

Live, Die, Buy, Eat

A Cultural History of Animals and Meat



Kristian Bjørkdahl & Karen V. Lykke



Live, Die, Buy, Eat

Live, Die, Buy, Eat. These words represent a chain of events which today is disconnected. In the past few years, controversies around meat have arisen around industrialization and globalization of meat production, often pivoting around health, environmental issues, and animal welfare. Although meat increasingly figures as a problem, most consumers' knowledge of animal husbandry and meat production is more absent than ever. Tracing a historical process of alienation along three distinct axes, the authors show how the animal origin of meat is covered up, rationalized, forgotten, excused, neglected, and denied. How is meat produced today, and where? How do we consume meat, and how have our consumption habits changed? Why have these changes occurred, and what are the social and cultural consequences of these changes? Using Norway as a case study, this book examines the dramatic changes in meat production and consumption over the last 150 years. With a wide range of historical sources, together with interviews and observation at farms, slaughterhouses, and production units, as well as analyses of contemporary texts and digital sources, *Live, Die, Buy, Eat* explores the transformation of animal husbandry, meat production and consumption, together with its cultural consequences. It will appeal to scholars of anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, geography, and history with an interest in food, agriculture, environment, and culture.

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Introduction

[T]o an almost occult degree, production has become disaggregated from consumption.

Rob Nixon

Strange as it may sound, most people today do not know what they eat when they eat meat. A good example of this is from a few years ago, when the Norwegian publisher and former TV host, Arve Juritzen, caused a minor controversy in the country's media. While shopping at his local supermarket, Juritzen had come across a whole suckling pig, encased in transparent plastic and placed alongside other foods in the freezing unit. Being a good digital citizen, Juritzen immediately posted the image on Facebook, adding an outburst of shock and disbelief: "I went shopping for groceries. In a perfectly ordinary freezer in a perfectly ordinary store I found this!! Is this even possible!?! I'm going vegetarian!"¹

Juritzen must have seen in the piglet a post-mortem plea for mercy, and assumed that his online friends would feel the same way. And as a matter of fact, they did: His post was shared more than 900 times, and his Facebook page turned into a flood of agitated comments. Most of Juritzen's online friends reacted with shock, disgust, and aversion at the sight of this whole frozen animal. Some of them mimicked Juritzen's own outburst, with short descriptive exclamations: "Omg" – "Nasty" – "Yuck" – "Cruel!" – "Disgusting!" – "Oh, ghastly!!" – "Totally grotesque!" – "My God horrible!" Other commenters mirrored Juritzen's expression of disbelief: "Shock and horror!" – "Is this possible?!" – "OMG agree, is this possible?" – "A disagreeable surprise in the freezer, It doesn't make me want to eat or buy anything." Another group displayed empathy with the animal and disgust at seeing it presented in this manner: "Poor little thing" – "Ouch. This robs me of my appetite. Think I'm going vegetarian" – "One thing is to let adults see this, but what about children?" – "Ohhhh it hurts to see this" – "Yuck, I can't stand seeing any kind of pork after this picture."

Many of the reactions revealed a lack of awareness of the connection between animals and meat. To many, including Juritzen himself, the dead pig

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Figure 0.1 Arve Juritzen's Facebook update from October 10, 2014.

in the supermarket seems to have come as a surprise. It was as if the incident forced many to think: *Is this what I eat when I eat meat?* “Gee, is this legal?,” asked one person, while others questioned whether Juritzen’s picture could really stem from our part of the world: “Nooooo. Here in Norway?” Some expressed disappointment or anger by learning that it was indeed from Norway: “This is sad, can’t understand that it’s happening” – “Sickest thing I’ve seen! Makes me really mad.”

Not all the comments were equally ignorant, shocked, or disgusted. In statements to mainstream media, Juritzen himself was forced to moderate the impression left by his viral status update: “I grew up in the country, with food production all around me [and] with a mother who worked at a slaughterhouse. I know how food is made.”² And in the comments, several took issue with those who expressed disgust at the photo: “It shouldn’t come as a surprise that the meat we eat comes from animals,” one wrote, while another added: “Before it is parted, meat is an animal.” But objections like these did little to shift the balance of Juritzen’s Facebook page, and a response to the latter comment displays a deep-seated unwillingness to make

the connection between animals and meat: “Sure, we know that animals are animals before they are jointed. But we [normally] don’t have to look at grim photos like this one, which is enough to rob anyone of their appetite.”

In this book, we will be concerned with episodes like this one – that is, with how ordinary people shy away from the fact that meat comes from dead animals. Using one specific country – Norway – as our case, we trace how a systematic disinclination to connect animal and meat has grown over time, and we probe for answers to why this has happened. What we offer is a narrative about the industrialization of meat production, but with a twist. Ours is not so much a story about factory farms, antibiotics, genetic animal monocultures, or conveyor-belt slaughterhouses, though all of these make an appearance in the pages that follow. Instead, the optic we bring to bear highlights how the animals destined to become our food, not to mention the processes that make them so, have receded from our everyday lives, to the point where the mere sight of a dead animal meant for human consumption causes “shock and horror!”

How and why did the animal origin of meat come to seem this strange, even offensive, to so many of us?

Alienation and Denial

Our basic claim in this book is that we have become estranged from the animal origin of meat: In a whole range of situations and contexts from farm to fork, the connection between animals and meat has been broken, and awareness that the food we eat was once a living, breathing animal – not to mention knowledge about how this animal lived and died – is covered up, rationalized, forgotten, excused, neglected, if not outright denied. As the production of meat has increasingly taken on the character of an industry, most people have become ever more alien to the sites, processes, and skills that turn animals into meat. Consequently, in our increasingly carnivorous culture, we have come to expect the animal origin of meat to be undercommunicated, and many of us engage in all sorts of cognitive gymnastics to avoid facing the fact that meat was once an animal.

This estrangement from the animal origin of meat cannot be attributed solely to the manipulative efforts of the meat industry, though those certainly plays a part.³ If consumers and citizens are fooled about what meat is, they are active participants in the scam. According to sociologist Robert Chiles, there is a “suppressive synergy” at work here, in which “[i]ndustry, mass media, and consumers’ everyday habits jointly contribute to the maintenance of [distance]” to the thought of where meat comes from.⁴

If the animal origin of meat has become unfamiliar to us, this state did certainly not descend on us suddenly. The notable historical sociologist Norbert Elias tied this state to the long historical development that he, with the title of his famous book, dubbed “the civilizing process.” In that book, he described how Western societies, over time, have accumulated a growing

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catalog of phenomena that offend people's sensibilities. Animals and our dealings with them is one important example of this tendency: At festivities at premodern courts or estates of the nobility, animals were presented to the guests whole, sometimes even with fur and feathers intact. Animals would be ceremonially carved at the table, in view of everyone. To carve an animal was a prerequisite skill for any man of a certain lineage; it was an opportunity for "the man of the world" to show his distinction. But, over time, Elias argues, whole animals were replaced by animal parts, and the carving was now done in the kitchen, out back, by servants. At one point, even the use of the knife at the table became a problem, since it symbolized the very action one did not want to reflect upon. Especially among the upper class, Elias shows, there was a growing sensibility in which the taking of animal life was felt to be uncivilized. Elias sums up the process thus: "[T]he distasteful was removed behind the scenes of social life."⁵

From a standard of feeling by which the sight and carving of a dead animal on the table are actually experienced as pleasurable, or at least as not at all unpleasant, the development leads to another standard by which reminders that the meat dish has something to do with the killing of an animal are avoided to the utmost. In many of our meat dishes the animal form is so concealed and changed by the art of its preparation and carving that, while eating, one is scarcely reminded of its origin.⁶

In our time, the tendencies described by Elias have reached new extremes. As we aim to show in the chapters that follow, contemporary meat culture rests on a whole range of different denial strategies that help people avoid dealing with the fact that they eat animals. Most of these strategies are not products of conscious choice, but a function of our socialization. They might be described as an aspect of our *habitus*. This term, which was arguably given its fullest meaning by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to "a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action."⁷ The term denotes a set of dispositions for action that are at the same time bodily and mental. While one would perhaps expect our *habitus* to dispose us primarily in a positive sense, that is, that it would capacitate us to act or think in particular ways, it is equally forceful in allowing us *not* to act or think about particular things. We might, in other words, be disposed negatively – that is, we might be trained by our upbringing and our culture to *not* look in a particular direction, to *not* consider certain connections. This, we contend, is precisely what we find when it comes to the animal origin of meat.⁸

Bourdieu was well aware of how we, in our everyday lives, suppress certain types of knowledge, not least the knowledge of how our own practice works – what he called *learned ignorance*.⁹ And he believed that this function of concealment is precisely what creates the need for social and cultural

analysis of everyday life. If denial is socially organized, and if it reproduces itself largely without our conscious awareness of it, there is all the more reason to uncover the forces at work. That is what we aim to do with this book. Our purpose is not so much to raise suspicion or discredit consumers, media, industry, or government, but rather, to help put us all in position from which we can take responsibility for our actions. To do that, we must confront what we have grown accustomed to deny; we must learn anew that which we have learned to ignore.

This kind of work cannot be done once and for all, but must take on the character of an ongoing work within specific contexts. The context for this particular book is a peculiar country at the periphery of Europe: Norway. It is a large country with a small population, only 5.4 million people. Within a short period of time, but with a large amount of good fortune, Norway went from being a country with modest means and meager economy to being one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Today, Norway is the *nouveau riche* cousin in the European family, with petroleum as its central asset. A hundred years ago or so, Norway was firmly divided by social class, and poor peasants even relied on child labor to get by; today, Norwegian farming has become a high-tech bio-industry which integrates seasonal and permanent labor from abroad.¹⁰ Most of the dramatic changes in Norwegian agriculture took off in the post-WWII era, especially from the 1960s onwards, when economic growth and technological advances lifted farmers from a circular economy anchored in self-sufficiency into an economy based on industrialization and commercial exchange. In Norway, this all happened in a very short period, and was so revolutionary in nature, that there are still people around who have living memories of the change.

While we underline the importance of the particular context in which consumers and others learn to ignore the animal origin of meat, we do not mean to say that there are no similarities across countries and contexts. For while Norway's agricultural sector still has certain peculiar characteristics – a relatively small-scale production, a set of cooperatives as central actors, and a comparatively modest use of antibiotics, to mention some factors – the underlying tendency of development in Norway has been much the same as in other industrialized countries.¹¹ The tendency has been well summed up by historian William Cronon, who describes it as a constant quest to “systematize the market in animal flesh – to liberate it from nature and geography.”¹² This quest has played out differently in different countries, however, and our starting point has been that something crucial will be lost if we do not care about the particularities.

Using Norway as our case, we want, with this book, to show how Norwegians, as part of the development over the last century or so, have come to be distanced – but also, how they distance themselves – from the animal origin of meat and the processes the make food of animals. Our claim will be that Norwegians over time have been *alienated* from the animal origin of meat, and that this alienation has gradually increased the need for socially

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organized *denial*. The result is that many people today do not know what they eat when they eat meat.

We do not present a strict chronological narrative, but have rather organized the book so as to trace two different processes of transformation. The first transformation process is the one in which meat is made from animals – in other words, the chain from “farm to fork.” This chain forms the design principle for the book’s four main chapters – *Live, Die, Buy, Eat* – each of which examines a separate link in this chain. The second transformation process is history itself – that is, the process of change that has taken us from where we once were to where we are today. Each of our four main chapters, then, tells a story of how a particular set of practices – raising animals, killing animals, buying animals, and eating animals – has changed, from *then to now*, more specifically, from the late 1800s to the present.

This structure comes with certain challenges. For one, while the historical emphasis shifts slightly from one chapter to the next, we will indeed be presenting four iterations of what is roughly the same chronology. The reader will need a certain amount of patience as we add a new layer to the story for each chapter, and they will have to wait until the end to get a full view of how those layers work in concert. There is a point to presenting each link of the chain as a separate layer, however, namely that this is what they have in fact become: The links in the chain from farm to fork have, over time, grown ever more distant from each other, and it has been important for us to understand how each of these links historically grew into its current, differentiated, state. At the same time, it has been imperative for us to include each of these links in a single book, in an effort to bring back together what has been separated, to reconnect the links in the chain.

In what remains of this chapter, we will outline our analytical take on the theme we have just sketched, and show how it relates to other scholarly efforts in this area; we will describe and justify our approach to studying it; and we will give a background on the case of Norway. First, however, we want to explain why we believe the theme of this book should be seen as one of general concern.

Meatification

As geographer Tony Weis points out, in his book *The Ecological Hoofprint*, the production of meat worldwide has more than quadrupled in less than half a century.¹³ As per 2019, approximately 80 billion animals are killed for human consumption annually, which means that each human individual on average causes more than 8 animal deaths every year.¹⁴ This immense growth has been possible, Weis notes, thanks to a process of “meatification,” a term coined to capture the multidimensional nature of industrialization and global interconnection of meat production.

At almost every point in human history, meat has been seen as a sign of social status; a high level of meat consumption has generally signaled the social distinction of the meat eater. As sociologist Nick Fiddes

points out: “Time and again, in different contexts, cultures, social groups, and periods of history, meat is supreme. Within most nations today, the higher the income bracket, the greater the proportion of animal products in the diet.”¹⁵ The drive for meat has had certain negative consequences at earlier stages in history as well, but with industrial meatification, meat has indeed become a global problem of quite immense scale and difficulty. There are three areas in particular where meatification now poses a threat.

First, as scientists, scholars, and activists have pointed out for several decades, industrial animal agriculture generally reduces the lives of animals to an existence so restricted that many find the practice hard to justify morally. The effects of industrial animal husbandry on animal welfare were first brought home to the public by Ruth Harrison, in 1964, in her now classic statement *Animal Machines*, where she argued that industrial agriculture inflicted severe suffering on farm animals – a claim that would prompt the British government to set up the Brambell committee to investigate the welfare of farm animals, and which resulted in the so-called “five freedoms” for animals under human control.¹⁶ In part due to Harrison’s intervention, the field of animal ethics would later form, which not only clarified the ethical stakes, but which also provided radical animal rights organizations like PETA with an impetus, not least thanks to books like philosopher Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, first published in 1975.¹⁷ While certain steps have been taken toward improving the welfare of animals in industrial meat production, we would argue – and we would not be alone – that industrial meat production still represents a moral problem.¹⁸ We would also suggest that some of what passes as improvements to animal welfare are in fact instances of what we call “welfare washing,” a form of disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to create an impression that one is taking responsibility for animal welfare, but where the improvements made are in fact marginal or even non-existent.¹⁹

Next, our contemporary meat culture exacerbates environmental crisis.²⁰ In recent decades, as the world’s total meat consumption has grown, it has become ever more apparent that our current – not to speak of our prospected – levels of global meat consumption are nowhere near being environmentally sustainable. This tremendous rise has caused expert commentators to single out meat as a central culprit behind climate change, as it not only causes widespread land use change – including deforestation and a shift to industrial monocrops – but also contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. The livestock industry takes up as much as 40 percent of the arable land worldwide, and is responsible for 14.5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Livestock consume 36 percent of all calories produced in the world. And while domestic animals take up 83 percent of the agricultural land, they only provide 18 percent of the total calories and 37 percent of the proteins consumed.²¹ In addition, meat production often pollutes local environments, and does harm due to its excessive water use.

No less than 29 percent of all the fresh water used in agriculture globally is spent on livestock.²²

Third, nutritional science has firmly established that the current meat consumption patterns in affluent countries are far excessive of our nutritional needs, and that they are in fact quite detrimental to our health. People who consume a lot of meat – and processed meat in particular – are more prone to develop cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain forms of cancer.²³ Recent research even questions the effects of white meat in a healthy diet, and it is beyond doubt that current levels of meat consumption, or indeed meat consumption at all, is unnecessary for a healthy lifestyle.²⁴ The official position of the American Dietetic Association, for example, is that “appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.” As if to underline that vegetarian diets really are safe, the Association points out that its conclusion, after a systematic review of the literature, is that, “Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes.”²⁵

But while scientists and others document with ever more confidence the various facets of these three problems – animal welfare, the environmental consequences of meat consumption, and the health effects of meat-excessive diets – global meat consumption remains on a steep climb. The number of animals killed for human consumption annually is still on the rise almost everywhere and is now the highest it has ever been in history.

The Modern Meat Paradox

One would perhaps think that the reasons just enumerated would be enough to make most of us reconsider our appetite for meat, but that is emphatically not the case. While we now consume more animals than ever before, many of us appear to be averting our gaze from what the author Upton Sinclair once described as a continuous “stream of animals” and “a very river of death.”²⁶ This arguably presents us with a paradox, which psychologists now are indeed referring to as “the meat paradox.” In an emerging area of inquiry within psychology and related fields, scholars have been asking, with Brock Bastian, one of the central figures in this field, “how do so many people manage to eat so much meat while also readily espousing their love for animals?”²⁷ As it has been construed within psychology, “the meat paradox” refers to our psychological ability to love animals and love their meat at the same time. How do we do it? One central way of managing this paradox, Bastian and his colleagues suggest, is “to forget the link between meat and animals”:

People rarely enjoy thinking about where meat comes from, the processes it goes through to get to their tables, or the living qualities of the

animals from which it is extracted. *Forgetting* or *ignoring* the chain of meat production allows people to mentally *separate* meat from animals, so they can eat pork or beef without thinking about pigs or cows.

Because we cannot always forget or ignore the connection between animals and meat, our choice, when the connection is forced upon us, is often “*Denying* mental qualities to animals,” which according to Bastian, “reduces cognitive dissonance over their consumption.”²⁸

Bastian builds these conclusions on a growing body of work in experimental psychology. In one such study, done by Jonas Kunst and Sigrid Hohle, the authors measured how people reacted in two different situations. In the first situation, the animals’ connection to meat was undercommunicated, and in the other, it was emphasized. This was done by displaying animal carcasses either with or without their heads, and by referring to a dish on a restaurant menu as either beef/pork or cow/pig. Their findings were conclusive: When the animal origin was curtailed, participants in the study displayed less empathy and showed less inclination for disgust, while they were more inclined to eat meat. Kunst and Hohle argue that culturally established dissociative processes allow us to avoid and manage cognitive dissonance, that is, the discomfort associated with a mismatch between our thoughts or perceptions and our actions. In other words, by dissociating ourselves from the animal origin of meat, we make it easier for ourselves to remain carnivores.²⁹

While the present effort is an exercise in cultural analysis, our claim roughly aligns with this research in experimental psychology. To see these issues as matters of history and culture adds something important, we argue, to our understanding of what the psychologists are calling the meat paradox. It suggests, for example, that the construal of the problem *as a paradox* is a peculiarly modern inclination. The idea that there is something contradictory, something problematic, in loving *and* eating an animal is not a problem produced by an autonomous, transhistorical human psyche, but a product of the society and the culture we inhabit. Our interest, then, is mainly in how *specific* people, in a more or less distinct culture, have handled this issue – or how they, in effect, have not.

A direct inspiration for us has been the British critic and author John Berger’s essay, “Why Look at Animals?,” where he suggested that the shift from traditional to industrial capitalist societies forms a central historical turning point in our relation to animals.³⁰ In industrial capitalist societies, humans have become estranged from all things natural, Berger argued, and are now “a species which has at last been isolated.”³¹ Berger’s thesis, which would become something of a standard piece in the study of human-animal relations, was that animals were “vanishing.” True, there were many more of them than ever before, but at the same time, Berger lamented that the old intimacy between humans and animals had been lost. Today, he stated, animals in food production are “treated as raw material” and “processed like manufactured commodities.”³²

As described by Berger, the preindustrial relation to animals rested on an idea of a virtual contract which gave each party a set of rights and duties. For preindustrial agriculturalists, the contract entailed an idea of mutuality: “I will feed you, take care of you, and treat you well, and in the end I will eat you.” Animals were vital to human livelihood, and the rhythms of the year were marked by transhumance, births, and slaughter.³³ Farmers were dependent on their animals, for the food, wool, and byproducts – including the manure – they provided, and the animals were dependent on the farmers, for grazing areas, feed, and protection against predators and hostile weather conditions. In short, the implicit contract between farmer and animals called on each party to provide for the other, in turn. Although it was a virtual contract, the mutual dependence of humans and animals could not be denied: If the animals starved, so did the farmer.³⁴

While Berger acknowledges that animals still occupy space in contemporary cultures, he laments the disappearance of the integrated, mutually dependent, lives that humans previously lived with animals, where their respective roles were clearly designated and justified. This leads Berger to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: Although animals are superficially present in our cultures, the *real* animal – the one that entered into serious mutuality with the small farmer – vanishes. In the contemporary age, “Animals are thus made *invisible*; they are made into objects we can look at but which do not look back: All animals appear like fish seen through the plate glass of an aquarium.”³⁵

Only when the old contract based on mutuality withered away, would we begin to see a problem with loving an animal and eating it at the same time. The “peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork” Berger noted, but what was so difficult for us moderns to understand “is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*.”³⁶

While Berger’s text has been tremendously popular, particularly in animal studies, other scholars have demonstrated that there is nevertheless reason to challenge some of its claims – or, rather, *how* those claims were made. For instance, Jonathan Burt challenges Berger’s historical periodization, and suggests that, contra Berger’s assumptions, changes in human-animal relationships have had less to do with alienation from a pre-industrial, integrated bond, and more to do with the emergence of animal welfare as an institution.³⁷

As we see it, however, one might agree with both writer and critic in this case. Though we concede that Berger’s thesis rests on an oversimplified periodization, which makes no impressive allowances for time lags or cultural specificity, his basic idea that we have become alienated from a certain category of animal – those we eat – is in every way accurate. This does not mean, however, that animal welfare has played no role in the matter. To the contrary, as we will elaborate further in “Die,” the institutionalization of animal welfare into legislation has been part and parcel of the alienation

process: While, in the old days, the moral responsibility rested with the person who killed the animal, or who at any rate witnessed the killing, this responsibility has over time been “outsourced” to an increasingly complex set of laws and regulations – which oftentimes are so technical that they hardly make sense to the average consumer. One function of shifting responsibility to legislation has indeed been to make the killing of animals and the witnessing of that killing a much rarer occurrence, as this act is now confined indoors, in facilities that are more or less closed off to the public, to be performed by a certain category of professional. This too, we argue, is alienation. This too allows us to remain at a distance from the animal origin of the meat we eat.

