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THE COST OF MEAT

A 52' and 90' documentary

Directed by Caroline Du Saint

Produced by Arte France and Nova Production



Synopsis

Animals are no longer seen as living beings, they are now a raw material. As such, they are subject to all forms of industrial and commercial exploitation. The question of animal suffering can be approached in various ways: in zoos, circuses, experimental laboratories, etc. animals suffer. But factory farming has rationalized and perfected this suffering like never before in the history of humanity. The numbers are staggering.

Every year, 70 billion animals are slaughtered by man. In our countries, 1 billion animals were killed last year in France, and 700 million in Germany. 95% of the world's living animals are farmed animals – intended for consumption. We tell our children that our planet is populated by wild animals, lions and elephants. In reality, there are 40,000 lions and 1 billion domesticated pigs in the world. 500,000 elephants and 20 billion chickens are killed every year. The world has turned into a vast mass grave; one where “chick shredder” is an actual job. People are paid to kill millions of male chicks every day, unfit for egg production. Treated as waste, they are crushed before being thrown in the garbage. From birth until death, farm animals live a life of constant violence.

Mutilated at birth, artificially impregnated, locked up in overcrowded buildings, before being brought to a slaughtering line, without ever having seen the light of day. The very notion of living, which we are supposed to share with animals, has lost all its meaning. The cut between man and animal, initiated by the Western philosophical tradition, reinforced by Christianity which places man as master of creation, then validated by the Cartesians and their definition of the dominant reason, seems definitive. And it is this system that feeds us. In less than a century, our eating habits have shifted more than in the last three millennia. A Westerner eats an average of 100 kilos of meat per year – without even seeing an animal carcass before their meal, not to mention the suffering that was necessary to provide their food.

The majority of people accept the fact of eating animals as a banal gesture; they willfully ignore how their food was produced. And yet the way we produce it has become the source of unprecedented violence against animals. Companies, governments, consumers: everyone seems to have agreed to build an imaginary world that hides animal suffering as much as possible and allows us to eat our protein overdosed rations. Animal suffering is now completely out of the picture. Industrial breeding is an opaque, closed world. And woe to those who try to find out what is really going on. “Don’t ask, don’t tell”.

The meat production industry, which is worth more than 140 billion dollars, does not like people meddling in their business. **How did it come to this? What ruthless mechanism has been put in place so that we all accept this permanent crime? What thought and what discourse have justified, in recent decades, the large-scale sacrifice of animals?**

We will investigate and describe the industry of animal suffering. We are going to unravel the mechanics of an institutional and global crime – the result of an economic organization that has made productivity and profitability the two pillars and priorities of its functioning. Because animal suffering is not the result of gratuitous cruelty, nor of an essential need for meat. Human beings are omnivorous, their food survival is not at stake. Nor is it the logical consequence of the increase of the human population: the exponential growth of meat production is far superior to that of the world population, and historically precedes it.

Suffering is structural in a society where the laws of the market dominate all our actions, including eating. It is not an accident of history, neither is it a marginal phenomenon. It has become normal, logical, integrated into our system. The way we eat simply produces most of the animal suffering.





Editorial intention

To investigate these mechanisms, we will follow a narrative thread: the itinerary of this “material” destined to become meat, of this thing that is no longer considered as a living being.

We will follow the animal, or what we have done with it, along its journey shaped by the laws of the market. This is where our approach of showing animals as economic resources will make the most sense.

In addition to avoiding showing unbearable images, it will allow us to follow the path of what is now only a raw material, a standardized object. We will start with the “manufacture” of this object, then we will follow its packaging, its distribution, the sales arguments, and finally the adaptation of this model on a global scale.

For this, we will go to Poland, a country with a heavily productivist approach to poultry. We will then go to the United States, in search of the first slaughterhouses where animal suffering started being made invisible. Then in China and Brazil, where we will discover the insane power of the multinationals, which destroy traditional farms, and push ever further the cold, calculating logic of profiting from living beings.

We will discover that at each stage of “production” of this object, suffering only becomes more and more intense. We will also see through the lies told about each of those stages. We do not know the half of what the animal has gone through before we could eat it.

A global lie has been orchestrated by those who benefit from selling ever more meat. This “oblivion of the living” has been organized for the benefit of a few global groups that are now devastating the planet.

Our film is a global investigation, which will question these deceits and manipulations, and will try to discover who agreed to them, and who organized them. This is not a documentary on the excesses of factory farming, denounced by associations like L214.

