

Diffdifferent ways of looking at food

[Food & Diet](#), [Organic Food](#)



DiffDifferent Ways of Looking at Food The Omnivore's Dilemma, by Michael Pollan, attempts to figure out how such a simple question as, " What should we have for dinner? " (Pollan 1), turned out to be so complicated such that we need investigative journalists to tell us what is in our food. To do so, he went on a journey to follow all three food chains that sustain us today: the industrial, the organic, and the hunter-gatherer back to their origins.

Although these journeys may have led to very different paths, there was one underlying theme that linked them all: the tension between logic of nature and industry. For every step industrialization takes, natural forces push it back to balance it out. Even so, industrialization has found a way to keep up with nature's work by breaking through its cycle in order to thrive and profit.

The work of industry is undeniably compelling. The Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) alone has made meat so cheap and abundant that most American families can afford to eat it every meal. Industry makes this happen by feeding cows and steers large amounts of cheap federally subsidized corn, which the cows never evolved to eat. The result of this poor diet is simply a hoard of sick cows due to the acidity the corn produces in their stomachs. To counteract this problem, industries turned to antibiotics. Medicines that were created to treat diseases are now a staple ingredient in a cows' fodder, as an attempt to treat this acidic imbalance. Pollan explained the irony in this situation: " Here the drugs are plainly being used to treat sick animals, yet the animals probably wouldn't be sick if not for the diet of grain we feed them. " (" The Feedlot: Making Meat" pg. 79) The power of industry lies in its ability to manipulate and twist the work of nature and to break closed cycles within nature. It has stripped the evolution of the rumen

and its relationship with grass and has transformed cows into corn-fed machines. However, it doesn't stop there. Pollan thought there was a simple alternative to this industrial disaster, but it turned out that it wasn't as black and white as he once thought it was. When people think of organic agriculture, they picture happy cows on a grassy green farm. However, the truth behind organic agriculture is similar to conventional agriculture. Even within organic agriculture, industries find their way to implement their system to work against nature. Pollan states, " When we mistake what we can know for all there is to know, a healthy appreciation of one's ignorance in the face of a mystery like soil fertility gives way to the hubris that we can treat nature as a machine. Once that leap has been made, one input follows another, so that when the synthetic nitrogen fed to plants makes them more attractive to insects and vulnerable to disease, as we have discovered, the farmers turns to chemical pesticides to fix his broken machine. " (Big Organic" pg. 149) Following the logic of industry means taking short cuts, and these short cuts lead to consequences that often cannot be paid off and add up. Pollan expresses in his two quotes, that the logic of industry brings sickness to our food, and thus the consumers. When industry manipulates nature like a machine, it morphs the closed cycle to an open one with inputs and outputs. Once that cycle is broken, there is no going back except to keep adding in inputs to try and cover up the damages that breaking cycle has done. Undermining the great evolution of rumen and all the life that exists beneath a patch of soil has led America to become the most obese country. Over time, this crisis in our food system has impacted human choices, behaviors, and ultimately the culture. The obsession of

oversimplifying nature is demonstrated in the process of making food. In the logic of industry, the three principles that drive this system to work are: big, fast, and cheap. The problem with producing huge quantities of cheap food in a short amount of time is that it requires sacrifices, such as the quality of the food. For example, instead of allowing cows to grow on a diet of grass, which will take much longer, industries forced cows into CAFO where they are essentially prisoned and force-fed corn on a daily basis. This method ensures that thousands of fat cows are ready to be slaughtered fourteen to sixteen months after birth. The living conditions in CAFO are horrific: sights of cows suffering from diseases, pollution, and soaking in their own manure are abundant. However, these concerns aren't important enough to rank on the industry's list. A few dead cows were nothing to stop them from the mass production operations. The fact that industry is willing to produce meat even if it's sick meat is disgusting to contemplate. These decisions seemed to be made so mindlessly, and yet, it affects a much larger scale of people and limits their choices. The food industry is so powerful that it is difficult to go against it. Most farmers choose to be within the system to keep the cash flow to afford the most basic living. Farmers are left with no choice except to grow monocultures of corn because that is the only thing companies would buy. However, growing monocultures of corn on the same patch of soil all year round is simply impossible, thus, forcing farmers to turn to chemical fertilizers resulting in not only sick meat, but also now sick vegetables. The magic of this cheap commodity was able to produce over half the products in the supermarket, as well as taking over the fast food chains. We can see why the industrial food chain is such a success, because it is able to offer high