Three Axes of Alienation

While we believe Berger was being sweeping rather than strictly speaking wrong, it is important to resist his oversimplified distinction between “before” and “after” industrialization – if for no other reason, because industrialization arrived at very different times in different places. In a sense, then, what we offer in this book is a sort of empirical explication of Berger’s thesis: We want to fill in the details that give life to his sweeping thesis, using our own country, Norway, as an historical case study. The Norwegian case is distinct, but not absolutely so, and we believe that similar, if not identical, stories can be told from within other modern affluent societies about the processes that have made a certain category of animals “vanish.” What, then, are these processes?

Berger’s text gives away the first half of our claim: Over the course of the last century and a half, our relation to animals that become meat has changed in ways that can only be described as a process of estrangement – as *alienation*. This is a term with historical baggage, and while there are certain connections between Marx’s theory of alienation and our way of using the term, we have no ambition to latch our work neatly onto a Marxist analysis.³⁸ In the context of this book, the word alienation refers to a process of change in which people become increasingly estranged from the animal origin of meat, but *also* to the end point of that process – that is, to the estranged state in which many people find themselves. This alienation process has unfolded, we argue, as the sites, skills, and meanings involved in the killing of animals and the treatment of their dead bodies have increasingly disappeared from sight of most people. To be more specific, our claim will be that alienation from the animal origin of meat has taken place along three distinct, but interrelated, axes.

Spatial alienation means that the distance between the places where domestic animals are kept and slaughtered and the places where most people live and work has increased. One central reason for this was urbanization. Like people in most high-income countries, Norwegians have moved away from the countryside and into cities and towns – a well-known shift, to be

sure, but one that we tend not to reflect too much upon. A notable aspect of this shift is that, over time, a smaller portion of the population would be involved in work with animals. In 1900, 47 percent of all Norwegians with registered employment were active in the primary industries, and animals were of course an essential part of both forestry and agriculture.³⁹ Using the power of horses, foresters hauled their timber to the nearest river for floating and farmers plowed their fields. All over the country, grazing ruminants like sheep, goats, and cows transformed foliage, moss, and grass to wool, dairy products, and meat that would feed people – and into manure that fed the fields. Until well into the 1960s, it was common to slaughter small animals like pigs and sheep on the farm. Uncountable hours were spent carrying water, gathering fodder, feeding, and mucking. People spread dung on the fields, they milked, they clipped sheep, and they worked alongside horses. They took part in lambing in spring and slaughter in fall. In short, animals were part and parcel of everyday life.⁴⁰ In contrast, today, no more than four percent of all Norwegians are employed within primary production, and hence, very few live in proximity to farm animals.⁴¹ While urbanization is arguably the main cause of spatial alienation, the process is exacerbated by agricultural concentration, that is, by the fact that there are now fewer farms, which nevertheless maintain the same – or even a higher – number of animals. Meanwhile, slaughter has been concentrated to industrial facilities situated away from where most people work and live.

Next, *social alienation* refers to the process where people grow socially and professionally distanced from the context where animals become meat. When employment in the primary sectors shrunk from 47 to four percent, this caused not only a spatial alienation from the countryside, but also a loss of knowledge about the professions involved in keeping and killing animals, and about the social networks – and more generally, the ways of life – that those professions were part of. People who were once part of farming are today employed in industry or service jobs; many are part of *the creative class*, who live off ideas, language, and intellectual capital. But despite talk of our living in a “knowledge economy,” a vast amount of knowledge has been lost: Since most of us do not need to handle or slaughter animals ourselves, knowledge about these things has disappeared – or rather, it has been outsourced to a small number of professionals. Although many of us still want meat, we do not need much knowledge about what we eat when we eat meat. As Nick Fiddes points out: “Nowadays, the consumer need never encounter animal flesh in its vulgar undressed state.”⁴² Rather, meat is rendered readily available in pre-prepared pieces in tidy plastic containers, and the only knowledge we need to have is its sell-by-date.

Finally, *cultural alienation* refers to a growing incapacity to explain, rationalize, and justify the animal killing that is necessary for meat production and consumption. Practically everywhere and at all times people have felt a need to justify and attach meaning to the fact that we kill other living beings to consume them. This need for justification has been so widespread,

in fact, that it even transcends the distinction between hunter-gatherer cultures and agricultural cultures. Such justifications are found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but also among hunter-gatherers and indigenous peoples – or for that matter, in the philosopher René Descartes’ suggestion that animals are *automata*, and that the noises they make when they suffer are hence equivalent to a squeaky machinery. A characteristic feature of our time, we argue, is that many have become estranged from such justifications. Having abandoned most of the frameworks that historically provided justifications for animal deaths, our culture has become increasingly alienated from the idea that we kill animals in order to eat them – and many consequently find themselves faced with the “meat paradox.” When the cultural frameworks that made animal deaths meaningful and necessary are left behind, then loving an animal and eating it – becoming “fond of one’s pig and glad to salt away its pork” – becomes a problem: Killing animals becomes the source of a painful cognitive dissonance in need of correction. The foremost cultural authority of our time is arguably science, but science appears only to complicate the picture even further. It tells us, for instance, that we are exterminating other animals at an unprecedented pace; that many animals are far more capable beings than we have been accustomed to think; that animals suffer in modern animal husbandry; that our consumption of animals causes great harm to the planet; and that we consume so much meat that it endangers our health.

These three axes of alienation appear at different places, and in various combinations, across the process from *live* to *die* to *buy* to *eat*. There is no predetermined order to any of these developments. When considered with the appropriate level of detail, many of them appear, to the contrary, quite messy, accidental, and unpredictable – they are efforts toward ends that keep changing, with means that do likewise. Our assumption is thus that we have been placed in our present condition by particular historical processes that have socialized us in quite specific ways and given us cultures that are to some extent unique. That is not to say that people at other times and places have had no problem killing animals; to the contrary, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this represents something like an endemic problem for most meat-eating *homo sapiens*. The difference, however, lies in the particular ways of responding to that problem: While the problem at most other times and in most other places has been met more directly, the contemporary age tends increasingly to look away – to respond, that is, with some form of denial.

Making Meat a Mystery

While we emphasize that these three axes of alienation are not inherent features of a predetermined historical trajectory, it is important to underline that they are not mere accidents either. They are, at least to some extent, products of sustained efforts made by specific actors – individuals and

institutions who stand to benefit, somehow, from our alienation. So while there are certainly many accidents and coincidences in the history we look into in what follows, it cannot be denied that alienation has been aided by, and is intertwined with, the strategic production of ignorance.

In Norway, arguably the most obvious example of this is the somewhat deceptively named *Opplysningskontoret for kjøtt* (the Meat Information Office). This might sound like an official, governmental, agency, but it is actually a propaganda unit for Norway's meat industry, and its mandate has always included increasing Norwegians' consumption of meat.⁴³ The Meat Information Office is Norway's social democratic version, one might say, of the American meat lobby. Among many other noteworthy initiatives, the Office has issued recipe books to home economics classes in schools and placed one of their employees as a chef on a popular morning TV show. More broadly, deceptive advertising of meat and other animal products abound, whether we are talking about happy egg-laying hens rendered in surroundings that were abandoned almost 100 years ago, on-screen dairy cows placed on lush pastures, when they actually spend most of their time cramped indoors, or pork production facilities that come across as more caring environments than kindergartens. The effect of the rhetoric employed by the meat industry, we argue, is to present an unreal image of how animals become meat in our society. By way of placing such unreal images in the minds of the consumer, the industry creates ignorance.

What is at work here can be understood through what – within sociology, science and technology studies (STS), and related disciplines – has come to be called *agnotology*. Coined by Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, in 2008, the basic objective of agnotology research is to demonstrate the importance of ignorance to social life, and to study how ignorance is more or less strategically produced, by certain actors for certain purposes, in various areas of life and industry.⁴⁴ Among the paradigmatic cases in this field is tobacco, an industry which demonstrably, intentionally, and with various sophisticated means tried (and, for a while, succeeded) to produce ignorance among authorities and citizens. Long before “fake news” became a buzzword, the tobacco industry had crafted techniques for creating and circulating falsehoods, the effect of which were to fend off criticism and other forms of negative attention. The tobacco industry distracted the public's attention, issued pseudo-scientific counter-reports, stalled or diverted legal inquiries, etc. Tobacco has since become something of a model for certain other industries, like the fossil fuel industry, aviation, and more.⁴⁵

More recently, this field of study has been advanced by sociologist Linsey McGoey, who in her book, *The Unknowers*, shows how strategic ignorance is not always a concerted effort concocted by the captains of a single industry. Focusing mainly on how certain economic ideas and principles have been upheld by strategies of obfuscation, McGoey defines strategic ignorance as “any actions which mobilize, manufacture or exploit unknowns in a wider environment to avoid liability for earlier actions,” or also, as the

ways in which “non-disclosure is tactically deployed to avoid the repercussions of inconvenient evidence.”⁴⁶ On this understanding, strategic ignorance can refer either to a productive effort to create falsehoods or to more subtle techniques of non-disclosure and avoidance. In all cases, the concept refers, in McGoeys use, to techniques that help someone avoid or divert “inconvenient truths.”

Importantly, McGoeys emphasizes that such production of ignorance, while typically the concern of corporate elites out to secure and protect their privilege, also extends to ordinary citizens: “[C]itizens typically resent the effort to draw attention to [...] atrocities carried out by their own governments in both the past and the present,” McGoeys notes, and adds that citizens of any nation are prone to what Gayatri Spivak calls “sanctioned ignorance,” that is, they are inclined to maintain certain blind spots when it comes to their own involvement in atrocities, in order to retain “a sense of national respectability or honour.”⁴⁷

It is our contention that, in the course of the 20th century, the meat industry entered into an implicit historical alliance with both government and meat-consuming citizens in order to *make meat a mystery*. This was a strategic effort, in the sense that it helped different actors avoid the inconvenient truths of how animals become meat, but it was not always and everywhere a conscious or explicit one. Often, no more than a weak intentionality was involved. As we will try to show, however, this weak intentionality is part of the phenomenon we are trying to describe: Consumers tacitly accept the state of affairs, to a large extent by not inquiring about what that state really is. We might say that, in contradistinction to talk of “co-production of knowledge,” that meat has become an object of a *co-production of ignorance*.⁴⁸ Consumers are occasionally stirred toward enlightenment or even provoked into resistance, but these are typically episodic sentiments, after which most return to a set of convenient fictions, like the notion that the authorities are making sure everything is in order. The combined result of the more or less strategic elements of this alliance and the accidental convergence of several processes of historical change is that we increasingly turn our gaze away from the animal origins of meat and from the process of transformation involved in creating this food.

An insightful take on the dynamics of our growing inability to connect animals and meat was offered by Carol J. Adams, in her signal publication, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Her concept of the “absent referent” identifies the phenomenon that we want to expose in detail in what follows. According to Adams, the absent referent “is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product.”

The function of the absent referent is to keep our “meat” separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the “moo” or “cluck” or “baa” away from the meat, to keep *something* from being seen as having been someone. Once the existence of meat is disconnected from

the existence of an animal who was killed to become that “meat,” meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image.⁴⁹

Adams’ contribution shows how ignorance about the connection between animals and meat is produced by obfuscating or obstructing *sight*. In her view, a prerequisite of our becoming oblivious to the de-animalization process – the process in which animals are made into meat – is that this process has been removed from view. In a multitude of ways, this process, and any reminder of it, is made invisible.

Perhaps surprisingly, the sight of the de-animalization process is obstructed even at a site like the abattoir. As has been documented by anthropologist Noëlie Vialles, in her classic study *Animal to Edible*, the modern slaughterhouse divides the job of killing an animal up into so many distinct tasks, typically along a factory-style conveyor belt, that one can no longer be entirely certain who actually takes the animal’s life.⁵⁰ Similarly, political scientist Timothy Pachirat shows, in his book *Every Twelve Seconds*, that the floor plans of modern slaughterhouses are such that the various processes of de-animalization that take place in those facilities are strictly separated from each other, among other things by obstruction of sight lines.⁵¹ So offensive has the act of killing an animal for food become, it seems, that even those tasked with doing the killing must be protected from it.

This scholarship is useful in that it helps us see the problem as one of diversion, looking away, averting one’s gaze. Beyond showing how this obstruction of sight happens, another of our ambitions with this book is to recover and perform an act of *witnessing*. To retrace the historical steps that got us into our present relation to the animals we eat is, we would argue, a necessary feature of such witnessing – since it allows us to learn anew what we have unlearned. If decades of alienation have caused us to look away, we want to redirect our gaze, so what we once again look at what we eat when we eat meat.

The concept of *denial* is central to this effort. As McGoey argued, we “resent the effort to draw attention” to inconvenient truths, in order to protect ourselves. And this socially sanctioned tendency to “look away” is precisely what sociologist Stanley Cohen explored in his acclaimed book *States of Denial*. According to his own narrative, Cohen became interested in this theme during his upbringing in South Africa’s apartheid regime, where he began to wonder how white South Africans could live with themselves – but at the same time, not quite – knowing that blacks were systematically oppressed by a regime that whites benefited from greatly. Drawing on a wide range of scholarly inputs, Cohen finds that we have a whole range of techniques at our disposal with which to deny inconvenient acts or circumstances. Denial is a rich and multifarious social phenomenon, Cohen argues, which takes place when:

[P]eople, organizations, governments or whole societies are presented with information that is too disturbing, threatening or anomalous to be fully absorbed or openly acknowledged. The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted. Or else the information “registers” well enough, but its implications – cognitive, emotional or moral – are evaded, neutralized away.⁵²

Although Cohen’s perspective goes well with our thesis, we should be careful to point out that not everyone is equally bothered by the thought of the animal origin of meat. As Piazza et al. have shown, many people justify their meat-eating by one of the “four Ns,” which refer to a set of arguments that rationalize meat-eating as *normal*, *necessary*, *natural*, or *nice*.⁵³ According to these authors, these motives are correlated with lower levels of guilt, which means that anyone who earnestly identifies with any of these justifications will simply not be much troubled by the idea of eating sentient creatures.

For those who are not capable of this type of response, however, the issue is more troubling. According to scholars Darst and Dawson, who adapt Hirschman, anyone who is disinclined to justify meat production or consumption with reference to the four Ns is left with only three strategies: exit, voice, or loyalty. We can *voice* our protests against the current meat culture, but in practice, such protests have tended to be fragmented, conflicting, and confused. To the extent that protesting is not sufficient, one could be led toward two different forms of *exit* – either substitution or abstention – but most people feel these are overly demanding solutions. That leaves only *loyalty*, which in this context means continued meat consumption. With this – most common – strategy, however, one has done little to remove the unease around meat-eating, and hence Darst and Dawson argue that this final response leads to “socially organized denial of the evidence and its implications.”⁵⁴

It is important to emphasize that denial, in this context, refers to a social, not merely an individual, phenomenon. The failure to confront the inconvenient truth about meat is a *socially sanctioned* form of ignorance; it is a form of unknowing that we tend not to object to in other people, whether our family members, our friends, or our co-workers. In fact, we might not even notice it as “unknowing” at all, since most of us are deeply implicated in reproducing it ourselves. We are all – unfortunately – in this denial together, or certainly those of us who eat meat. One important implication of this insight, we believe, is that one cannot expect to deal adequately with the issue if one sees it as a question about individual moral choice. If we really want to confront our failure to confront where meat comes from, we cannot get lost in notions of individual responsibility. We need instead to attack the problem at its spatial, social, and cultural root.

According to David Harvey, and a tradition of research in geography which has followed his lead, that root goes back to what Marx referred to as “the fetishism of commodities.” To illustrate this phenomenon, Harvey

presents a thought experiment that he gives to his students, in which they are prompted to trace the last meal they ate. “Tracking back all the items used in the production of that meal reveals a relation of dependence upon a whole world of social labor conducted in many different places under very different social relations and conditions of production,” Harvey says, and adds that, “we can in practice consume our meal without the slightest knowledge of the intricate geography of production and the myriad social relationships that puts it on our table.”⁵⁵ The mechanism at work here, he argues, is the fetishism of commodities, a term with which Marx “sought to capture [...] the way in which markets conceal social (and, we should add, geographical) information and relations.” The ignorance that ensues from this process is “in itself cause for concern,” Harvey says, and outlines very clearly how it rests on a separation of the contexts of production from the contexts of consumption:

The spatial range of our own individual experience of procuring commodities in the market place bears no relationship to the spatial range over which the commodities themselves are produced. The two space horizons are quite distinct, and decisions that seem reasonable from the former standpoint are not necessarily appropriate from the latter.⁵⁶

The academic (and political) program that follows from this insight, Harvey insists, is to “lift the veil on this geographical and social ignorance and make ourselves aware of these issues.”⁵⁷ And this is in fact what many scholars of geography have done, in studies that trace – and attempt to reconnect – the production and consumption of various commodities.⁵⁸ Cook and Crang provide one example of this kind of study, but they add a critical perspective which is potentially interesting for our purpose. Presumably, commodity fetishism entails “a vacuum of meaning and knowledge to be filled,” they say, but this way of presenting the issue discounts the “potential for fetishized commodities to be re-filled by consumers themselves.”⁵⁹ They take this perspective from the cultural studies tradition, which postulates that consumers might indeed meet fetishized commodities, but are nevertheless free to do with them as they wish. While we take this to be a solid theoretical point, and always a political *option*, in practice, when it comes to meat, most consumers often get quite comfortable within their relative ignorance of where meat comes from. For our purposes, then, Harvey’s agenda of “lifting the veil” is highly pertinent, though we would insist that the ignorance in question here is co-produced by a range of actors.

Agri-Cultural Studies

To insist that denial of the animal origin of meat is not an issue of individual responsibility is, at the same time, to say that it is not merely a matter of “consumer choice” – and hence, that it cannot be solved simply by

encouraging “conscious consumption.” Instead, we should assume that we face a complex bundle of economic, social, and cultural incentives that have been deeply engrained in our daily lives over time.⁶⁰ We cannot expect change to come easily. But while our inclination to deny where meat comes from is certainly a recalcitrant thing, and although strong interests are working hard to keep it that way, we can start the work of change by uncovering the factors that led us to, and keep us in, a state of ignorance.

The disciplinary and methodological perspective we bring to bear on this topic is a form of exploratory cultural analysis that results from combining cultural history, rhetoric, and cultural studies on agricultural topics – what we for the purposes of this book like to think of as *agri-cultural studies*. The most basic drive of our approach has been to understand how certain patterns of thinking-feeling and acting-behaving have become engrained into our everyday practices over time. This means, *first*, that we are interested not just in arguments, but also in sentiments (remember those “yuck” and “shock and horror!” responses to the frozen suckling pig); *second*, that we are interested not just in what people say, but also in what they do (consumers tend to say they care about animal welfare, but they also tend not to act on it); and *third*, that we are interested in actions that appear intentional as well as behavior that appears less so (contrast the Meat Information Office’s propaganda campaigns with a consumer’s shopping decisions in the supermarket). Finally, and most importantly, it means that our primary focus is on the practices of everyday life, and less on politics or institutions or business, and that we are interested in understanding how these practices have changed over time.