It is not about animal rights, animal sensitivity, or the environmental and social ravages caused by the meat industry. It is an investigation into a global system that has gone haywire.





Director's note

Animals suffering and dying is always difficult to watch. So how can we talk about a problem that we cannot show? Our entire film is about this common thread. That is why we decided to use animated illustration. We do not want to show images that are so shocking that they freeze the viewer, that they stop them from thinking. In the farms, we shoot scenes with animals, but we will not show the most violent scenes. We cut the image at that moment, and show drawings, diagrams, etc.

We were inspired by the codes of industrial drawing, which allows us not to show the violence, but also to symbolize the transformation of a living animal into a manufactured object. We follow the itinerary of this animal transformed into an object throughout our film. And it is only at the end of the documentary, when the viewer is ready to see the facts face to face, that we show difficult images.

At that moment, these images will no longer scare them away. Like in the final sequence of "Waltz with Bashir", when the animations turn into real news images to show what the Sabra and Shatila massacre really was. Aside from our narrative thread, this film will of course be based on major interviews. Those of the main actors of the stories we will tell. But also those of historians, economists and philosophers who will help us decipher the mechanisms and understand the thinking behind this system, where the animal has lost its status as a living being.

To illustrate our film, we will also shoot cinematographic images of the current situation. In Poland, China, Brazil, France and Germany, we will film inside the actual breeding farms, factory farms and slaughterhouses to show the reality of our subject matter. Drone images will show the absolute gigantism of everything related to animal husbandry nowadays. One third of the land on our planet is devoted to industrial animal husbandry, we need to showcase this fact. It is also an investigative documentary, so we will use the codes of this genre. We will knock on doors, try to enter forbidden places. We will also use documents that we recover.

Finally, our documentary will also rely on archival footage. Real images documenting the turning points in the history of intensive livestock farming worldwide, such as the opening of the first slaughterhouses. But also archives of advertisements, public service announcements and health recommendations that have marked the lives of three generations, now convinced that we must eat meat several times a day to be healthy, all in a world of cows and pigs living happy in their green pastures.





Speakers

We will interview the main actors in these investigations and stories that structure our subject:

Mathieu Laupain, the repentant breeder settled in Isère.

The managers of the factory farm in Poland

The managers of JBS in Brazil, and the operators of small and large farms in China.

The whistleblower James Keen, the employees and the top managers of the US Meat American Research Center.

The managers of Poulehouse, a new home for “retired” hens.

But we will also give the floor to intellectuals, philosophers, economists and historians to decipher, analyze and give meaning to our investigation.

Friederike Schmitz, philosopher, author of “Animal Ethics, in Short and Understandable”, and of “Eating Animals, Do We Have the Right?” (2020). In 2011, she initiated a petition signed by 300 scientists and intellectuals to end factory farming. For her, animals excluded from our human community must be reintegrated. An ethical behavior towards living beings will benefit the whole society.

Amy Fitzgerald, anthropologist, professor at the University of Ontario, Canada, author of a “Social History of the Slaughterhouse.” She works in particular on the social dimension of these buildings, and the historical turning point that they represented in the history of animal suffering.

Peter Singer, Australian philosopher, author of “Animal Liberation”, the founding book on animal suffering in the 1970s. A utilitarian philosopher and a committed intellectual, he is a key observer of the evolution of our societies on this theme. For him, capitalism does produce suffering, but it does so because it produces goods that the consumer wants. It is therefore up to the consumer to change things.

Florence Burgat, philosopher. She works on the metaphysics of meat and published “L’Humanité carnivore” in 2017. Her research focuses on the “oblivion of animals” in the meat industry, the negation of the living and the construction of discourses on the animal.

Katy Kieffer, American journalist, author of “What’s the Problem With Meat?” She works on the “super integrators”: JBS, Tyson, Cargill, the all-powerful multinationals and their methods of imposing themselves and destroying small breeders throughout the world.

Nicolas Treich, economist, researcher at INRA. He works on risk theory and environmental economics. For him, economic logics are largely responsible for animal suffering in our societies, particularly in the field of animal husbandry.

Jocelyn Porcher, former breeder, sociologist and director of research at INRA. Author of “Living With Animals, a Utopia for the 21st Century” and “Manifesto for a dignified death of animals”. For her, it is up to the breeders to enter into resistance against agribusiness, and to repair the relationship with the living. How can we make breeders and animals happy together, rather than unhappy together?

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