grits, Barthes does with steak and chips, Solnit does with lambswool, and Wallace and Wilkinson do in telling the story of the lobster. For example, work backwards—like Pollan did—and explore the cultural and natural history of food important to you, or identify a food item that represents a particular place and examine its history. Expose or inquire into any controversies surrounding its history. Or begin with the product in its raw state and explore how it can spiral into something else.
You should gather 5 of the best sources on this topic which should be intelligently integrated and correctly cited in MLA style.

Your essay must be 4-5 double-spaced pages. It should have 1 inch margins. It should be in a reasonable professional font like Times New Roman 11 or 12 point or Garamond 11 point (which you see here). If you are tempted to achieve length via a technicality, DON'T. See me instead.

UNIT IV SCHEDULE:
10.25 PAPER 2 FINAL DUE; FILM: Food, Inc; ASSIGNMENT 4
11.6 Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma, Part II (123-184) [61]
Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma Part III (185-225, 262-273) [51]
11.8 LIBRARY DAY-Hopkinson
11.15 Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma Part III (Personal/The Forest) (277-366, 391-409) [107]
NOVEMBER
11.20 CONFERENCES
11.27 WORKSHOP DRAFT DUE
11.29 PRESENTATIONS and LUNCH
11.30 FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 5PM