The meat industry is of course a central actor in what follows, but it is certainly not the only one. In Norway, the agricultural authorities, the food inspection authorities, veterinarians, the big cooperatives, but also, agricultural colleges, magazines and media, retailers, and, not least, *Ola Nordmann* – the man in the street – have all been central characters in this cast. So although the story that follows will of course be framed by economic, institutional, agricultural, and political history, our own contribution lies mainly in the study of “ordinary” individuals and citizens. We have been interested in the everyday practices of farmers, butchers, industrial slaughterers, shopkeepers, housewives, and more.

We have found that nonhuman actors too have impinged on our narrative. While we are not necessarily committed to the notion of “generalized symmetry,”⁶¹ we have come to think that the issues cannot be explained solely with reference to the motives and actions of certain human beings. Rather, as we will show, physical things like mechanic saws and conveyor belts, slaughterhouse floor plans, packaging, advertisements, as well as large social shifts like the movement of women into the workforce, are also among the factors that have allowed meat consumption to increase so dramatically, while at the same time obfuscating the processes which uphold that consumption. In the same way, laws and regulations that ordain how meat is

to be produced, but which – by so doing – releases consumers from any obligation to make their own inquiries, also take part in this drama. One could even argue that the soy that replaces the Amazon rainforest should be considered a central actor, since it has increasingly been feeding the animals that are transformed into Norwegian meat.

We should not be surprised that our current level of meat consumption requires such a complex network of factors to operate successfully, for, as historian Roger Horowitz has remarked, the central component in any system of meat production and consumption – the animals – often resist our designs on them. Horowitz points out that it was far from easy to attain our present levels of meat consumption, since, as he writes: “It is difficult to turn a living thing into a meal for human beings.” Reminding us of the *material* nature of meat, Horowitz notes that, despite technological and other advances, the meat industry, “to this day [...] remains tethered to a natural product, hemmed in and constrained by the special features of its source.” Horowitz further notes that in the history of American meat production, “standardizing the shape of meat and slowing physical decay have been the Holy Grail of meat purveyors,” and that, “[i]n search of these ever-receding objectives, innovation has interacted with – at times clashing with, at times transforming – popular tastes for meat.”⁶²

Horowitz helpfully presents the trajectory that led us to our current predicament as a complex and ever-evolving movement between material and semiotic culture – between *the animal as matter* and the question of *how animals matter*. This movement was mediated by an ever-evolving set of technical artifacts of various kinds or, as the subtitle of Horowitz’s book puts it, as an interplay between *taste, technology, and transformation*.

In this book, we have tried to capture some of this complexity, first, by taking an eclectic approach, using a wide variety of sources, including texts, persons, geographical sites, and more. On and off over the course of almost a decade, we have read reports and white papers, agricultural textbooks, cookbooks, and food magazines. We have done archival research on folk questionnaires, agricultural organizations’ journals, retailers’ and consumers’ journals, the consumer research institute, and the Meat Information Office. We have interviewed farmers at many different locations across the country, including the west coast of Norway, Eastern Norway, mid-Norway, and Northern Norway. We have interviewed slaughterers, meat retailers, veterinarians, bureaucrats, journalists, and consumers. We have visited and in short periods worked on small farms, industrial sized farms, mountain dairies, as well as slaughterhouses. And we have spent hours browsing markets, butcher shops, and supermarkets with the gaze of the cultural analyst.

Our approach has been open and explorative, combining different sources and tools into what Ehn, Löfgren, and Wilk call *a methodological bricolage*, and we have been guided, most of all, by a desire to capture complexity with what Clifford Geertz famously called “thick descriptions.”⁶³ At the same time, we must admit that the questions we raise in this book ultimately

exceed our capacity. So, while we certainly aim for a *thick* description of how the actors and factors mentioned here have impacted our current relation to meat, we cannot promise a *comprehensive* one. This is just to say that the present study has certain limitations.

First, the scope of our inquiry is very wide. We have promised to cover, and indeed to connect, how animals have lived and how they die, how they have been treated, packaged, and sold and how they have been prepared and consumed. This breadth of scope is exacerbated by a certain embarrassment of archival riches: Most of the changes we study in this book have taken place since WWII, and in this period, the practice of documenting virtually all aspects of both production and consumption of meat became increasingly common. The potentially relevant source material is incredibly abundant, and there was a danger of getting lost in it all.

To give some structure to this diverse material while not forcing an encyclopedia on our readers, we have placed the *example* at the center of our method. Offering close readings of various stories, illustrations, situations, and episodes, we have looked not just at what is said, but at what is not – as well as at who says it, why, and with what effects. The wider purpose of these deep dives into the material is, however, to sketch the outline of the larger social universe of which these examples are part of. Leaning on traditions within both cultural history and rhetorical criticism, a recurring technique in this book has been the *synecdoche*, that is, to point toward a whole by describing and interpreting a part in great detail. We provide context with statistics and other sources that help us establish a broader picture, but those resources are no more than supporting actors. Rather than aim for a complete and chronological narrative, we assemble a series of case studies that prioritize depth over chronological coherence, and we have intentionally drawn on rather diverse material, to underline that examples of alienation and denial can be found more or less everywhere one looks.

If this method appears unsystematic, that is not entirely so. True, an exploratory study like this one starts off in a fairly unsystematic way, and indeed, avoiding “the danger of knowing what you are looking for” is an important reason to proceed in this way.⁶⁴ But as one traverses the landscape, this way and that, mapping out more and more of it as one goes along, eventually, connections begin to appear, and patterns emerge. Based on these accumulating connections and patterns, one forms working hypotheses which, in turn, work themselves into one’s attempts to make sense of new pieces of the landscape, and so on. Over time, the assortment of single cases gains a certain structure.⁶⁵ There is no great mystery here, only what is known as “abduction.”

Nevertheless, we expect that scholars from many other disciplines – perhaps even our own – might be less than satisfied by this book. Because our scope is so wide, we are forced to trespass on the territories of other disciplines, and we have often found ourselves messing about in a great number of areas where academic literatures are already well-established. It has been

important for us to integrate into a single analytical movement the entire chain from farm to fork. To get a handle on this whole, we have been forced to fluctuate between being experts and being communicators of expertise, between doing original research and interpreting the research of others. To those invested in one of the relevant scholarly areas, our relation to the literature – and more generally, to the tradition of scholarship established within any one such field – will perhaps seem superficial and eclectic, only half serious.

But we contend that this reaction in itself illustrates the problem we are concerned with: For just as the process that takes animals from farm to fork has become obscured and fragmented, knowledge production about each part of this process has specialized into largely separate academic fields, each of them somewhat estranged from the next. A sociologist of family eating habits does not necessarily have any dealings with an anthropologist of modern slaughterhouses, just as STS scholars who research modern farm practices are not necessarily into agricultural history: Even the sight lines of knowledge production have been obstructed. The objective of this book, in contrast, is to gain a perspective on the whole, and in that way, bring back into view what has been obscured. This is another way of saying that this is an interdisciplinary book. It emphasizes the horizontal movement across various fields, in order to make connections between them, rather than the vertical burrowing down to an exquisitely nuanced understanding of a strictly defined object of study.

Another limitation of this study is, of course, that our inquiry is largely confined to the Norwegian case. Again, there are certain practical reasons for this choice, but the most important reason is operational: If we had not radically restricted our geographical scope, our topic would have grown intractable, and we would also have been forced into a more superficial form of analysis than what we strive for. And since our starting point has been that the issue is very much a part of people's everyday lives, often in quite complex ways, it was necessary to focus on a particular cultural context. We believe it is important to point out that, despite globalization and cultural homogenization, people still live their everyday lives in concrete places, within certain – often national – cultures as the most central cultural frames. That does not mean that we need not care about the transnational flows of ideas, technologies, commodities, and so on – only that such flows flow in actual places, and that one has to start looking at them somewhere.

Encasing Norway

Norway might seem like an odd place to start in a study of meat. For one, Norway is admirably free of many of the troubles associated with modern meat production. It prides itself on being a world leader in animal welfare, it claims that much of its meat production is actually environmentally friendly, and – at least according to some figures – the Norwegian population's meat

consumption is more modest than that of the most-consuming nations. Despite having modernized its agricultural sector, Norway still boasts what, compared to many other affluent countries, looks like a largely family-owned, relatively small-scale model of agriculture.

As we will see, there is plenty to question in this official narrative, but even if the official narrative should turn out to be overly rosy – and it will – Norway is interesting first and foremost as a boundary case. Our most important rationale for focusing this study on Norway is that if the mechanisms of alienation and denial can be found here too – in what purportedly is a case of “best practice” – we can be fairly sure to find similar tendencies elsewhere.

In some ways, at least, Norway is an ideal case from which to understand changes that have also happened elsewhere in the Western world – and which have more recently taken hold of the so-called “emerging economies.” Because Norway was a relative latecomer to agricultural industrialization, many of the relevant changes have happened within a short time frame, and in addition, the central actors involved are relatively few and fairly open, so that one can actually get a good overview of the situation.

The title of the fourth volume of *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, a comprehensive history of Norwegian agriculture, gives away the contours of how Norwegian society has shifted in just a few decades: It covers the period from 1920 to 2000, thus overlapping with an important stretch of the time span in this book, and is entitled *From a Society of Farmers to Bio-Industry*.⁶⁶ While the first three volumes of this history demonstrate how, previously, almost all of Norwegian society was anchored to utilizing its primary sources, this final volume describes the many societal and agricultural changes that have transformed not just rural Norway, but the country as such.

Geographically, Norway is an elongated country, with one of the longest and most rugged coastlines in the world, and with some 50,000 islands along its indented shore. The country is characterized by high plateaus and rugged mountains, broken by fertile valleys and small, scattered plains. Norway has numerous glaciers, and in the higher mountain areas, as well as in the interior of the three northernmost counties, there is permafrost. Only 3.2 percent of the land is arable, while as much as 38 percent is forested, out of which all of 22 percent is commercially productive. The rest of the country is mountains and rocks.

As farmland is such an insignificant part of the geography, one might wonder how it was even possible for Norway to become “bio-industrialists,” and the answer must refer to certain particularities of Norway. The first factor is arguably that Norway’s agricultural sector, at least up until fairly recently, evolved under a characteristically social democratic motivation, which meant, among other things, that the sector was highly regulated, that this regulation used a set of agricultural cooperatives as a central governance tool, and that the model as such – in recent years dubbed the “Norwegian agricultural model” by the sector itself – rested on a tradition

of dialog and cooperation between the parties. The latter tradition goes back to the establishment of the so-called Main Agreement for the agricultural sector, first established in 1950, which, in turn, was modeled on the tripartite general Main Agreement, from 1935, which came to be known as the “constitution of work life” in Norway.⁶⁷ The overall effect of this system has been to ensure a substantial measure of national self-sufficiency by way of agricultural protectionism, which, in turn, has had a moderating effect on consolidation and centralization within the sector. More generally, the system has prevented private agri-business from gaining a position like they have in certain other countries, like the United States.

Another factor, which in no small part is a result of the first, is that Norway is a peculiar sort of “bio-industrialist” – more specifically, a small one. For while Norway’s agriculture has generally been industrialized along the same lines as what one finds in most comparable countries, this tendency has not been taken to the same extremes as elsewhere. For an apparent contrast, we can compare the Norway to the United States: In 2018, the United States had 63 egg-producing companies with one million plus layers and 15 companies with more than five million layers, while there were approximately 201 egg-producing companies with flocks of 75,000 hens or more.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Norwegian legislation bans flocks of egg-laying hens of more than 7,500, and the average flock size was 851 in 2000, while it had increased to 2,042 in 2018. In 2021, the average herd of dairy cows is 25; in 2000, the number was only 14. According to USDA’s 2017 Census of Agriculture report, 55 percent of US dairy cows come from farms with more than 1,000 cows. The same year, there were 189 dairy farms with more than 5,000 cows and the average herd size of these operations is 7,400 cows.⁶⁹

In Norway, the largest increase is the number of breeding pigs per piggery, which increased by no less than 150 percent between 2000 and 2018.⁷⁰ Furthermore, growth hormones and regular use of antibiotics are generally prohibited in Norway, and its agricultural sector uses the least antibiotics in Europe.⁷¹ Norway has some of the healthiest livestock in the world, and its standard of animal welfare compares well to that of many other countries, again notably the United States.

These numbers convey, most immediately, that the scale of Norway’s agriculture is fairly small. They also show, however, that if the herds are still relatively small, they have more than doubled in size in 20 years, and in fact, a good many of the restraining factors of the traditional “Norwegian agricultural model” have been abandoned and the sector liberalized. In the recent couple of decades, Norway’s agriculture has continued on the path of mechanization, industrialization, and centralization, and now also relies heavily on import of feed concentrates.⁷² Meanwhile, Norwegian biotechnology has become an important worldwide export – in particular for pork and dairy cattle. In summary, while Norway’s agriculture is still relatively small in scale – and it is, after all, a small country – the tendency of development has been much the same as in other industrialized countries.

At the consumption end of things, Norway has recently been approaching the average European level, and in certain estimates is even above the European average – a development that sociologists Gunnar Vittersø and Unni Kjærnes attribute to the specific political economy of meat in Norway. The main components of this system, they argue, are “concrete political measures combined with extensive marketing,” which has led to a “politics of meat promotion” that, perhaps surprisingly, “has not been met with broad [counter]mobilization, either from the environmental or consumer movements.” The spatial distance between production and consumption, which is at heart of the three axes of alienation from the animal origin of meat, is very much present in Norway. According to Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Most people lack knowledge about [the] consequences of growing meat consumption, and do not consider reducing their own meat consumption as a relevant [...] measure.” Instead, these scholars argue, the “role of meat production for the agricultural economy has dominated the political debate.”⁷³

A central background for this situation is that the market for many agricultural commodities until quite recently was one approximating monopoly, as the powerful cooperatives (eggs, dairy, slaughter/meat, etc.) were more or less the sole actors within their markets.⁷⁴ These cooperatives were by necessity tightly tied to the state, and commentators talk about the political “iron triangle” of the Norwegian agricultural sector, consisting of the parliament, the ministry, and agricultural organizations – in addition to experts. As a result, agriculture has been a “fairly closed off sector,” where “decisions have mainly been made in negotiations among the ‘stakeholders’.”⁷⁵

For consumers, issues of agricultural policy have been seen as technical questions, as a concern for producers, politicians, and bureaucrats, and they have consequently come to trust that agricultural affairs can safely be left to the actors of this triangle. In a comparative study of European countries, Kjærnes and her co-authors found that Norwegian consumers are authority-oriented, and had the highest level of trust in the state and the food provision sector of all the countries investigated.⁷⁶ One explanation for this is that, in Norway, “everyone expects everyone else to be doing what they should be doing with respect to everyone else.”⁷⁷

Norway has traditionally had a highly protected agricultural sector, which has aimed for a high degree of agricultural self-sufficiency to ensure food security. Since the 1990s, steps have been taken to liberalize the sector, however, and the main agricultural debate is now how open the agricultural sector ought to be. The focus on this single issue, argue Vittersø and Kjærnes, means that,

[As one sees] no conflict between Norwegian agricultural business interests and health/environment [or animal welfare], there is little space left in which to take up problems. Few actors believe it is their responsibility, or in their interest, to take up problems that cut across this conflict

line. Those problems are poorly communicated in the public sphere; they are made invisible and trifling.

This, these authors add, is “a very poor starting point with which to mobilize consumers towards decreasing meat consumption.”⁷⁸

While Norwegian consumers have been slow to mobilize in critiquing Norwegian agriculture, the industry has been enabled, not least by liberalization, to enact a supply-side-driven increase in meat consumption, which is what Vittersø and Kjærnes refer to with their phrase “politics of meat promotion.”⁷⁹ What is more, it has been able to do so while retaining consumers’ trust. One of the industry’s most notable techniques in this regard has been using every opportunity to underline how Norwegian agriculture is best in class when it comes to the use of antibiotics, food safety, and animal welfare, and sustainability. The meat farmers’ cooperative Nortura, for instance, is not ashamed to claim that Norway’s livestock production is a spearhead for the world:

Our claim is that Norwegian livestock are the world’s most sustainable animals: With their unique animal health, low use of antibiotics, and high degree of utilization, Norwegian cattle, for instance, has only about half the climate footprint of the global average per kilo of protein. Even for pork, chicken, and egg-laying hens the situation is clearly in Norway’s favour. Norwegian livestock production sets the world’s gold standard!⁸⁰

Even so, egg-farmers and Nortura protested against the ban on barren cages for egg-laying hens, and the Norwegian farmers’ union organized protests against the requirement for pasture, as well as loose housing for cows. These advances were made by the EU, not by the non-member Norway, and Norwegian farmers have resisted – and still resist – EU measures toward improving animal welfare.

Although Norwegian agriculture is small-scale compared to other countries, the general tendency has been much the same in Norway as elsewhere; a development toward mechanization, and toward fewer but larger facilities.⁸¹ The industrialization of animal agriculture has been notable not least within chicken and egg production, but also in pork. And although the agricultural sector is still strongly regulated in Norway, a dynamic of supply and demand has over time lead to a significant increase in meat consumption: Between 1990 and 2013, average meat consumption rose from 49 kg per person per year to 70 kg.⁸² Although the agricultural authorities have enacted an “active strategy to increase meat consumption,” the response to the problems caused by this increase is left to consumer choice.⁸³

This leaves Norwegians in a paradoxical situation. Consumer studies reveal a significant gap between believing that animal welfare is important and actually operationalizing that value as a shopping decision. One

cross-national survey of this discrepancy in seven European countries found that Norway had the largest gap of all: 84 percent thought animal welfare was important, but only 26 percent used it as a criterion when shopping for meat. In trying to make sense of that discrepancy, the authors of the study state that, in Norway, “although many see problems, including those of animal welfare, with how food is produced today, they nevertheless trust that the authorities, experts, market actors and farmers have the will and the ability to improve conditions.”⁸⁴ If Norwegians are slower than other Europeans to let animal welfare guide their consumption choices, this is not because they do not care, but because the supply system “does not make room for consumer choice.”⁸⁵ Any prospect of reducing the level of meat consumption, improving animal welfare, or amending any other aspect of the process that makes meat out of animals, is stuck in a catch-22 (which serves the industry, first and foremost): Norwegian consumers leave the issue to the experts within the iron triangle, trusting the authorities to take responsibility according to legal guidelines.⁸⁶ But the authorities have already outsourced this responsibility to the consumers themselves, construed as “consumer choice.”

This reading underlines, again, that we cannot expect any “quick fix” to alienation and denial. Because they are products of complex bundles of economic, social, and cultural incentives, these phenomena must be uncovered in all their complexity, and along all these axes, before we can expose potential for change. Our effort begins with “Live,” which takes up the issue of how the context around the lives of animals have changed over time, and how these changes have increasingly obscured those lives for most Norwegian consumers.

Notes

- 1 All translations from Norwegian are the authors’ own.
- 2 Vibeke Johnsen, “Dette fant Arve Juritzen i butikken,” *Nettavisen*, October 13, 2014. <https://www.nettavisen.no/arve-juritzen/dette-fant-arve-juritzen-i-butikken/s/12-95-8496974>.
- 3 See Kristian Bjørkdahl and Karen Lykke Syse, “Welfare Washing: Disseminating Disinformation in Meat Marketing,” *Society & Animals*, Advance Articles.
- 4 Robert Magnuson Chiles, “Hidden in Plain Sight: How Industry, Mass Media, and Consumers’ Everyday Habits Suppress Food Controversies,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 57, no. S1 (2017): 791–815.
- 5 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Malden: Blackwell, 1994), 103. Emphasis in the original.
- 6 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 102.
- 7 Loïc J. D. Wacquant’s summary in Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 15 and 18.
- 8 In *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), Nick Fiddes uses Bourdieu to make a similar point, which is that meat-eating is a part of our cultural common sense, our *habitus*, and thus “a principle unquestioned by most

people.” Fiddes usefully underlines that, from the perspective of cultural analysis, “the meat-eating habit requires explanation as much as does the non-meat-eating habit,” 5. While Fiddes’ aim is to explain that meat-eating habit as such, our aim is more specific, namely, to explain how we, in various ways, cover up that habit.