calories at a remarkably low price. When you can get more calories with the same dollar bill, it makes much more economic sense to buy from the industrial food chain. The fact is, most households can't afford to eat healthy and are left with no other option except to fall into this system. When you follow the principles of industry, it wasn't just deciding on creating some CAFO, it was changing the whole way our food is made and sold around the world. The worst thing is we're the ones to suffer from those decisions, not the companies. When companies have decided that all they see in our food are dancing dollar signs and the means to make profit, our food loses its values. The more troubling issue however, is how they are able to present this sickening food in a way that we can blissfully ignore the critical issues that we should be concerned with such as where food comes from, how its raised, harvested, handled, processed, transported, and sold. The industry was able to sell an ideal image; a false sense of safety. The industry has deterred our attention instead to focus on the bountiful number of beautiful packages and new selections on market shelves, the flawless fruits and vegetables available all year round, and the boneless meat bundled so neatly in the meat aisle. The whole attitude towards food has changed. In modern society, people no longer care about the way we're eating, what it's made of, and the consequences that follow. This is because industry is treating nature like a machine: rumen as a corn machine, and chemical soil as machine to grow monoculture of corns. However, as much as industry would like to alter the way nature works, there is a reason why nature is able to manage such a perfect closed cycle without problems such as pollution; it is simply not a production line with petroleum running downstream from the

rivers at the end of it. With no intension to compromise with nature, and no boundaries to this industrial disaster, the whole country is being manipulated in a way to work like a machine. The problem with machines is that they always wear down over time and eventually need replacement. The question then comes down to, how much of the machine will the industry be willing to replace, when the system is no longer sufficient; how many dead cows will be too many; and eventually, in what twisted ways will the human body be affected by the unnatural cycle of unhealthy food and eating that has been superimposed on our society, until someone realizes there needs to be changes — drastic changes — to this food system. The health of our food ultimately reflects our own health. Changing the natural way of acquiring and consuming energy will cause us to pay a dear price. This is, simply put, a broken culture. “ Culture is broadly defined as the values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices accepted by members of a group or community. Culture is learned, not inherited; it is passed from generation to generation through language acquisition and socialization in a process called enculturation. ” (Kitller) Food is an important part of establishing culture; it can express a lot about a culture’s values. In many countries, history and traditions connect back to their local foods. America is comprised of many different cultures such as, Indian, Chinese, Mexican, and African, among an array of others. One would think that this is an advantage: to experience and explore foreign cuisines. However, this is not the case because in order to keep a food business running, one needs to catch up to the demands of the country. Due to the work of industrial food chain, consumers have been wired to be familiar with the tastes and texture of fatty meats, and salty oily foods that

give off a tasty fume in the air. This is the reason why many foreign restaurants do not necessarily follow traditional food recipes from back in their own country, instead they choose to modify their food to meet the mainstreamed taste of their customers. Here, food is about being quick, convenient, and cheap — regardless of where you buy it. In turn, this changes the importance of food in our culture; it is no longer about comfort, pleasure, or tradition. The issue with industrial food chain is it attempts to take short cuts into producing food, and ignoring the full costs of it. This includes an obese country, high medical bills, and an unhealthy nature. We may not give much thought into what we eat, but it reflects our culture's values and beliefs. Eating brings family and friends together, it binds our relationships to each animal and all the plants that we digest. The way we eat affects our behavior in how the earth is treated, revealing our individual and collective foundation of ethics, and basis of character. References: Kittler PG, Sucher K: Food and Culture in America. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989 Pollan, Michael. The Omnivore's Dilemma. New York, New York: Penguin Group, 2006. Print.