- 9 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 19.
- 10 Reidar Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie IV, 1920–2000: Frå bondesamfunn til bioindustri* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2002), 30.
- 11 Clearly, a study like the present one, which focuses on a single country, will profit from being read alongside works that take a broader perspective. A notable effort in the latter category is Harvey Neo and Jody Emel, *Geographies of Meat: Politics, Economy and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
- 12 William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 259.
- 13 Tony Weis, *The Ecological Hoofprint: The Global Burden of Industrial Livestock* (London: Zed Books, 2013).
- 14 Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, “Meat and Dairy Production,” *OurWorldInData.org*: <https://ourworldindata.org/meat-production>. Of course, a substantial part of the world’s population is vegetarian, but this only means that carnivores consume an even greater number of animals per capita.
- 15 See Nick Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 13. We should of course be careful not to describe such things as though they were natural laws.
- 16 Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines* (London: Vincent Stuart, 1964). Roger Brambell, *Report of the Technical Committee to Enquire Into the Welfare of Animals Kept Under Intensive Livestock Husbandry Systems* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1965).
- 17 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: New York Review, 1975). See also Kristian Bjørkdahl, “The Rhetorical Making of a Crime Called Speciesism: The Reception of *Animal Liberation*,” in *Eco-Global Crimes: Contemporary Problems and Future Challenges*, edited by Rune Ellefsen, Ragnhild Sollund, and Guri Larsen (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 71–90.
- 18 There is a substantial academic literature on the ethics of meat-eating. Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, still the classic utilitarian statement, was later followed up by Tom Regan’s deontological position, in *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), whereafter a whole host of different approaches were elaborated. A related strand is the somewhat more practically oriented literature on animal welfare, see, for instance, John Webster, *Animal Welfare: Limping Towards Eden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). For a more popular meditation on the issue, see Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009).
- 19 Bjørkdahl and Syse, “Welfare Washing.”
- 20 For a much-cited overview of this issue, see N.N., *Livestock’s Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* (Rome: FAO, 2006).
- 21 Antony Frogatt and Laura Wellesley, *Meat Analogues: Considerations for the EU* (London: Chatham House, 2019).
- 22 Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek, “Reducing Food’s Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers,” *Science* 360 (2018): 987–992.
- 23 Polly Walker, Pamela Rhubarb-Berg, Shawn McKenzie, Kristin Kelling, and Robert S. Lawrence, “Public Health Implications of Meat Production and Consumption,” *Public Health Nutrition* 8, no. 4 (2005): 348–356, and Evelyne Battaglia Richi, Beatrice Baumer, Beatrice Conrad, Roger Darioli, Alexandra

- Schmid, and Ulrich Keller, "Health Risks Associated with Meat Consumption: A Review of Epidemiological Studies," *International Journal for Vitamin and Nutrition Research* 85, no. 1–2 (2015): 70–78.
- 24 While the link between intake of red meat and certain health problems has been known for some time, and is by now well documented, the idea that white meat is detrimental to health is rather more recent. In one recent study, however, this is precisely the conclusion reached by a group of American nutritional scientists, who claim that their study does "not provide evidence for choosing white over red meat for reducing CVD [cardiovascular disease] risk." See Nathalie Bergeron, Sally Chiu, Paul T. Williams, Sarah M. King, and Ronald M. Krauss, "Effects Of Red Meat, White Meat, And Nonmeat Protein Sources on Atherogenic Lipoprotein Measures in the Context of Low Compared with High Saturated Fat Intake: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 110, no. 1 (2019): 31.
- 25 Vesanto Melina, Winston Craig, Susan Levin, "Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Vegetarian Diets," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 116, no. 12 (2016): 1970.
- 26 Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010 [1906]), 35.
- 27 Brock Bastian, "The Meat Paradox: How We Can Love Some Animals and Eat Others," *The Conversation*, March 24, 2011. Italics added. <https://theconversation.com/the-meat-paradox-how-we-can-love-some-animals-and-eat-others-149>.
- 28 Brock Bastian, "The Meat Paradox."
- 29 See Jonas R. Kunst and Sigrid M. Hohle, "Meat Eaters by Dissociation: How We Present, Prepare and Talk about Meat Increases Willingness to Eat Meat by Reducing Empathy and Disgust," *Appetite* 105 (2016): 758–774. Other studies in the same vein include: Jared Prunty and Kevin J. Apple "Painfully Aware: The Effects of Dissonance on Attitudes toward Factory Farming," *Anthrozoös* 26, no. 2 (2013): 265–278; Steve Loughnan, Brock Bastian and Nick Haslam, "The Psychology of Eating Animals," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23, no. 2 (2014): 104–108. For an argument from sociology that runs roughly in the same direction, see Robert Magnuson Chiles, "Hidden in Plain Sight."
- 30 John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (London: Writers & Readers, 1980), 3–30.
- 31 Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," 28.
- 32 Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," 11.
- 33 Transhumance, as rendered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the action or practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer." Norwegian transhumance could also involve moving livestock to islets and islands on the coast; see Lars Reinton, *Til seters* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1976), 29–30.
- 34 Kristofer Visted and Hilmar Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur, vol. 1* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1951), 152.
- 35 Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," 28.
- 36 Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," 5.
- 37 Jonathan Burt, "John Berger's 'Why Look at Animals?': A Close Reading," *Worldviews* 9, no. 2 (2005): 203–218. See also Anat Pick, "Why Not Look at Animals?," *NECSUS*, June 12, 2015. https://necsus-ejms.org/why-not-look-at-animals/#_ednref12.
- 38 One such connection is obvious: As we noted above, we take our cue from John Berger, whose writings, while in every way distinct, certainly had Marxist inclinations.
- 39 Stein Hansen and Tor Skoglund, *Sysselsetting og lønn i historisk nasjonalregnskap: Beregninger for 1900–1930* (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 2009), 25.

- 40 Sven Taksdal, *Bondeyrket: Rettleing i jordbruk, hagebruk og husdyrstell med øvingsoppgaver og svar* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1943).
- 41 See also Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 42 Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* 95.
- 43 The literal translation is “The Meat Information Office.” Its English name does not appear to have been formalized, but it was called the Norwegian Meat Marketing Board for at least two decades, in the 1980s and 1990s, and has also been called the Norwegian Meat and Egg Council. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to it as the Meat Information Office, or just the Office, for the remainder of the book.
- 44 Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, ed., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- 45 See Robert N. Proctor, “Agnotology: A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and Its Study),” in Proctor and Schiebinger, *Agnotology*, 1–35.
- 46 Linsey McGoey, *The Unknowners: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World* (London: Zed Books, 2019), 3 and 2.
- 47 McGoey, *The Unknowners*, 40 and 41.
- 48 See Sheila Jasanoff, ed. *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and the Social Order* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- 49 Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), xxiv. Originally published in 1990, by Continuum.
- 50 Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). We will return to Vialles’ study in more detail in “Die.”
- 51 Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrial Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
- 52 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (London: Polity, 2001), 1.
- 53 Jared Piazza, Matthew B. Ruby, Steve Loughnan, Mischel Luong, Juliana Kulik, Hanne M. Watkins, and Mirra Seigerman, “Rationalizing Meat Consumption: The 4Ns,” *Appetite* 91 (2015): 114–128.
- 54 Robert G. Darst and Jane I. Dawson, “Exit, Voice, and Denial: Confronting the Factory Farm in the United States,” *Society & Animals* 27, no. 1 (2019): 38.
- 55 David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 422.
- 56 Harvey, “Between Space and Time,” 423.
- 57 Harvey, “Between Space and Time,” 423.
- 58 One creative example, which sums up some of the trends in this research, is which Ian Cook, James Evans, Helen Griffiths, Rebecca Morris, and Sarah Wrathmell, “‘It’s More than Just What It Is’: Defetishising Commodities, Expanding Fields, Mobilising Change....” *Geoforum* 38, no. 6 (2007): 1113–1126. There is even research in this vein which deals with animal products, including meat, see, for example, Michael J. Watts, “Are Hogs Like Chickens? Enclosure and Mechanization in Two ‘White Meat’ Filières,” in *Geographies of Commodity Chains*, edited by Alex Hughes and Suzanne Reimer (London: Routledge, 2004), 39–62.
- 59 Ian Cook and Philip Crang, “The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement and Geographical Knowledges,” *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 2 (1996): 131–153. The quotes are from page 141.
- 60 On this point, we have taken inspiration from the Norwegian sociologists Eivind Jacobsen and Arne Dulsrud, who argue that there is no such thing as a universal

- consumer, since the consumer role is always and everywhere framed in particular ways by the “institutionalization processes” that tell people what it is to be a consumer. “The consumer role is plastic and open for business interests, civic society organizations, and governmental agencies to mold,” they write, so to understand what potential exists for consumer agency, and hence for ideals such as “ethical consumerism,” we must therefore first understand the particular “[i]nstitutionalization processes whereby consumer roles have been framed” in a specific national and cultural context. See Eivind Jacobsen and Arne Dulsrud, “Will Consumers Save The World?: The Framing of Political Consumerism,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 20, no. 5 (2007): 473.
- 61 This term originated within actor-network theory, and was coined to avoid the tendency for *a priori* demarcations of relevance along species lines. Studies that assume generalized symmetry will not decide, before-the-fact, on an exclusive focus on human beings, but will consider other entities, including animals, inanimate objects, and abstract things, as constitutive of social life. Some actor-network theory (ANT) practitioners have since abandoned the term (though not necessarily the attitude), see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 62 Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.
- 63 Billy Ehn, Orvar Löfgren, and Richard Wilk, *Exploring Everyday Life: Strategies for Ethnography and Cultural Analysis* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30.
- 64 See Orvar Löfgren, “The Danger of Knowing What You Are Looking For: On Routinizing Research,” *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 20 (1990): 3–15. Again, see also Ehn, Löfgren, and Wilk, *Exploring Everyday Life*.
- 65 Daniel Bertaux, ed., *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981).
- 66 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*.
- 67 See Francis Sejersted, *Sosialdemokratiets tidsalder: Norge og Sverige i det 20. århundre* (Oslo: Pax, 2005). For a case of the sector’s self-presentation, see, for example, “Hva er den norske landbruksmodellen?” <https://www.landbruk.no/samvirke/hva-er-den-norske-landbruksmodellen/>. Accessed: September 23, 2021.
- 68 “Eggs Profile,” Agricultural Marketing Resource Centre. <https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/livestock/poultry/eggs-profile>. Accessed: August 19, 2021.
- 69 “Census of Agriculture,” United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/index.php>. Accessed: August 19, 2021.
- 70 N.N., *Landbruksbarometeret 2019* (Oslo: AgriAnalyse, 2019), 22.
- 71 “Fewer Antibiotics in European Livestock Farming,” European Data Journalism Network. <https://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/eng/News/Data-news/Fewer-antibiotics-in-European-livestock-farming>. Accessed: August 19, 2021.
- 72 Magnar Forbord and Jostein Vik, “Food, Farmers, and the Future: Investigating Prospects of Increased Food Production within a National Context,” *Land Use Policy* 67 (2017): 546–557.
- 73 Gunnar Vittersø and Unni Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi – usynliggjøring av et betydelig miljø- og klimaproblem,” *Sosiologi i dag* 45, no. 1 (2015): 74.
- 74 See Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*. The national cooperative for dairy, Den norske meieriforening (the Norwegian Dairy Association), later TINE, was

formed in 1881, from various local cooperatives. The national cooperative for eggs, Norske Eggsentraler (Norwegian Egg Centrals), later Prior, was established in 1929, again from various local cooperatives. Finally, a national cooperative for slaughter/meat, Norges fleskesentral/Norsk kjøtt og fleskesentral, later Gilde, then Nortura, was established in 1931. The latter two cooperatives, eggs and meat, fused in 2006. In what follows, we refer to the entity now known as Nortura interchangeably as the “meat cooperative” and the “slaughter cooperative,” depending on the context. The company’s origin is plainly in slaughtering, but, as we will describe, it over time sought vertical integration and is today known among consumers for its brand products. There are also separate cooperatives for animal breeding, and also within retail.

- 75 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 82.
- 76 Unni Kjærnes, Mark Harvey, and Alan Warde, *Trust in Food: A Comparative and Institutional Analysis* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 157.
- 77 Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde, *Trust in Food*, 196.
- 78 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 91.
- 79 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 74.
- 80 “Vi skal være Norges mest bærekraftige matprodusent,” Nortura. <https://www.nortura.no/nyheter/vi-skal-v%C3%A6re-norges-mest-b%C3%A6rekraftige-matprodusent>. Accessed: November 12, 2021.
- 81 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*.
- 82 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi”; Britt Lande, Anita Thorolvsen Munch, and Lars Johansson, *Utviklingen i norsk kosthold 2017*. Report. (Oslo: Helsedirektoratet, 2017).
- 83 Marthe Hårvik Austgulen, “Environmentally Sustainable Meat Consumption: An Analysis of the Norwegian Public Debate,” *Journal of Consumer Policy* 37, no. 1 (2014): 61; Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 88.
- 84 Unni Kjærnes, Eivind Jacobsen, and Randi Lavik, “Ansvarlige forbrukervalg som politikk: Eksemplet dyrevelferd,” in *Forbrukerens ansvar*, edited by Kristin Asdal and Eivind Jacobsen (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2009, 99).
- 85 Kjærnes, Jacobsen, and Lavik, “Ansvarlige forbrukervalg som politikk,” 105.
- 86 Kjærnes, Jacobsen, and Lavik, “Ansvarlige forbrukervalg som politikk,” 107–108.

1 Live

The farm Rånes, in Østfold, is located no more than 100 kilometers from Norway's capital, Oslo, but you cannot be sure to find it, even with a state-of-the-art GPS. We first came across the farm after floating the idea of interviewing farmers with a long-term attachment to a single site, and a friend of ours suggested the couple at Rånes. Our friend did not trust us to successfully maneuver the labyrinthine dirt roads of inner Østfold, however, so he insisted on leading the way. We realized soon enough that his instincts had been sound: We would certainly not have found our way without him, and we took to wondering what it was like to live in such a place before one had the aid of motorized transport and mobile phones.

Our little convoy arrived one morning in May, and was met by Yngvar and Randi, the farming couple who had owned and managed Rånes for several decades. They offered us coffee and cakes on the porch, and we spent several hours talking about how life on this farm had changed since Randi grew up there as a girl. Apart from its extraordinary remote location, Rånes is quite typical of a traditional small farm in eastern Norway. In 1934, it was farmed by Anders and Maren, Randi's grandparents. Its acreage was 7.5 hectares arable land and 10 hectares forest. They had a horse, five cows, two calves, a pig, and a few hens. There was just a dirt track leading up to the farm, and there was no electricity. Their five cows were fairly high-yielding considering the day and age: They milked between 10 and 15 liters of milk each, which would be poured into pails, placed on a purpose-built ramp where the road stopped, and then collected by the local dairy once a day. The cows were milked by hand, and the horse pulled the carriage filled with milk pails over the dirt track to the gravel road. The same horse also lent its power to plough the fields, pull the hay load in summer, and haul timber and wood out of the small forest in winter. During summer, the animals could drink from the lake that bordered the farmland, or water could be hosed up to the barn. During winter, when the lake was frozen, about 50 liters of water per cow were carried manually from a spring and into the barn.

Randi told us about the extraordinary changes to everyday life that had taken place in the span of her life, and about how many of those changes were mirrored in the lives of animals on the farm. Rånes provides an especially

useful illustration of agricultural development in 20th-century Norway, because it was electrified as late as in 1990. Randi and Yngvar remembered the date well: On 21 December 1990, just in time for Christmas, they switched on the electric light for the first time. So although Rånes is typical of Norwegian farms in many respects, it is quite untypical in that Randi and Yngvar oversaw four generations' worth of change within a single generation.

In the old days, Randi told us, they had lived a simple life, with few luxuries or accoutrements, but where necessities were always met. They were by no means well off, but they made do with little and they never starved. All three generations lived in a small house, with just a living room, a kitchen, and an attic. In the winter, they would all sleep in the living room, as it was too cold to use the attic: The log-notched house was poorly insulated, and the attic under the rafters was made of only clapboards, so it was freezing during the cold season.

Randi's grandfather passed away when her father was 16, and since he was the eldest boy, it went without saying that he would take on the farm. Apart from that, the farm did not change much. A couple of bullocks fattened for slaughter were added to the menagerie at some point; they were kept in the far end of the byre along with the pig. Randi could not remember exactly where the pig would come from, though she remembers it was always bought as a piglet, was tame as a dog, and fat enough for slaughter in late autumn. Randi explained how her mother, Anna, would keep a pot over the wood burner filled with potatoes that were too small or damaged, and therefore unfit for human consumption, and cook them for the pig. They would mash the potatoes with barley flour to enhance the feed – this was before feed concentrate was sold in pellets. The pig also ate grass, weeds, and roots. “Back then, the pigs were never ill,” Yngvar added. Randi explained that “the potatoes were free – we grew them ourselves.”

The three generations were close to each other, close to their neighbors, close to their animals, and close to nature. They were also, Randi explained – in her own words – closer to the fruits of their own labor: They bought flour at the grocery store, but baked their own bread in the wood burning stove. Four loaves were usually enough for the week. Farmers who delivered milk to the dairy would get a discount on cheese, so this was usually on the table too. Berries were collected in the woods and made into jam, and the eggs and meat came from the farm. After the farm's pig had been slaughtered, in late autumn, they made white pudding of its lungs and black pudding of its blood for weekday meals. Its liver was made into patés for sandwiches, but also fried for supper. A ham would be cured in brine and then dried in the airy attic for consumption on warm summer days. Their everyday diet, in other words, was sourced from the farm and its surroundings.

The highlight of the year was when their extended family came down from another part of the country to help with the haymaking – a memory that Randi recounted with apparent nostalgia. The resident household then moved up under the rafters, while the visitors were given the living room to

sleep in. When Randi talked about this time in her life, she emphasized how different everyday life was back then. Although there was no proper road running up to the farm, the farm was a social place: Neighbors and friends popped by, and there was always time for coffee, banter, and maybe a slice of bread or two. They needed little and spent little. What had to be purchased could be bought with the money they earned from the milk.

But while there was a feeling, as Randi put it, of being “content with what one had,” life on the farm had been *bound* in ways that might seem strange today. It was in many ways a constrained, a restricted, life: They worked every day of the year, from dawn to dusk. They never went on holidays. Not only did life follow the daily and annual cycles, it *had* to do so – and the flipside of being content with what one had was that one could not choose otherwise. For a long time, there was no way to break free from the limitations of life on the farm. The farm and its surroundings would only support a certain number of animals, and that number of animals would support a household economy of only a limited size.

Life on the farm involved hard physical labor. Carrying water and milking required real strength, and there was no belittling the skills and endurance that one would develop over a lifetime of tending cows. Randi’s husband, Yngvar, admitted to us that he could never keep up with his mother-in-law’s stamina and explained that “when Anna was milking, the bucket was full of froth from her speed!” Born in 1918, Anna’s capable hands and strong shoulders had milked by hand and carried bucket loads of water throughout her long life – she died in 2003.

Rånes farm provides us with a good example not just of life on a Norwegian farm in the post-war years, but also of the trajectory of Norwegian farming in the decades thereafter, when structural shifts triggered radical changes to farm life, not least thanks to the new economic possibilities that opened up as a consequence of cheap, subsidized feed concentrates: In 1980, Anna was 62 years old, and still milking her five cows by hand. She delivered such high-quality milk that she won silver spoon prizes for it every year. Its fat content was high and bacteria count low, which had to do with the hand-milking, which was kind to the cows’ udder and which also allowed Anna, by stroking the udder and teats by hand, to detect problems before they arose. When she learned, however, that the dairy would stop collecting milk daily, downscaling to every three days, it was no longer economically viable to maintain the hand-milking. At this point, technology had become a bottleneck: It was very useful if you could use it, but the nail in the coffin if you could not.

As there was no electricity on the farm, there were no refrigerating facilities either. Up to a point, the family at Rånes had been able to run the farm on a shoestring. When there was little need for investment and they could sustain themselves mostly from what the farm produced, things ran quite smoothly. Things were about to change, however. When they had to give up hand-milking, Randi’s father, Ernst, decided to start growing cereals

instead. As his acreage was small even by Norwegian standards, “life wasn’t easy,” Yngvar told us. Then again, they had no mortgage, no heating bill (since their stove was fueled from their own forest), and no expensive modern appliances. They made do, although their menagerie had by now shrunk to the one pig, a few hens, and a cat.

By 1990, Ernst’s health was in decline, and he told Randi and Yngvar: “This is it – if you want to take over, the time is now.” Yngvar had always “hung around on farms,” as he put it, and had plenty of experience as a hired hand. He was eager to farm, but Randi, having experienced the benefits of electricity since she moved away from home in 1974, put her foot down and demanded electricity before committing to move back home. When the municipality promised to install electricity at Rånes, the couple made their decision, and in 1993, they started work on constructing a new house on the farm.

Randi was now 35 years old and had an office job, while Yngvar, who had taken on the farm, at first followed his father-in-law’s strategy of farming cereals. He had previously worked for a large estate in the area, however, and knew that pig farming could be a viable business even for a small farm like theirs. The big difference was that pig farming required a substantial investment. But Yngvar had an inclination for business, and in the autumn of 1997, they started their pig farming venture by purchasing 30 inseminated sows. When the sows had farrowed, the piglets were done suckling, and the sows had regained their weight, the sows were slaughtered – these animals were accordingly called “disposable sows.” The piglets were fattened to 75–85 kilos for slaughter before Christmas. Having quit cereal farming, they also started rearing cattle for meat production. They required little housing and could be fed feed concentrates in addition to the grazing outside. Abandoning dairy meant that no milk had to be delivered, and there was less labor involved in rearing beef cattle than in dairy farming.

The farm’s animal housing was, at this point, too poor to keep pigs throughout the year. The investment in disposable sows provided means enough to obtain a mortgage, however, so in 2005, they invested in the housing needed for a full scale pig breeding operation. They became a satellite farm in a so-called “sow-ring,” which meant that they would rent inseminated sows which would farrow, and which would then be returned to their owner. They would be provided with a new set of inseminated sows as soon as they had room for more. This allowed them to produce pigs throughout the year without the inevitable gap between litters due to insemination, gestation, and farrowing – they could simply rent a steady stream of sows who would farrow at a given time. In the course of only a few decades, Rånes farm thus went from producing *one* pig a year to producing the Norwegian maximum number of 2500 piglets a year. Government regulations allowed them to feed 900 of these piglets themselves, while the remaining 1600 would be sold off to farmers who specialized in raising pigs from piglets onwards.

As we were listening attentively to the trajectory of a small-scale farm that turned into a piggery venture, our conversations turned to other topics associated with pig farming. Yngvar in particular expressed concerns about current trends – including the fact that sows produced an ever increasing number of piglets, that the genetic make-up of the sows were less apt at mothering so many piglets, that the fluctuating prices of pork made it very difficult to plan ahead, and that the investments of millions of kroners might not be paid off before new structural demands required him to buy yet another pig house. The development had taken on an astonishing speed: “I used to count pennies,” he quipped, “but suddenly I found myself dealing with millions in such a detached manner that it seemed like toy money.” Both Randi and Yngvar were concerned about the low price of pork. They even seemed to take offense at how consumers now expected meat to be as cheap as possible and eaten every day – which, as they saw it, imposed some perverse economic incentives on the farmer, mostly toward investing and upscaling. As Yngvar put it:

A million is hardly money anymore. This or that, what does it cost, 50 or 60,000? I'll buy it. Won't give it a second thought. If I had [not] lived [on a farm but] in a normal house, I surely wouldn't have spent that kind of money! And all people can talk about is cheap food. People have really changed their eating habits. In the past, you had chops or roasts on the weekend. You looked forward to it, it was something extra, you never had it in the middle of the week. But now you might even eat beef steak in the middle of the week! People want something good constantly. Grilled ribs, for example – it certainly didn't use to be like this! My impression is that there is no longer any big difference between the week and the weekend. In the old days, maybe you had beef patties or some cured ham in the week, but the roast was for the weekend. Now this is quite changed.

As we left the farm, our bellies were full of cakes and coffee, while our heads were full of the story of life on this small Norwegian farm. Suddenly, it occurred to us both that we had spent half a day on a farm that produces 2500 pigs per year without seeing, hearing, or even smelling a single pig.

Like people in other affluent countries, most Norwegians have left the countryside in great numbers during the last 100–150 years. At the same time, life on the farm has changed radically, as our conversation with Randi and Yngvar illustrates. This is a well-known shift, though what is less well-known – and which has become increasingly less so – is what this development has meant for the way we interact with and treat animals, and how their lives and ours have changed drastically as a consequence.

In this chapter, we want to give a sketch of how the lives of animals on Norwegian farms have changed during the last century or so, and how our relation to those animals have changed as a result. We focus especially on

the emergence of pork and poultry in Norwegian agriculture, the two categories of meat which account for most of the unprecedented spike in meat consumption in Norway (and elsewhere in the industrialized world) since the late 1950s. Giving condensed histories of how and with what motivation the lives of these animals have changed over the course of a century or so, we focus on how industrialization of agriculture entailed dramatic changes to farm life, including to the lives of animals. The term “industrialization” is arguably somewhat too monolithic, however, since we are in fact talking about a series of multifaceted shifts: Industrialization meant a “rationalization” of agricultural practice, an ideal that relied heavily on science and technology, and had as its main consequence a transition from diversity of production and combination of activities on the farm toward specialization and genetic monocultures. This transition was, in turn, predicated on a detachment from dependency on the natural cycle of the seasons toward a system of agriculture that, thanks to chemical fertilizers and feed concentrates, became increasingly standardized. Further, industrialization meant a move toward increasingly larger volumes or scales – reducing the number of farms, while increasing the output of each. It meant an almost complete transition away from self-sufficiency and subsistence agriculture to agri-business based on trade. And it meant a separation of human and animal lives on the farm, reducing the level of – in fact, need for – human-animal cohabitation and interaction.

These shifts were intertwined with a detachment of everyday life from the animal – in other words, with alienation along the spatial as well as the social axis – and, over time, this placed many consumers in a state of denial about the lives of the animals they eat. Rather than confront the reality of how animals actually live, industry and consumers have increasingly allied around various sorts of denial mechanisms that have helped make meat morally safe for consumption. These mechanisms take many different forms. One such mechanism is the tendency – which one can find not least in industry advertising, but also elsewhere – toward nostalgically beautifying representations of how animals live. Such representations entail a romantic pretense that makes it appear as if animal lives have not changed at all during the last hundred years, as if these animals still lived in small-scale family farms where the main priority was to accommodate the animals’ wellbeing. This mechanism surrounds consumers with images of happy animals, tended carefully by human caretakers, in natural, free-ranging, small-scale surroundings. Another mechanism is the tendency to simply erase the animal from the representation of meat, which happens whenever information about the lives of the animals are left out of advertisements or other types of information about this food. The implication of this mechanism is to shift people’s attention away from the lives and deaths of animals toward meat as a disembodied ingredient, as something that – quite mysteriously – “comes from” the supermarket. Finally, a denial mechanism which might be somewhat more peculiar to Norway is

that, while the bulk of growth in meat consumption has been caused by the spike in poultry and pork, industry, politicians, and even agricultural scientists project grazing animals – mainly the cow – as the ultimate justification for Norwegian meat production and consumption. The standard narrative is that Norway’s geography is not particularly fit for growing crops, but is splendid as pasture. Even this is a diversion tactic, we argue, since neither chickens nor pigs are placed on pasture, and even cows spend most of their time indoors.

Norwegian Farming

Even though the industrial and agricultural revolutions had begun almost a century earlier, as many as 47 percent of all working Norwegians were still active in the primary industries around the year 1900.¹ In the farming culture that nearly half of all Norwegians were socialized into, life was lived in close, everyday contact with animals. Farming involved a sensory relationship with the animals: Farmers spread the dung, milked the cows, clipped the sheep, and worked side by side with the horse. Taking part in lambing in the spring and slaughter in the fall was part and parcel of the year’s agricultural cycle.² Milking involved touching and stroking the warm udder, squeezing the cow’s teats until milk began streaming into a bucket, or, if electricity was available, latching the teats onto a milking machine. Goats were held between the milker’s legs, while the milker bent her own body over the goat’s and reached around its lower belly for the udder. Horses were brushed down, patted, ridden, worked alongside. People handled the animals, and they handled the animals’ excrements: In many places along the Norwegian coast, the fields were too steep for a horse, and manure had to be carried in so-called *kiper*, woven backpack baskets, and carefully distributed to where it was most needed.³ The sheep were clipped (and still are) by clenching them between one’s knees, or between an arm and one’s body. But while the animals yielded milk, meat, labor, wool, skins, and so on, they were not treated as objects. Their wool and skin were touched and stroked in life, and worn as an insulating second layer of clothing for humans after slaughter.⁴ The human-animal relationship was multisensory and embodied; animals were friends and companions.⁵ They were, to quote John Berger, “with man [sic] at the centre of his world.”⁶

Yet while farmers were obviously close to their animals, the ultimate purpose of keeping them was nevertheless utilitarian – what is tellingly reflected in terminology from Northern Norway, which distinguished between “sea mitten sheep” and “skin rug sheep.”⁷ In short, the old farmer and his family relied on these animals to get by: Along Norway’s long coast, a few sheep and maybe a cow or two were central parts of the farm economy. Lumberjacks used horsepower to pull logs down to the nearest river, to float them to market, and farmers used horses to pull ploughs and sleighs and to

packsaddle. Grazing animals, not least cows, were particularly important. They transformed pasture into tradable goods like butter and cheese, and thus contributed to the farmer's economy. A herd of cattle was thus a valuable asset that could transform the land itself into food. Not only that, the cow became an important symbol for the self-sufficiency of the Norwegian nation, and came to play a role in national identity.⁸

As late as the early 1900s, farmers on the west coast of Norway, in some mountain regions, and north of the Arctic Circle, grew barley or oats on small patches of land. Rationality, that is, optimizing the input of labor versus output of the grain harvest, was not always a priority. Rather, these efforts were often motivated by a principle of self-sufficiency, which ran very deep indeed – even though the idea of self-sufficiency could seem both uneconomical and Sisyphean.

The historian Andreas Holmsen notes an interesting example of this from the mountain region of Lesja and Dovre: If the cereals did not ripen, farmers would direct their labor to the forest, and strip valuable birch bark off the trees in early autumn. By October, they would transport vast amounts of birch bark all the way down to the Western market by the sea. 900 kilos of birch bark could be swapped with 6 barrels of salted herring. The barrels of herring were then hauled back up to their mountain farms, awaiting winter, when ice and snow made sledging possible. They then slid the herring barrels down again, but this time eastward, to the other side of the mountain, to the rich agricultural valleys of Hedmark. Here, they would swap one barrel of herring against two barrels of grain. Interestingly, grazing would also enter into the trade: While the valleys in Hedmark could ripen their cereals without problems, they often needed more grazing areas to maintain a dairy herd large enough to produce manure for their fields. Since good grazing could be found in the same mountain areas as the barrels of herring had been hauled up and slid down, they swapped not only herring but also grazing rights against cereals.⁹

Although a case like this might seem to suggest that Norwegian farmers were dependent on trade, the *principle* of self-sufficiency and independence ran deep in the mentality of the farming population, and it was – paradoxically, one might say – what justified the trade. Trade provided the farmers with flexibility: Self-sufficiency was primary, but trade was used as a tool to maintain the principle.¹⁰

The agricultural historian Stein Tveite explains how the cattle and dairy production was part of a complicated trading system. The farmland's vicinity to market towns and cities would direct how they chose to refine their produce. For instance, there would be two spatial "borders" in the dairy market: one called "the sweet milk border" and another called "the sour milk border." Some farms were close enough to towns and cities to sell their milk fresh, or sweet. This was a profitable trade, and these farms were better off than farms further afield, which had to process their milk using a yoghurt- or kefir-like culture to make it sour, thus less perishable. Those

who had sour, cultured milk to sell were in a better position, in turn, than those outside the sour milk border, who could not sell dairy at all – but only meat or livestock for slaughter. These farms had options too, however: Dairy farmers who produced either sweet or sour milk required hay for their animals also during winter, and thus evolved a market for hay. The farms further afield had hay in excess, and were thus in a position to charge more at wintertime, when the milk prices were high. In other words, the ample opportunity for trade made farmland close to urban areas more valuable than farmland elsewhere, but even the farms further afield were part of a network of trade. Tveite even argues that it was these, the remote farms with access to large outfields, that enabled and facilitated urbanization in Norway.¹¹

As exemplified above, the interplay between animal husbandry, arable land, hunting, fishing, forestry, and trade have varied from place to place and over time. Nevertheless, three general points can be made: The first is that many farms had more grazing animals than the farm's acreage could sustain. The next is that animals of all kinds spent more time grazing than they do today. And the final point is that this grazing often did not take place in the vicinity of the farm, but involved *transhumance*. Transhumance meant moving ruminants to grazing areas in the mountains or further afield. During the summer months, women, children, and sometimes the whole household would follow the livestock to pastures in mountains, forests, and hills and even rowed over to otherwise uninhabited islets with good grazing. As a practice and agricultural way of life, it was still very much part of the annual cycle until the 1950s.¹² In short, the fields on the farm proper could give yields because cows, sheep, and goats grazed in mountains, forests, and on islands, and because feed for the same animals was harvested from every nook and cranny round about. "The outfields mother the infields" goes an old Norwegian saying emphasizing this important connection. Norway was not unique in this respect. As the historian Fernand Braudel has pointed out,

Rural life in Europe was based on both agriculture and stock farming, *labourage et pâturage*, the latter providing not only the manure vital to the crops, but also animal energy which was put to constant use, and a substantial share of human diet.¹³

The pastoral element is key. As in other mountainous areas in Europe, like the Alps and the Dolomites, animals, their valuable manure, and their output in terms of dairy products and wool, were fundamental.

A country parson called Herman Ruge wrote poetically in the 18th century that the grazing in the mountains of Valdres, in mid-Norway, was so good that "butter would almost drip off the rocks."¹⁴ In some mountain pastures the cows would yield twice as much milk as cows elsewhere.¹⁵ Farms situated in places like this would have sheep, goats, and dairy cattle as their

main source of income. In a book from 1943, the following advice was given to mountain trekkers:

If you arrive as a stranger to a farm in the middle of July, you will most likely find the doors closed and the windows curtained with blankets or blinds. Everything alive – people and animals – have moved to the shieling.¹⁶ This is not just to take advantage of the grazing [...]. The feed harvest in the mountain is what feeds the cattle in the winter – and so also feeds the people. A couple of days before the moving day, which is the same day for everyone on the farm, about a fortnight after Midsummer, the fields surrounding the shieling has to be mowed, and the hay stacked in the shieling's barn, so the grazing animals can move freely up to the shieling.¹⁷

While the livestock stayed at the shieling, the hay in the fields closer to the farm could grow, be harvested, and stacked. Animals were kept at shielings and outdoors for as long as the weather allowed, as keeping them indoors was labor intensive and costly: Not only did they require vast amounts of feed and water, but the urine and manure had to be shoveled out by hand.

Feed was not limited to hay and grass. Grazing sheep, goats, and cows had a diet that was substantially different from that of today. In addition to various grasses, vegetation such as leaves, moss, and heather were both harvested and grazed. Although hay and heather in outfields and mountain pastures is still grazed today – albeit to a very limited extent – the important grazing along the coast has been forgotten, and with it, the important role of seaweed used as feed among coastal farms. Yet the fact that seaweed still has common names associated with their use as feed is revealing: Knotted wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) is called “pig seaweed” in Norwegian, channeled wrack (*Pelvetia canaliculata*) is named “sheep seaweed,” while wing kelp (*Alaria esculenta*) is called “cattle kelp.” Not only seaweed, but fish heads, dried fish, and even dried whale flesh was used to feed cattle. Agricultural manuals from the turn of the century even provided farmers with neat tables comparing the nutritious value of these feeds.¹⁸ A multifarious feed supply was transformed through the animals' gut to yield muscle power, wool, milk, and meat, and processed into storable foods such as butter, cheese, cured, and dried meat. Their wool was turned into textiles. Animal manure was also a significant part of the harvest, as it enabled cultivation of grains like barley, oats, and even rye and wheat, where the conditions were good enough. The animals' milk and flesh nourished people and their manure fed the farmland. In short, animals and humans lived lives that were entwined all day long, all through the year, throughout their entire lives.

Domestic animal breeds were highly diverse.¹⁹ The breeds had been selected over many generations to suit the agricultural practice and the environment in which they lived. In Norway's case, old cow breeds did not milk as much as modern breeds do, but they traversed hills and mountains

like goats, and their small size enabled them to survive winters on poor feed. When breeders started registering the various breeds, they counted as many as 33 in Norway.²⁰ English sheep breeds had been introduced in the 1800s and interbred with an old Norwegian sheep breed, which had hardly changed genetically since the Bronze age, while along the west coast, there was a special meat goat that was kept out on the skerries and islets grazing heather, shrubs, and grass.²¹

In sum, farm life up to the mid-1800s was marked by deep interdependency between humans and the animals they kept. Animals were very much part of the landscape in which they lived – the same landscape in which around half of the human population also lived. Animals and people were spatially and socially close, and farm animals were an integrated part of human cultures. Grazing animals like the cow were particularly important, as they converted otherwise inedible natural resources, like grass, into protein by way of their gut.

Impending industrialization would, however, weaken the string of interdependence between farmers and their animals, and between animals and the land. In the course of the 20th century, and with particular intensity from the 1960s onwards, Norwegian agriculture turned into agri-business, and farms went from being more or less self-contained units to becoming part of a national and global business venture involving global feed supplies, biotechnology, and the industrialization of animals. Despite certain Norwegian peculiarities, the history of agricultural development in Norway over the last 100–150 years basically mirrors John Berger’s contention that industrialization marked “the beginning of a process, today being completed by 20th century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken.”²²

After WWII, Norwegian farms had very few animals left. During the war, farmers had focused on cereals and vegetables, as this was the most efficient way of nourishing the population.²³ When the dust settled after the war, Norwegians started the graft of rebuilding their country. The immediate post-war effort was directed toward building new housing to replace all that had been burnt to cinders and bombed to pieces, getting the national economy back on track, and achieving national self-sufficiency and food security to the degree that this was possible.

To this end, the so-called “channeling policy” was introduced. In short, this scheme exchanged the idea of *farm* self-sufficiency with an idea of *national* self-sufficiency. Small-scale farmers on the west coast and in mountainous areas, with poor or little arable land, were thus encouraged to focus on animal husbandry rather than on cereals, since these parts of the country provided access to plentiful grazing areas. In contrast, farmers in mid-Norway and eastern Norway, who had good arable land and large fields, were encouraged to turn *all* their arable into grain production rather than divide it between grass, grazing, and grains.²⁴ If there were no animals that needed silage or hay, they could turn the grass fields into grain fields, and

use chemical fertilizer rather than animal manure to ensure high yields. The rough grazing in Eastern Norway slowly turned into brushwood and forest.²⁵ While farmers had been dependent on animal manure for high yields, now they simply needed a spreader attached to their tractor to fertilize and improve the crop nutrition and profitability.

Another thing that changed was the farm population. While farms had been close-knit family enterprises relying on manual labor from both men and women in the extended family or the geographical vicinity, the mechanization of farming required less labor. First, the unmarried women left agriculture, followed by male farmhands. Then the extended family left the farms, as they found better paying jobs elsewhere. Farming became professionalized and specialized.²⁶

The character as well as the ideology of agriculture changed profoundly. Crop farmers could buy fertilizer rather than deal with the sludgy manure they had been so dependent upon in the past. This was an important change for Norwegian agriculture, as it dissolved the co-dependency between farmers and their animals. Whatever could not be produced on the farm would simply be bought from other farmers, nationally or abroad. The practice of relying solely on grazing to produce milk and meat increasingly also became a thing of the past. Now farmers began supplementing the grass with feed concentrates. In itself, this idea was not new. The novelty was rather that the animals were removed from the equation for many farmers, and the idea of on-farm self-sufficiency was abandoned. The market, in a complex interaction with the Norwegian government's tolls, taxes, and subsidies, would now decide the price of the cereals – both the cereals produced by Norwegian farmers and the cereals on the global market. This meant that it became economically viable to buy grains to feed livestock. Between 1950 and 1972, the average content of concentrated feed increased, on average, from 18 percent to 40 percent. In the same period, import of concentrated feed doubled and the use of rough grazing decreased significantly.²⁷ Not only did this make livestock farmers less dependent on their outfields and grazing acreage, it also opened the door more widely for new animals on the farm, notably pigs and poultry. These two animals had one obvious and significant advantage over grazers, which was that they required little in terms of acreage, as long as you could pay for their feed. This massive change in agricultural practice resulted in a lot more meat.

In the industrializing agricultural system that emerged in the post-WWII years, there were notable changes to how grazing animals were kept and used, not least the fact that they were “relocated” by the channeling policy. The industrialization – or indeed, the “meatification” – of agriculture can be observed most clearly, however, in the case of pigs and poultry: While, in 1959, Norwegian farming produced 2.9 million kilos worth of poultry per annum, by 2017, the number had risen to 104.1 million kilos. In the same time period, the production of pork went from 48.2 to 137.3 million kilos. (For all categories of meat, the expansion in the same period was from 118.9 to 354.5 million kilos.)²⁸

There is a certain overarching logic to why pigs and poultry became so central to the tremendous growth of meat production and consumption, since, as we have hinted at, the industrialization process involved a detachment of humans from animals, a detachment of animals from the land, and – through chemical fertilizers – a detachment of land from its natural constraints. And while grazers were, in certain ways, still bound to the land, pigs and poultry were not. In the case of these animals, the detachment was more full-blown, and that is why we, in what follows, explore in some detail how this process took place, using these two fast-growing animal industries as case studies of a broken interdependence.

Pigs and People in the Past

One way to understand the history of pigs in the 20th century is to point out that they have gone from being free-roaming animals constantly surrounding the people who would later eat them, to become not much more than a piece of meat. While most of us today meet pork on our plates more often than ever before, we are largely oblivious of pigs' lives. Pork today stems from a creature that is rarely seen outside – which is, in fact, rarely *seen* at all. A relation that used to be very close indeed, has today become quite distant. Of course, to say that pigs have become “not much more than a piece of meat” is to see things from the perspective of the consumer, to whom the realities of meat production have become ever more invisible. As a matter of fact, the process in which pigs were made into a mere ingredient has been quite a technological and economic feat, and has involved extreme changes to the lives of pigs. Seeing the history of pigs from the side of production, then, one could say that they have gone from being largely unprofitable members of the family on the farm to becoming the raw material of big agri-business. The Norwegian pig provides an interesting case in point, as its genes have become the object of a highly sophisticated biotechnological export venture for Norway, feeding into the global meatification process. In short, the story of the pig is a story of how farming turned into industry – of how technology and biotechnological science were put to use to produce ever increasing amounts of pork, while consumers grew increasingly unmindful.

To illustrate how radically pigs' lives have changed since the 1800s, there is no better place to start than with the writings of the Englishman Arthur de Capell Brooke, an enthusiastic and adventurous tourist and travel writer who visited Norway in the 1820s. Brooke's travel journal recounts with shock and horror some of his meetings with the Norwegians and their animals. One particularly challenging episode took place in the post house in Breiden, Vågå. Not only was his landlord “stout, corpulent, and greasy, and every part of him denoted habitual dirt,” but the farmhouse itself was so filthy that he was only very “reluctantly compelled to make [it his] quarters for the night.”²⁹ Since the place was infested with flees, he decided to make

an early escape and looked for his manservant. He accidentally lost his way in the dark, however, and inadvertently grabbed the wrong door:

On opening the door, a scene both curious and strange to my eyes presented itself. In five or six wooden cribs near twenty persons of both sexes, perfectly naked, were lying together in heaps. Several large pigs were enjoying the sweets of repose, and responding with drowsy grunts to the snores of, I might almost say, their fellow swine.³⁰

The scene described above seems almost unbelievable to modern readers. Other writers give similar accounts, however, among them the German tourist Leopold von Buch, who found himself in a similar situation two decades prior:

In the evening I reached Viig. The whole family dwelt together in one room; and there was no division of any kind between them and the stable: the pigs run about between the beds. This is true laziness. Hitherto I had never seen a house of this description, and in an inn it was the more remarkable.³¹

Another account, from the 1880s, again one by visiting foreigners, tells of cohabitation with pigs in a mountain dairy:

The sæter was a long low house, with three little rooms and only two windows. Its legitimate tenants were a very nice man and his equally nice wife and three children; but there was some occasional visitors here to-night in the shape of ourselves, our three men, the mediæval angler, and another traveler, twelve altogether to be appointed among four beds; and to make matters worse, the rooms were continually invaded by sheep, pigs and goats, of which there were a large stock.³²

Accounts such as these did not emanate exclusively from visiting foreigners, but were also made by some Norwegian city people. In one account, from 1869, the renowned Norwegian social scientist, Eilert Sundt, detailed why animals and people spent time under the same roof. He explained that animals – young animals such as lambs, kids, and the occasional piglet, in particular – were kept in the house for good reason. If they were frail, they needed heat and protection from the cold – and also, one could add, from predators such as foxes, wolves, lynx, and bears.³³ There were relatively fewer accounts of pigs as compared to other animals, Sundt noted, but that was because pigs were less common among farmers. In any case, as an American historian of the 18th and 19th centuries in Scandinavia explained, Norwegian houses were filthy in no small measure because animals and people shared shelter: “When it is remembered that in many peasant homes pigs and poultry had constant access, it is no wonder that most travellers commented on the prevalence of dirt.”³⁴

The cohabitation of pigs and people forms a stark contrast to our contemporary relation to pigs, but there are other differences as well between the past pig and the present one: First, pigs were quite rare compared to sheep, cattle, and goats. Second, pigs were quite a different sort of animal – not just from the pigs we keep today, but also from their European relatives. The British travel writers, Derwent and Conway, wrote, in the late 1820s, that, “Pigs formed no part of the farm establishment, and indeed, generally speaking, these animals are rare,”³⁵ while travel writer and adventurer Arthur Bennet, who indeed had observed pigs in Norway, wrote that, “Along the road we were continually passing cows, calves, sheep, goats, and pigs.” Bennet was not terribly impressed by the countenance of these animals, however, and added that, “The pigs were a combination of dirty yellow, black, and red in colour, and were most detestable-looking creatures.”³⁶

Detestable to the Englishman’s eye, Bennet’s description probably refers to the old “unimproved” Norwegian pigs which in later agricultural manuals would be referred to as “long-legged fast-runners.”³⁷ The old Norwegian pig earned such monikers due to its freedom to roam – indeed run – around, a clear contrast to the contemporary notion of pigs as lazy. This common country pig roamed around on many a Norwegian farm, with its long snout, its hard and long bristle, and its long legs – with an appearance that to contemporary eyes recalls that of a wild boar rather than a domesticated pig.³⁸

And in fact, in some ways, the lives of these pigs were actually more reminiscent of a wild animal. Two of the above-mentioned tourists and travel

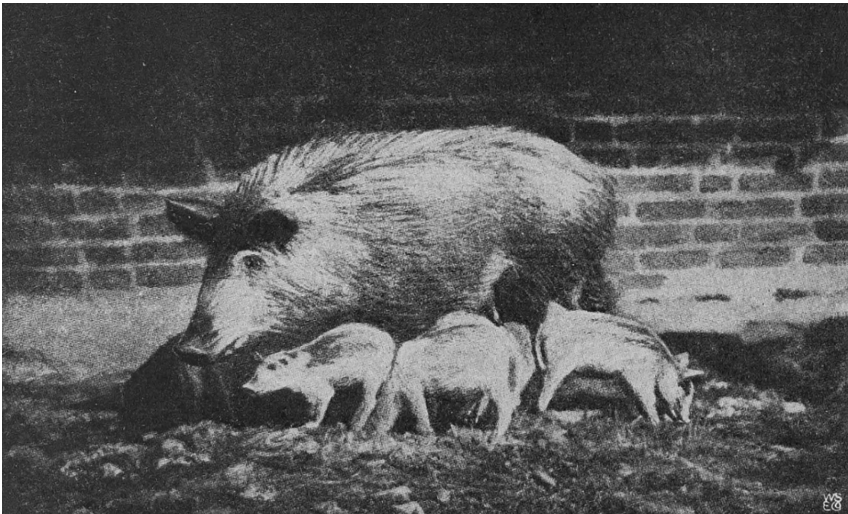


Figure 1.1 An old Norwegian pig, from before the start of professional breeding. Source: Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1908).

writers, for instance, recalled seeing “many pigs roaming free and unmolested as they do in Ireland.”³⁹

According to veterinarian and author, Bergljot Børresen, the need to roam is indeed an intrinsic trait for a pig. The pig is a *flâneur* as well as a *gourmand*, she writes, who is constantly snuffling about, devouring all sorts of tempting tidbits as it trots.⁴⁰ Free-roaming pigs were a common sight on farms as well as in forests in Norway until the late 1920s. There would typically be no more than one or two of them about, however, and they would feed on a combination of refuse from the kitchen and around the farm, adding to this diet whatever they could find throughout the day – whether it was horse dung or roots, grass, slugs, and more. In this way, the free-roaming pigs transformed what humans reckoned inedible to what they considered edible (that is, the pig itself).

The free-roaming life of the old Norwegian pig is indicative of a *traditional* way of pig-keeping, in which the farm’s self-sufficiency was the basic principle. And while the practice of keeping a pig or two did indeed add to the farm’s diet through the year, pig keeping was not profitable. An agricultural college textbook from 1911 provides insight into the scope and rationale of traditional pig keeping in Norway:

Keeping one or two pigs to utilize refuse from the kitchen and the barn is highly recommended. Tending to a pig or two is easy and straightforward, and feeding them is cheap, since so much refuse can be used. Keeping a larger number of pigs is not a task suitable for just any man to take on. This is a venture entailing high risk, larger housing requirements, and feed that at least in part must be bought, something which can be hard to do at an advantageous price.⁴¹

In other words, most farmers would keep a pig or two alongside other animals rather than specialize in pig keeping. Pigs were tame enough to wander about, and were popular companions. As in our own day, pigs were social, playful animals that one easily became fond of.

Archive photos from museums and collections around Norway illustrate how the pig was a family member of sorts, which was ridden, played with, cuddled, and so on. Even where pigs were kept in a sty rather than in a bed, the photos show people on the farm interacting with these animals in all sorts of ways. One telling photo is from about 1930. A little boy, maybe five or six years old, and with a happy smile on his face, is lying on top of a pig twice his size and many times his weight. Bearing in mind that the pig is untethered, and could easily get up and shake the boy off, and that a pig, like a dog, has sharp teeth and could easily damage the boy if it was unhappy with the situation, the boy seems very confident about his playmate.

Similar images – of children playing with, petting, or even riding pigs – are found in abundance in the archives. This is not proof that children played with pigs all the time, of course, but such images do tell us that the pigs were



Figure 1.2 Boy lying on pig, 1930s.

Source: Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek.

tame, that they were attractive playmates, and that they were apparently so used to the company of humans that they put up with the kids' fun and games without protest.

Gamboling and playing with pigs was not, we might add, an activity reserved for children. The memorable photo below, of a dairy maid riding a pig, was at one point turned into a postcard, and was later voted "Norway's most popular postcard." In an interview in the family magazine, *Norsk Ukeblad*, a journalist had managed to locate the dairy maid, Anna Skår. She explained that they had a few cows and a lonely sow in the barn, and the sow was behaving stubbornly on this particular day. It was at daybreak, about six in the morning. The pig was supposed to follow the cows out to pasture but would rather relax, so she refused to follow the cows, and stopped in the middle of the road. Anna had to get it out of the way before any tourists arrived to buy cheese, and as she was "young and full of fun," she mischievously jumped up on the sows' back to get it going. A tourist from a cabin nearby took this photo, and two decades on, it was published as a postcard under the title "The dairy maid's day off."⁴² In the same interview, Anna commented that she certainly had not had a day off: She was the youngest of five dairymaids at this shieling, and had been up working since four in the morning.

As can be seen from these images, none of these pigs look much like the long legged fast running, "unrefined" and boar-like, Norwegian pig we



Figure 1.3 “The Dairy Maid’s Day Off.” Photo from 1932, later published as postcard.

Source: Public domain.

described earlier – and that is because, at this point, in the early 1900s, a program of *refinement* of Norway’s pig stock had already been set in motion. From the late 1800s, foreign breeds were introduced to the Norwegian stock, and over time, this changed both the appearance and the constitution of the Norwegian pig quite dramatically. This change was accompanied by attendant changes to conceptions about pig keeping: From the early 1900s, agricultural advice offered to Norwegian farmers thus triggered changes in thinking around animal husbandry. Over time, this would change the everyday life of the pig from being a useful companion and a bonus family member to becoming an instrument with which to increase the material wealth of the farmer.

The Science of Temperate Soap Suds and Dappled Shade

Agricultural science was arguably the most important actor in the modernization of pig keeping in Norway. By way of agricultural advice, the emerging field of agricultural science introduced systematically verified ideas and practices to Norwegian farmers, and in this way contributed to professionalizing farmers’ practice. This agenda in fact went back to the middle of the 18th century, with the so-called “potato-priests.” The potato-priests were

clergymen who conveyed the social and material benefits of agricultural reform while also tending to their religious duties. As part of their agenda of agricultural reform, they instigated agricultural schools and colleges, the first of which was established as early as 1825, on Semb farm, in Borre. At first, the purpose of these schools was to educate the sons of wealthy farmers and estate owners, but after a while, a movement of agricultural reform was directed also toward smallholders, and, in 1914, Parliament passed legislation to establish agricultural schools also for them.⁴³

Agricultural schools and colleges were important for developing Norwegian farming in general, and they were imperative for the history of Norwegian pig keeping. In a fairly short time period, animal husbandry went from being an established practice and form of knowledge, which previously had been conveyed from one generation to the next through tradition, into an ideology emanating from outside the traditional farming community. The scientific approach questioned traditional ideas of self-sufficiency, which had run deep in the farming population, and replaced them by an expert system which emphasized economy and “rational” thought.

This process had implications for the long-legged pig, which we can understand by investigating the leading agricultural textbook, *Husdyrlære* (Animal Husbandry), by Bernt Holtsmark, a founder and director of one of the new agricultural colleges and later Norway’s Minister of Agriculture. The book was published in no less than 14 editions between 1897 and 1961, and became much like a Bible of animal husbandry for several farming generations. Although we cannot claim that all the theoretical learning and advice from this book was turned into practice on each and every farm, this book still says a lot about the ideology directing practice, and how this ideology changed in the period we are studying. By following Holtsmark’s *Husdyrlære* through its many editions, we can trace some of the changes in the thinking around pig keeping.

The old saying, “Large horses and many pigs will lead the farmer to ruin,” was one that Holtsmark took very seriously.⁴⁴ His specific advice was to limit one’s stock of animals like horses, pigs, and chickens – who eat what people eat – since they, for both economic and more generally “rational” reasons, were troublesome. In the first edition, Holtsmark was hesitant about whether pig keeping could be financially viable at all. The uncertainty was in part due to its diet, and in part due to the old-fashioned breeds in use in Norway. The old, long legged, Norwegian pig breed grew slowly but required little, and to keep a pig or two of this kind could, he said, be justified. Holtsmark warned, however, that “producing bacon using fine [foreign] breeds is a financial luxury,”⁴⁵ so as a financial venture, pig keeping was better left to wealthy farmers.

In the third edition, from 1904, Holtsmark’s thoughts had shifted somewhat: Fine breeds were no longer deemed a “luxury,” and although he still acknowledged that fine breeds required substantial investment, it no longer seemed to him impossible for the right farmer, and he consequently modified

his wording, describing it now as a “difficult venture.”⁴⁶ This was not quite a recommendation, though, since foreign pigs still required better food than the old Norwegian ones did, and might become the farmer’s competitor for gruel.

When Holtsmark, in the fourth edition, from 1908, offered farmers and smallholders thorough advice concerning the economic viability of keeping pigs, he still advised that large-scale pig farming was a venture for moneyed farmers.

First and foremost, pig farming is viable when it is a way to transform refuse to feed (kitchen refuse, refuse from the barn, refuse from the dairy, refuse from slaughter). In addition, pigs can pay their way if buying or using cheap feed (roots etc). Small scale pig keeping will remain the most common and probably the most financially viable in our country. Under these circumstances, the largest part of the feed can consist of refuse; a whole lot of feed can be gathered (leaves, weeds etc) allowing small tasks to add up, be utilized and saved. In this manner, the pig becomes a “piggy-bank.”⁴⁷

Holtsmark also warned against too much cross-breeding with foreign pigs, including the English pig, as the native Norwegian “Landrace” had better mothering instincts and thus required less attention during farrowing than the English pigs did.⁴⁸ The Norwegian Landrace pig had, however, already been crossbred with English breeds like the Yorkshire, and this had changed its appearance: As compared to the traditional Norwegian pig, its legs had grown shorter and its body fatter. Holtsmark added several photos to illustrate, explaining that there were now two distinct Norwegian pig breeds: The long legged greyish one shown in Figure 1.1, and the pig that through cross-breeding had been developed into what was called a Norwegian Landrace, with a white body, long snout, and floppy ears.⁴⁹

But whether the pigs were pink, white, or grey, Norwegian, English, or just “foreign,” the ideology of *keeping* these animals rested, in the beginning of the 1900s, on the idea that the pig must be physically close to its human caretakers, and that it was in need of tactile attention. In the first edition of *Husdyrlære*, the author clearly conveyed to his readers, among whom many were students at agricultural schools and colleges, the importance of cuddling one’s animals. When it was time for the sow to give birth, Holtsmark wrote, “the pig keeper should calm the sow by sitting down and scratching it,” adding that, “if there is a danger for the piglets, he should pick them up and place them in a basket as they arrive; many times the sow accepts them calmly once the pain of labor has passed.”⁵⁰ He emphasized further the pigs’ need for an outdoor life. As soon as the temperature allowed, Holtsmark wrote, the pigs should be let out of the sty and into fresh air:

To make sure the piglets thrive and stay healthy, they should always have clean and dry bedding, and in addition allow for as much movement

as possible. In summertime they should immediately be allowed out in fresh air, although they must not be subject to strong sunlight as they can easily get a sunburn. For this reason, shade should be available.⁵¹

Shade and fresh air were not the only factors that impacted on the pig's well-being; an attentiveness to skincare and hygiene was also deemed necessary for the pig to thrive:

Apparently it is common to leave the pig without skincare. Yet anyone who has seen the wellbeing and content of a pig that gets washed and thereafter rubbed with straw, will not refrain from using this means to promote the pig's contentment. Particularly during summertime, pigs ought to be washed with cold water, and sometimes also with soap and lukewarm water.⁵²

An addition to this considerate skincare routine, pig farmers were advised to fence in a sizeable area, so pigs could rummage around or, even better, sow a little field with clover, so the pigs could satisfy their need to snuffle about in the soil.⁵³

In the following three editions of Holtsmark's book, from 1901, 1904, and 1908, there were not many changes in the account of what a pig requires to thrive: The mantra was that pigs need fresh air, that they enjoy snuffling and digging and rummaging, and that they like being washed and rubbed down. As the quotes above show, these pigs had a close physical relationship with their carers as well as with other people and animals on the farm. The ideology Holtsmark conveys is that pigs need to thrive if they are to grow well and become good food. These thoughts align well with the photos above, where the pig is indeed allowed plenty of fresh air and space to roam about, and where its relation to human caretakers appears in every way close. At the same time, they illustrate John Berger's idea that the traditional farmer's relation to animals was regulated by an implicit contract of care-taking and life-giving, where, "a peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away his pork."⁵⁴ Norwegian farmers cared for their pigs, they played with them, rode on them, cuddled them, and carefully attended to their needs – but then they slaughtered them and salted their bacon.

The next three decades of pig husbandry practice in Norway remained fairly stable. Advice on the needs of the sow during farrowing, for instance, did not change notably; the sow should be taken well care of and placed in a quiet and warm pen with straw, making sure the straw strands were not too long, as the piglets might get entangled in them. The sow should be tended to frequently, and the keeper should pat it, scratch it, and pull the sow's teats carefully, so that she made friends with the keeper. Importantly, the farmer or pig keeper needed to be present during farrowing, to protect the piglets from getting squeezed. Thereafter they could be carefully introduced to their mother.⁵⁵

The start of a more substantial change to these notions of what constituted a good life for a pig came in the 1930s, as a new generation of agricultural scientists took on the job of rewriting and editing Holtmark's book – which incidentally retained both author name and title. An important figure in this regard was Professor Johannes Høie, who taught agricultural students at Norway's only higher agricultural college, *Landbrukshøgskolen*. He was co-editor and co-author of the ninth edition of Holtmark's *Husdyrlære*, published in 1935, and also acted as editor on all the subsequent editions. In the 1935 edition, the editors warned the reader about the changes ahead, writing in the book's introduction that, "New theories and practical experiences are 'overwhelming' one from all directions."⁵⁶ Still, even this edition retained most of the advice from the previous versions, including the need for time outdoors and the importance for providing shade:

Just outside the pigsty, fence in an area (a pig fold) to allow the breeding animals to be outdoors as much as possible. If there are no large trees around the fold to provide shade in strong sunshine, one can make some cheap clapboard huts with three walls and a pitched roof.⁵⁷

Although this coming of a new generation of agricultural scientists signaled a change, it would take another two decades before the ideology of pig keeping was explicitly reconsidered.⁵⁸ In the 1950s, the old idea that only a happy pig which was allowed to rumple about outdoors would thrive and be healthy, was replaced with an interest in how many pigs one could produce at what cost. Agricultural students were now taught less about care and more about efficiency and economy, and farmers' common sense about pig keeping changed radically, in quite a short period of time.

Between the 1951 and the 1957 editions of *Husdyrlære*, Høie had changed his mind about how pigs ought to be treated.⁵⁹ In the latter edition, there is a new entry, where we can read that "pigs ought to be kept in such housing and given enough care to thrive, but one must be practical to ensure that the expenses *are not unnecessary high*."⁶⁰ A telling indication of how the agricultural scientists' thinking changed in the post-war years, was the reconsideration of how one ought to calm the sow down during farrowing. Holtmark, as we saw, had advised that this should be done by physical proximity, by stroking and scratching the sow. Now, the new generation advised the use of an innovative Danish product, called a *watcher* – an old-fashioned word for a farrowing crate.⁶¹ This is a cage that restless or stressed sows would be placed in to restrict their movements. It prevented the sow from squashing her litter during suckling or, if under extreme stress, from eating her litter. At the same time, the farrowing crate relieved the pig farmer from calming the sow. Another textbook about housing for pigs gives agricultural students and farmers advice on how to refurbish old farm buildings and furnish them for efficient pork production:

“In the old days” it was common to place angry sows in watchers so they would not eat their piglets. In many areas today, it is common to place *all* sows in watchers during farrowing. The reason for doing so is first and foremost to save as many piglets as possible, and at the same time it becomes less necessary to keep watch during farrowing.⁶²

Technological and mechanical devices thus replaced the farmers’ need to tend to farrowing sows, and the pig farmer could farm more efficiently, directing his attention toward increasing his production and furthering the economic viability of his enterprise. What agricultural scientists and farmers were in the process of discovering, in other words, was that there could be *money in pigs*.

Money in Pigs

In a matter of just a few years, the farrowing sow went from being washed with lukewarm suds, scrubbed with straw, and comforted attentively while producing her litter, to being placed in a cage. The pig, in other words, had become the raw material for a fast industrializing farming practice. Thanks

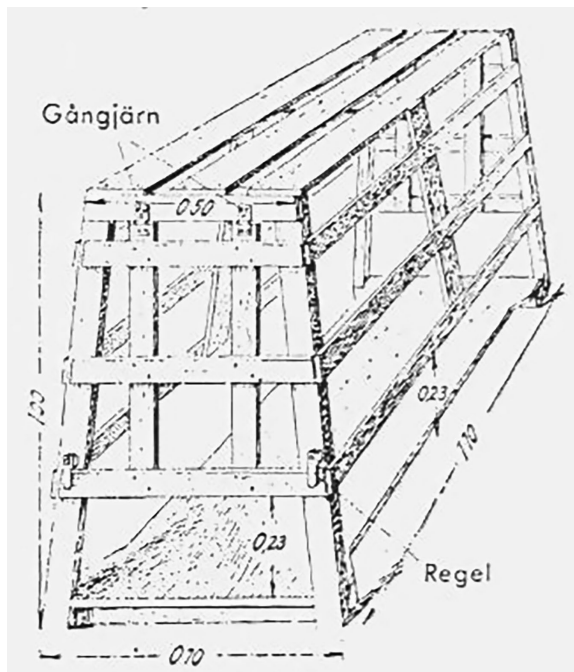


Figure 1.4 A *våkekone* (“watcher”), that is, farrowing crate.
Source: Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1951).

to the farrowing crate and other innovations, farmers could now keep more pigs, spend less time tending to them, and ultimately, supply cheaper meat to the market. As such, pig husbandry was only one of several examples of a more general modernization of agriculture which took off in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶³

In contrast to the pre-war years, where pig keeping, as we saw, had been mainly a means of maintaining the self-sufficiency of the farm, pig keeping became, in the post-war years, a way for Norwegian smallholders to take part in the general increase in wealth. A precondition for this development was that the operation could be scaled up, and while this, as Holtmark had pointed out, had always been difficult for traditional Norwegian farmers, it was now increasingly becoming a viable route.

First, thanks to a general increase in wealth, as well as technical innovations in animal housing and agricultural equipment, pigs were moved indoors – and this time, not into the farmer’s bed, but into modern, designated housing. This opened up the prospect of increasing the number of pigs per farm significantly, since the farmer could now monitor the health and growth of the pigs “rationally,” and in this way, ensure that the operation was profitable. It had another important consequence too, however, which was that pigs disappeared from sight. In the old days, the people who ate pigs had also seen them rummaging about, heard them squeal, smelt their pungent dung. Now, the pigs and their life worlds were moved to a separate sphere, away from the gaze and the consciousness of the consumer. With this move indoors, pigs no longer rummaged around farms in outdoor pens or stys like *gourmand flâneurs*.

To keep disease at bay, pig farmers and veterinaries would maintain strict hygiene in the pig house. The pigs’ physiology and growth rate would be carefully monitored, and into their troughs would be dumped feed containing plenty of protein and carbohydrates and all the right vitamins and minerals. They would be fed just enough to grow at particular rate and produce meat of a particular quality – with an appropriate distribution of muscle and fat. And feed was indeed another key to the scaling up of pig farming. Unlike cereal farming or dairy, pigs did not require much acreage, and a surplus of cheap concentrated feed, which could be purchased domestically or from abroad, had made pig feed cheap and readily available. In a book about pig breeding and pork production from 1954, we can read that:

The conditions for pig farming in Norway are completely different from what they were in the past. Dairies and our own grain and potato farming, and particularly the import of high-protein feed, makes it very easy to buy good, digestible, and concentrated feed for pigs. In fact, it has become so easy to buy good pig feed that people can keep many pigs and farm pork on a large scale without any land to farm feed on at all.⁶⁴

No farmer could miss out on the message that feed concentrates were the future of farming, since this message was more or less ubiquitous.

The Norwegian term for high-protein-high-carbohydrate feed, *kraftfôr*, translates as “power feed” – and the name was no great mystery, since according to definitions in the older agricultural books, this feed was easy to digest and contained concentrated nourishment. Concentrated feed was not a novelty in the 1950s, but had become both cheaper and more available as a result of increased global trade, economic growth, and relatively cheap cereals.

In the late 1890s, concentrated feed could be made of anything with high protein and fat, and could include cereals, oil seed, and even powdered whale jerky. A rough definition and classification of the various kinds of feed in this period went from the poorest feed, which was roughage such as straw, good hay, which was considered better than straw and labeled “normal feed,” while cereal, oilcake, or animal protein would be labeled “power feed.”⁶⁵ In the 1920s, the cereal prices had collapsed globally, and this led to a steady, cheap, though quite heterogeneous stream of exotic cereals, seeds, pulses, and dried foods. Soy, rape, coconut, maize, corn, cottonseeds, peanuts, and even African manioc were readily available and accessible to Norwegian farmers, and they could add their own protein through domestic herring meal and powdered whale. The list of available power feeds was thirty items long at one local cooperative, and each and every farmer would blend his own power feed according to price and availability.⁶⁶ From 1925, a variety of pre-blended feed concentrates for pigs were made available, and, according to the historian Svein Bertil Dybesland, concentrated feed was the main reason why scaling up of pig farming was possible in Norway in the years leading up to WWII. In the late 1950s, the feed suppliers had standardized their pig feed concentrates. The price of feed was still low, which enabled a massive growth in pork production throughout the 1960, and, in the 1970s, an agricultural policy including governmental subsidies increased the production even further, leading to overproduction.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the agricultural scientists were at work with breeding programs producing pigs that could transform this concentrated feed into meat more efficiently. In a book about feed utilization from 1974, author Arnulf Jensen explained how they, in less than 15 years, had managed to procure a pig with hereditary traits that enabled it to transform feed into lean muscle fast and efficiently:

[They] use 60 kilos less feed per animal to grow to 90 kilos live weight than a comparable hog would do 14 years earlier. In other words, with a model 1974 pig, we can produce 27 percent more pork using the same feed concentrate compared with a 1959/1960 model pig.⁶⁸

The efficiency did not stall the number of pigs produced, however, and this contributed to overproduction of pork. In the 1980s, there was a slight flattening of the consumer demand,⁶⁹ but the consumption curve soon pointed upwards again.

Since then, feed concentrates have become more central to pig keeping. “Feed concentrate is actually one of the most important commodities within global trade,” stated an agricultural college textbook from 1982.⁷⁰ During the last five decades, the importance of this commodity has increased immensely, with soy as the spearhead: The United States has almost doubled its soy production, from 50 million tons in 1980 to about 96 million ton in 2019. In the same period, Brazil, who had become a major soy producer, increased its production from 15 million to 114 million tons per year. More recently, Argentina has also taken up the race, and its comparable numbers are from 3.5 in 1980 to as much as 55 million tons in 2019.⁷¹ Soy has become “big business,” and this has made concentrated feed an accessible and cheap commodity also in Norway.⁷²

The coming of designated housing and feed concentrates were important material circumstances that contributed to scaling up pork production. At the same time, this modernization required an entirely new way of thinking about pig farming. This becomes very clear in the book, *Penger i gris* (Money in Pigs), which was published by the Norwegian Pig Breeders’ Association (Norsk Svineavlslag) in 1975. The introduction established that, “The purpose of running a production such as pig breeding is for it to pay for labor, capital, and other factors of production,” explaining further that:

To produce with as high a profit as possible, the breeder must plan the production accordingly and with this as its goal. This will often require choices between alternative operations. Any such choice demands knowledge about both the technical production and the business economy within the field.⁷³

The cover of the book shows a sow retained in a small metal cage, a farrowing crate. Her pink body is covered by a couple of dozen flies, and the horizontal beam running alongside her belly over her teats allows her piglets to suckle. By her head, a farmer wearing denim and a red checkered shirt is taking notes. According to a book on pig housing, the dimensions of a typical farrowing crate were 70cm wide by 2m long.⁷⁴ The same book reveals some of the new roles that pig keeping had for rural communities and employment. It reads:

Pig keeping is a production that is suitable for farms that have too little land to give the family employment and a reasonable income from the farm. Since pigs mainly live on concentrated feed that can be transported over long distances at relatively little cost, this kind of production contributes to maintaining rural settlement.⁷⁵

Demands for a higher standard of living increased, and small farms were not very profitable. This might pull people away from the countryside and into the city to more profitable employment, thereby leaving the countryside

without a population large enough to sustain the community with schools, health care, etc. However, if one could increase the production of pork and at the same time increase the demand for this meat, one had a potential win-win situation.

One might ask how this increase in consumption could be possible. The main vehicle, in brief, was the Meat Information Office (up until 1941 called “The Propaganda Office for Agriculture and Fish”), which worked intensively to amp up Norwegians’ demand for pork. This work was in every way a success: In 1959, Norwegians ate 48.2 million kilos pork, but 40 years later, this figure had doubled to 109.8 million kilos.⁷⁶ The numbers galloped away, and in 2017 they peaked at 136.1 million kilos.⁷⁷ Because of this increase in the demand for pork, small farms could keep on farming, albeit in a very different manner than before. The steps that were taken to enhance demand contributed to securing rural settlement, and also meant that Norway would retain a significant measure of national self-sufficiency. New animal housing, feed concentrates, restrictive tolls, and generous subsidies, as well as an active effort to increase the demand – not least by way of the Meat Information Office – were the main components of this “politics of meat promotion.”

If the increased living standard for most Norwegian farmers had increased in the second half of the 20th century, a poignant question is where this left the farmers’ pigs. Their lives had changed quite dramatically. Because they could be kept in large numbers, indoors, and were profitable, they had become important biopolitical tools to increase living standards on an individual level for the farmer, and collectively to maintain rural employment. Although the pigs’ feed was mainly imported, the pigs were still “Made in Norway,” thus adding to a notion of national self-sufficiency. Accordingly, there were important political and economic reasons why the number of pigs had increased significantly. At the same time, the legal framework which regulated animal husbandry had changed considerably for the better. The good health and wellbeing of Norwegian farm animals was a narrative projected by farmers and their organizations. But although these pigs belonged to the healthiest livestock in Europe, there are nuances even to this story.

As we explained in the introduction, we did not encounter a single pig when we visited Rånes farm. In order to understand more about the everyday life of pigs, we visited another piggery – one renowned for its great results, and run by a farmer who was reportedly one of Norway’s best pig farmers. According to one of our contacts, he had won prizes; his animals were the healthiest in the country; his pigs were hardly ever sick; and his sows usually managed to give birth to and maintain 13 living piglets.

His farm produced pigs from A to Z, he told us: He had sows, litters of piglets, as well as piglets being fattened for slaughter. In contrast with many Norwegian pig farms, then, this farmer tended to his pigs throughout their lives – from when the sow was inseminated until the resulting piglets were driven off to slaughter. He had as many pigs as the government quota would

allow, though it should be noted that this quota is politically regulated as part of so-called “district policy,” so the conditions are fairly small scale as compared to many other places.⁷⁸ There are in fact single pig factories in both China and the United States that produce more pigs than all the Norwegian pig farmers do in total.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, when we were let into the piggery, after having been dressed up in disposable overalls, we concluded that numbers were not the only thing that mattered. While the facility was clean and tidy enough, there was no doubt that everything was organized according to an industrial principle. A principle of separation meant that sows with suckling piglets were found in pens in one hall, sows ready for insemination in another, pigs being fattened for slaughter in a third, and a massive boar in a fourth. Incidentally, the boar – shaggy, huge jowls, yellow tusks, small eyes, and huge testicles – was not there to assist with the task of reproduction, the farmer informed us. Rather, he was just an accessory, there to improve the mood with his pheromones and thus help increase the fertility among the sows by his presence.

Another aspect of the industrial mindset plagued us even more, however. As we were led through the various sections of the pig house, the question that kept returning to us was, “What do these animals do all day?” After all, cows and sheep spend a lot of time just chewing the cud, but pigs are different. In a natural state, they keep busy digging up roots and rummaging

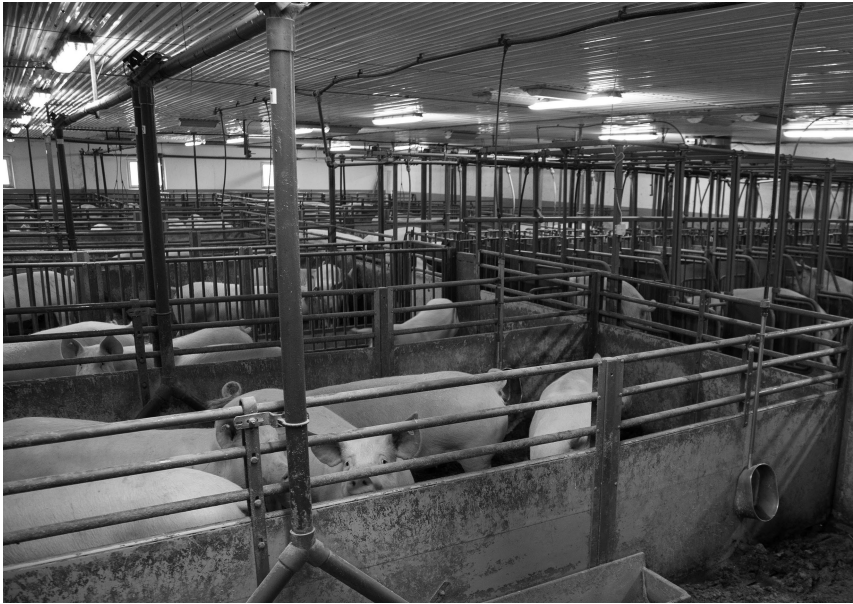


Figure 1.5 Modern Norwegian pig farm. Photographer: Iselin Linstad Hauge. Source: Dyrevernalliansen.

around after other edible stuff. They are highly mobile, very social, and remarkably intelligent creatures. These pigs, however, seemed bored. The point was brought home to us in the hall where pigs were being fattened for slaughter. They behaved very differently from the ones still with their mothers. There was one litter of pigs in each pen, and the pigs moved about almost as school of fish. If one of them ran toward the corner of the pen, all the others followed suit. And when one litter jolted toward the end of the pen, all the other pens in the room follow suit, as if there was a wobbly pink sea of flesh making waves throughout the whole length of the piggery. This was their life; they would eat, maybe jolt a bit, squeal some, sleep, and repeat this every day for 100 days, when they would be moved onto trucks and taken to slaughter.

While not as enormous in size as the piggeries abroad, this farm confirmed to us that the material circumstances as well as the thinking around pig keeping today has been far removed from what it was in Holtmark's day. Pork production is thoroughly *industrial*. Our visit's perhaps most surprising marker of this shift was the unnaturally unemployed boar – whose only role was as mood-enhancer for the sows' fertility. This made us curious: If he did not fertilize the sows, *who did?*

Now Pigs Can Fly

Modern pig breeding is a well-researched science, and is the result of decades of intensive genetic selection. According to the aforementioned agronomist and author, Arnulf Jensen, who was employed by Norsk Svineavlslag (The Norwegian Pig Breeding Association, later Norsvin), science could improve the hereditary traits and the quality, economy, and proficiency of the pig. Jensen had overseen an intensive breeding program, “the result of the labor invested at the Institute for Animal Husbandry at the Norwegian Agricultural College,” which had allowed the Association to create a more economic pig.⁸⁰ The Norwegian Pig Breeding Association was a cooperative organization established by the pig farmers themselves, in 1958.⁸¹ It superseded the national breeding program, which had been established sixty years previously, in 1898.⁸² The Association was established because the pig farmers themselves were unhappy with the quality of their pigs, and unhappy with the lack of efficient breeding programs. This was soon to be remedied, and with time, this Norwegian cooperative would develop into a biotechnological adventure.

In the 1980s, the cooperative changed its name to Norsvin (North Pig), and began focusing seriously on cutting-edge biotechnology. According to Jensen, the key to the company's later success rested on the fact that they combined their cooperative organization with the use of new technology. More specifically, the farmers themselves were recruited to feed data into a database, in a joint and systematic effort to improve the quality of their livestock. To enable this brave new world of pig farming, farmers had to

be computer literate, running programs with which they would monitor every pig, their weight, time and type of insemination, size of litter, medication, size and weight of carcass, etc.⁸³ These computer programs were (and are) distributed by Norsvin; every time a Norwegian pig farmer follows the program's instructions, he has shared important information with his colleagues in the cooperative. In the manual for the computer program, *In-Gris*, the final bullet point in the instructions was: "Send data to central database (Norsvin)."⁸⁴ In this manner, a huge bank of data about the pigs' traits was collected; the farmers would report the performance of each and every pig back to their association making sure that the next generation of pigs they farmed would be even better than the last. Only the boars with the very best traits would sire offspring. Not only would data about their traits be registered, but also the traits of their parents and grandparents, their siblings and their offspring. Arnulf Jensen's illustration explained the fairly complex process in detail, with Figure 1.6.

The conveyor belt – here symbolizing all the farmers entering (pig) data to the program – pushes a steady flow of boars (that is, data about boars) forward, selecting for (1) Hereditary traits, (2) Phenotype, (3) Sibling test, (4) Offspring test. As the pigs are pushed down the belt, some of the pigs are selected while others are discarded. Under the banner "reasons for discarding" the figure explains why: Some pigs are left out of the breeding program

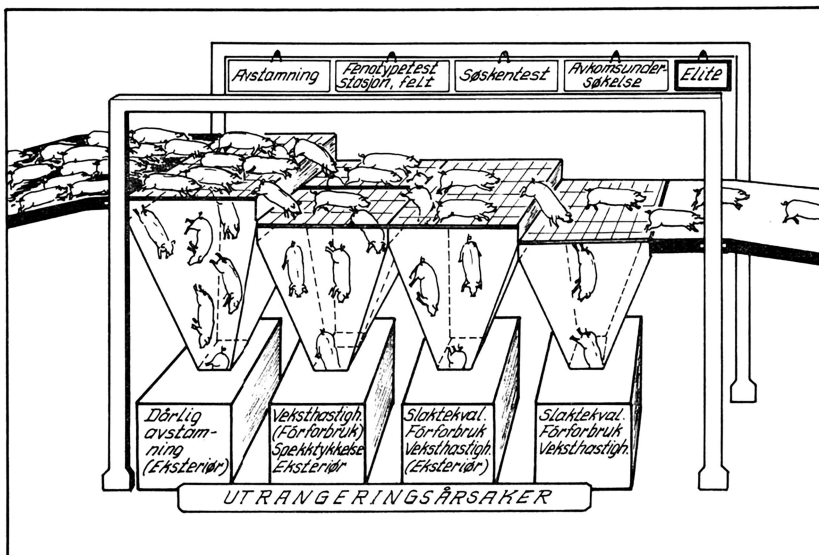


Figure 1.6 Flow chart illustrating "scrapping causes" in pig breeding.

Source: Jensen, *Forutnyttning – Ressurssparing* (1974).

(or tipped into a corresponding dumpster) labeled *Bad Hereditary Traits*. As the conveyor belt moves on, now with fewer pigs, it gets rid of pigs that cannot meet the standard for *Feed-efficiency*, *Depth of Fat*, and *Exterior*. The third dumpster is labeled *Slaughter Quality*, *Feed Efficiency*, *Growth Rate*, *Exterior*, and this is where pigs would be discarded if they had slow-growing siblings with poor carcasses. The final dumpster, also labeled *Slaughter Quality*, *Feed Efficiency*, *Growth Rate*, is where one would dump pigs with *offspring* of poor carcass quality, inefficient feed transformation, and slow growth. The figure shows only a couple of boars, embodying the very best hereditary traits, that are kept for breeding purposes. However all the data for all these pigs has been digitalized and stored for future reference and selection.⁸⁵

This didactic illustration explained the beginning of a Norwegian biotechnological adventure. This selection process rendered in this figure changed not only the boars, however: Over time, systematic selection led to sows with more teats, who could produce and feed larger litters; meanwhile, the piglets they mothered grew faster, used their concentrated feed more efficiently, and had longer and leaner bodies than in the past.⁸⁶

This type of intensive selection has turned sows and boar sperm into a biotechnological commodity – one which Norwegian farmers have developed alongside scientists from the Norwegian Agricultural College. In the same way that Norwegian pig breeders had previously imported Yorkshire pigs to Norway, Norsvin also imported the pigs whose traits they wished to integrate into the ideal Norwegian pig. With time, the achievement of the close-knit and highly monitored Norwegian breeding program was so successful that pig breeders abroad started taking an interest, and that was when Norwegian pigs really started flying: In 1996, Norsvin became an international actor. In 2002, Norsvin USA was established, as 602 sows were exported to the United States, which were used to establish a separate herd within the US market. In 2005, Norsvin signed contracts with Quality Genetics US, as well as with Finnish Finnpig. Meanwhile, Norsvin USA signed a deal with Genetipork, US.⁸⁷ In 2005, more sperm was sold abroad than in the domestic market itself. Then, in 2006, Norsvin established a Polish marketing company, called Norsvin Polska. Finally, in 2014, in a key event, Norsvin fused with the Dutch company Topigs, and their international venture peddling pig-sperm became Topigs Norsvin.⁸⁸ At present, Norwegian pig sperm flies all over the world, from Taiwan to Canada.⁸⁹ Topig Norsvin's international breeding database has no less than 45 million pigs registered; they are represented in 55 countries, and every year they produce 11 million doses of sperm. Every year, 118 million pigs are produced whose genes stem from Topigs Norsvin.⁹⁰

On the international Topigs Norsvin web site, the image on the main page is a pig in a CT scan, while the words, "The world's most innovative swine genetics company," cover the photo. Under the banner "Products," you can choose to shop for either "Terminal boars" or "Parent sows." There are five terminal boars to choose from; each has a different color, and their shapes

also vary to a certain extent. The five traits that a potential customer can shop for are: Growth Rate; Feed Conversion; Robustness; Lean Meat; and Meat Quality. Up to five stars can be awarded for each of these traits. The terminal boar, TN Tempo, for instance, is a,

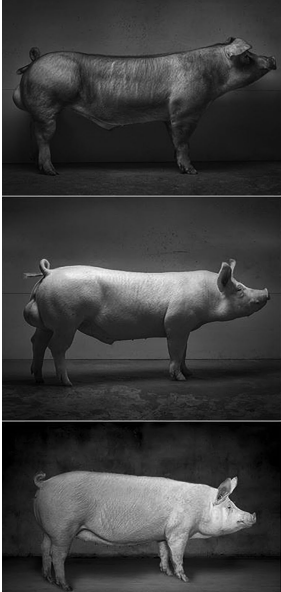
White synthetic boar of Large White origin. For producers who focus on low-cost production of commodity pork. Independent trials by a major US integrator show highest profitability under both disease-challenged and conventional health conditions.⁹¹

TN Tempo receives five stars for growth rate and robustness, four and a half for feed conversion, three and a half for meat quality and three stars for lean meat. On the other hand, TN Select is a “Purebred Piétrain boar, 100% stress-free,” suitable for “markets that value high-yielding, lean-meat carcasses,” and the page boasts that, an “[i]ndependent trial from Germany shows highest carcass value for TN Select on AutoFOM.” This is a lean boar (five stars) and its feed conversion rate is good (four stars) while its growth rate and meat quality receive only three stars.⁹²

Under the banner “Parent sows,” potential customers only have two choices; TN70 and TN60. TN70 is a “Hybrid sow based on Norsvin Landrace and Z-line (Large White). For the integrated businesses of the future that want to push the limits of productivity and profitability.” Pushing the limits of productivity and profitability sounds like a questionable thing to do to an animal, and if an animal is already pushed to the limit, it might not be so profitable if its living conditions are sub-optimal. The sow called TN60, on the other hand, is a “Hybrid sow based on two Large White lines, A-line and Z-line. For producers in hot climates under challenging production conditions. Also for producers in premium pork quality markets.” The stars that sows are awarded are connected to different traits than the boars: Piglet Productivity; Mothering Ability; Robustness; Finisher Efficiency; and Lean Meat. TN70 is in total only two and a half stars away from being top notch girl.⁹³

As these examples show, the Norwegian pig’s transition over the last few decades has not only been a journey from having a name to having a number, it has been a journey from being an animal to becoming animal matter: At the center of attention in this global agri-business are genes hidden in sperm kept in frozen dosages to be flown across the world to accommodate the highest production of meat at the lowest possible cost in both labor and money. Thus, Norsvin is a collaborative effort, and on Norsvin’s webpage they explain that they are “a cooperative owned by Norwegian pig producers.” Their objective, according to §2 of the mission statement, is to,

ensure the economy for Norwegian pork producers and contribute to that its members produce pork of the right quality. Norsvin should lead and coordinate action within breeding and technical production, while maintaining its members’ interests.⁹⁴



TN Talent

Purebred boar of Duroc origin.

For producers who focus on the efficient production of lean carcasses with high ham yields.

Product trials show TN Talent achieves lower production costs and higher yields than competitor boars.

- Growth rate ★★★★★
- Feed conversion ★★★★★
- Robustness ★★★★★
- Lean meat ★★★★★
- Meat quality ★★★★★

TN Tempo

White synthetic boar of Large White origin.

For producers who focus on low-cost production of commodity pork. Independent trials by a major US integrator show highest profitability under both disease-challenged and conventional health conditions.

Learn more about TN Tempo

- Growth rate ★★★★★
- Feed conversion ★★★★★
- Robustness ★★★★★
- Lean meat ★★★★★
- Meat quality ★★★★★

TN70

Hybrid sow based on Norsvin Landrace and Z-line (Large White).

For the integrated businesses of the future that want to push the limits of productivity and profitability.

Learn more about TN70

- Piglet productivity ★★★★★
- Mothering ability ★★★★★
- Robustness ★★★★★
- Finisher efficiency ★★★★★
- Lean meat ★★★★★

Figure 1.7 Two Topigs Norsvin “terminal boars” variety, and one “parent sow” variety.

Source: Topigs Norsvin.

At the same time, they distribute the genetic product of this cooperative effort globally, through Topigs Norsvin. Their webpage explains that,

Topigs Norsvin is the leading swine genetics company renowned for its innovative genetic solutions for cost-efficient pig production. Research, innovation and fast dissemination of genetic progress are cornerstones of our company. We are committed to help our customers to be successful in terms of production efficiency, meat quality, animal robustness and healthy, high productivity.⁹⁵

This innovative swine genetics company is so committed and can distribute their genetic matter across the world at such speed that they have taken the sting away from the old idiom “if pigs could fly.” In many ways, they do; the genes of the Norwegian pig are globetrotting around the world. In fact, every fifth pig slaughtered in the world has genes from Topigs Norsvin.⁹⁶

Precarious Care

When Norwegian pig breeding has turned into something of a multinational agro-industry “adventure,” this might be seen as indicative of two important

changes. The first is an increasing distance between producers and consumers of meat, or to put it differently, between the sites of production and the sites of consumption of meat. It is not just that pigs themselves have disappeared from sight, but also that most consumers are oblivious about the techno-industrial apparatus of which Norwegian pig breeding is a part. The story about Topigs Norsvin, for instance, is not at all well-known to the average consumer in Norway. The second change is how the current system of breeding pigs has been removed increasingly from the traditional notion of good pig keeping, which assumed that pigs had to be let outdoors, that they needed plenty of room and fresh air, and that their flourishing depended on close human contact and caretaking. Modern pig keeping makes no such assumptions, but is more squarely focused on how the “animal material” most effectively can transform feed into flesh. This development is a function of the increasing scientification of pig breeding and pig keeping; pork production has become a highly specialized field, which relies on knowledges and vocabularies that are not easily accessible to the non-specialist. The average consumer would never dream of talking about pigs as “Z line” or “TN70,” for instance.

One consequence of the growing gap between increasingly technical producers and increasingly ignorant consumers is that the space in between, as it were, opens up for various sorts of – dubious – communication efforts. Where consumers are relatively unknowledgeable about how pigs live, the industry is quick to provide them with “information.” In one example, a promotional film entitled *Pork Production at Anne Andvik’s*, from 2013, the Norwegian Meat and Poultry Research Centre, Animalia – which is owned by the meat and poultry industry and whose mandate is to “increase profit margins, reduce costs, and [ensure] a high level of trust in Norwegian meat and egg production”⁹⁷ – suggests to consumers how they might think about the lives of pigs on Norwegian farms. The film makes no attempt to hide the fact that pigs become meat – to the contrary, the film even features a sequence of unappetizing shots from an abattoir, blood and gore and all. Nevertheless, the image of pig farming that emerges from this film is that of an orderly, hygienic and, not least, *caring* enterprise.

We meet the pig farmer Anne Andvik, who not only guides us through some of her everyday routines on the farm, but who also introduces us to what appears to be the perfect family – a husband who also helps out on the farm in addition to his job in insurance, and three lively and helpful children to boot. We witness piglets cuddled, like babies, in the pig farmer’s arms, to a soundtrack of atmospheric acoustic guitar.

The purpose of this film is quite clearly to persuade consumers that Norwegian pig farmers have nothing at all to hide. In fact, the film suggests, Norwegian pig farmers have no problem featuring in films with name and family, and they willingly open both their homes and their animal houses – not to mention their innermost thoughts and emotions concerning farming pigs. “In 1991,” the farmer says,

When I started with fattening pigs here on the farm, I remember the transporter actually using an electrified rod to poke the pigs with, to usher them out. That is no longer allowed, and I am very glad it isn't. There was a lot of stress and screaming back then, and every time, I dreaded the moment when pigs were collected for slaughter.

As a contrast to this more disturbing past, we see Anne very carefully – with only a few, light slaps on their rumps – shove the animals out of the barn and onto the truck. (One wonders why Anne and other pig farmers did not object more loudly to the use of such things as electrified rods in the past, if they found them so horrible, but this is nevertheless a change for the better). Anne then turns to talking about how she sees herself as a pig farmer:

My job out there in the barn is actually to be a caretaker for the animals that live with me. The most important job I do in the barn is when I can save lives [...] Nothing is so grand as when you find a young one who is having trouble, and you more or less bring it back to life and after a few minutes, it's at it again, drinking milk.

Anne's motivation, she tells us, is "to be close to the animals." Anne appears more like a midwife than a farmer, one might say, but the difference, of course, is that the "children" she cares for have only a few months to live before they will be slaughtered, sold, and eaten.

Later in the film, we do in fact see Anne and her family around the dinner table, passing around plates full of cured ham. "Good food!" her husband, Per Asbjørn, exclaims. The impression left by Anne and her family is underlined by a veterinarian from Animalia, Bente Fredriksen, who says:

There are so many good things about Norwegian pork production. That is a result of this industry's tireless work over many years to make improvements. Our animal health is very good, and this is a prerequisite for good animal welfare.

The film arguably makes use of a personification technique, where a single pig farmer – Anne, which we are acquainted with on a rather personal level – stands in for the industry at large.

Compared to elsewhere, there has not been a great deal of controversy around cruelty to animals in Norway, and this probably has something to do with the fact that many things are, in fact, comparatively better in Norway. There is a fairly progressive Animal Welfare Act in place, a systematic set of rules and guidelines that are supposed to operationalize the law, and also a rigorous system of supervision operated by the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA). This does not exhaust the issue, however, for the general tendencies in Norway have been exactly the same as elsewhere. There is thus reason to think that the relative lack of controversy also has something

to do with the industry's success in persuading Norwegian consumers of the validity of the sort of images they present in *Pork production at Anne Andvik's*. As Vittersø and Kjærnes pointed out, the so-called iron triangle of Norwegian agriculture has enacted a "politics of meat promotion,"⁹⁸ and the communication that furthers this agenda often aims to soothe any concerns that consumer might have – telling them, in effect, to "keep calm and carry on eating meat." And, of course, while the industry has been exceedingly successful in this, one may also point out that the public has been receptive of this message; Norwegian consumers have, in our estimation, been quite willing to buy the stories served them by the meat industry, something which, no doubt, is a function of Norwegians' high level of trust in the authorities.

Given this trust, it was no wonder that, when an exposé of the industry suggested, in 2017, that Norwegian pig farmers had been making a silk purse out of a sow's ear, the reactions were violent. In December of that year, public outrage erupted when the public broadcaster, NRK, reported from an ongoing inspection campaign of pork producers, organized by the NFSA. The agency had received a great number of notifications about the industry's lack of compliance with welfare regulations in pork production, especially in Western Norway, and in response, they initiated a plan to inspect all the swine herds in the county of Rogaland. Even though farmers were informed of the inspection (in farmers' magazines as well as by text message), the inspections revealed serious violations of welfare regulations.⁹⁹ In fact, the inspectors found themselves faced with such "large, serious, and demanding cases" of violations that their resources did not suffice; the designated inspection period left time to inspect only half of the 582 herds originally planned for inspection. Of the 228 they did inspect, deviations or more serious violations of the regulations were found in as many as 166 of them – that is, in 73 percent of the cases. The agency's conclusion, in a 2018 final report, stated plainly that: "These findings show that the welfare of pigs in Rogaland is not good enough."¹⁰⁰

While there had been certain exposés of various other animal industries including egg-laying hens, broiler chickens, and fur-bearing animals, there had not been much public focus on pigs – which had grown into a high-tech bio-industry largely without Norwegian consumers noticing. So when NRK, halfway through the NFSA's supervision, presented a story about the ongoing campaign, the coverage shocked many viewers. It now became obvious to many consumers that the reality was quite different from the industry's self-congratulatory narrative. NRK reported, for example, on "shocking conditions among pig farmers" in Rogaland:

A pig moves forward with its front legs, because the hindquarters are almost completely paralyzed. A very sick pig lies in a bin with many other pigs, and has not received any extra supervision. We see a crowded pigsty with dirty animals, where the pigs fight to keep their heads raised.

These are conditions that the Norwegian Food Safety Authority's around 20 inspectors in Rogaland must regularly deal with.

The reports were illustrated by some thoroughly unappetizing images, of pigs with all sorts of deformities, in environments that consumers were probably not prone to think of as suitable for such animals. A food sociologist at Consumption Research Norway (SIFO), Annechen Bahr Bugge, who commented on the NFSA's report to the agricultural daily, *Nationen*, pointed out that pig farmers had long been among the actors that Norwegian consumers trusted the most, and that they now needed to "take consumers seriously."¹⁰¹ Previous media reports about antibiotic resistance in chicken had affected sales, Bugge pointed out, and emphasized that, in our day, it does not take long before such cases begin affecting farmers' reputations. Or as the same Bugge wrote in a report on "food, meals, and morality": "Nothing seems to taste worse to today's food consumers than products associated with industrialized and globalized systems of mass production and distribution [and] products that result from intensive production methods."¹⁰² Bugge's intervention was well placed, though arguably a bit cynical, since one could reasonably expect that the first thing pig farmers should try to fix after such an exposé is not their reputations, but the quality of care they provide for their animals.

Meanwhile, Marthine Petersen, a communications advisor at the meat cooperative, Nortura, exemplified the meat industry's techniques for marginalizing criticism: She acknowledged that such cases could be "harmful to the reputation of pork," but at the same time, she wanted everyone to "remember that these are individual cases."¹⁰³ This response was thoroughly disingenuous, since as the NFSA wrote in its report, they had found discrepancies in 73 percent of the cases.

In June 2019, the impression given by these revelations were extended even further, in a NRK documentary entitled "The Pig Industry's Secrets," which was based on undercover film recordings of Norwegian pig farms. The documentary enhanced the uproar that had been stirred by the NFSA's report, even attracting the attention of Økokrim (the Norwegian National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime). Even some pig farmers interviewed by the newspapers admitted that, "Things were worse than [they] had thought," while the meat cooperative promised countermeasures, including new programs to improve the attitudes of farmers toward animal welfare and reporting farmers in violation of the law to the police. Interestingly, however, the big food retailers reported that sales of pork had not gone down.¹⁰⁴

The fact that these exposés did not make a dent in the sales was perhaps indicative of just how deep-seated Norwegian consumers' tendency to look away had become. Even when a great many cases of animal abuse were exposed all over television and in the press – so many, in fact, that one had to think of them as a systemic failure to ensure animal welfare – Norwegian

consumers continued to toss sausages, chops, and loins on the barbecue. In a somewhat twisted update of Berger's phrase about the traditional farmer, we might say that contemporary consumers express shock in response to pig abuse and continue to salt away its pork.

The industry is surely the main culprit in this particular case, but at the same time, we would argue that the attitude taken by many consumers in response to such episodes is somewhat sanctimonious. As Yngvar, the Rånes farmer, reminded us, the demand for ever cheaper food, combined with a normalization of everyday meat-eating, is one important factor that maintains the incentive for further industrialization of meat production. Exposés like this one are thus a bit too convenient for consumers, who can offload moral responsibility to the industry, while they themselves avert their gaze.

We do not know how long consumers will continue to deny their involvement in this type of animal abuse, or what could inspire them to be more honest about their own role. We suspect, however, that the position – identified by Unni Kjærnes and her colleagues – that allows the Norwegian consumer to trust in the authorities, is just too comfortable to inspire real change. For instance, when NRK aired a follow-up documentary, in June 2021, and exposed that things had changed very little, if at all, it was called “The Pork Industry’s Broken Promises” – and with good reason, since the industry had in fact made a series of promises that demonstrably had not been kept. However, as a news story about the documentary pointed out, not only had the sale of pork remained stable after the previous exposé, it had in fact gone *up* by 15 percent.¹⁰⁵ The media’s and the consumer’s willingness to blame the industry for wrongdoing, without considering their own role in the maintenance of industrial meat production, is quite telling, and one wonders whether the function of these exposés is mainly to allow an outlet for pent-up denial: Having looked away, on an everyday basis, from how the animals they eat actually live, consumers embrace the occasional opportunity to look the truth in the eye – but only as long as someone else can be framed as the culprit.

The Good Life for *Gallus gallus domesticus*

To see how radically the lives of animals have changed over the last few decades, there is no better example than poultry – *Gallus gallus domesticus*, the chicken, in particular. The production of both eggs and broilers is now the most industrial form of animal farming there is, and, in Norway, they were also the forms of production that industrialized the fastest and with the most dramatic results. While the lives of pigs have changed dramatically, the lives of hens and chickens bear almost no similarity to how these animals lived 100 years ago. In fact, poultry production is so closely related to the rationales and techniques of industrial animal farming that some have referred to industrial meat production quite simply as

the “chickenizing” of food.¹⁰⁶ The changes to how chickens and hens live thus present the changes we want to describe in a clear, condensed form. More importantly, the story of modern poultry production provides a telling example of how disoriented, even confused, many consumers are about the animal foods they eat.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Norway, poultry were hardly considered proper farm animals at all. They received very little attention and care, did not have designated housing, and were hardly fed – if at all. They were considered an inessential presence on the farm, by some even a nuisance. Incidentally, hens were kept not just on farms, but also in the city, where many of them lived off refuse in the streets and gutters.¹⁰⁷ Toward the end of the 1800s, poultry had also become quite the thing for rich townfolk on their “country” properties, so-called *lokker*, on the outskirts of the cities. Both here and in the countryside proper, where most farming took place on small-holder farms, there would typically be a flock of somewhere between 2–5 hens, a rooster, and a brood of chickens. In the country, these birds would roam about more or less freely in search of food; they would eat scraps from the farmyard, the dung heaps, and under the sheds; they also ate insects and grass, and, as they were typically left unsupervised, they would also venture onto the farmer’s cereal field.¹⁰⁸ The birds stayed outdoors for half of the year, perching on trees around the farm. Poultry were primarily kept for their eggs, which offered a supplement to the everyday diet, but which could also provide the housewife on the farm with pocket money from selling eggs in the



Figure 1.8 Woman feeding hens in the courtyard, early 1900s. Photographer: Even Hammerstad.

Source: Anno Domkirkeodden.

market. In the fall, most of the poultry were slaughtered, and used mainly for soups and casseroles. At this point, though, some of the male chickens might have been slaughtered already, since, as one agricultural writer pointed out, they tended to make a “fuss” if they were kept with the hens for too long.¹⁰⁹ The remaining birds, usually just a couple of hens and the rooster, were taken indoors for winter, in most cases to the main house, where they would stay on a “rooster beam” under the kitchen ceiling.¹¹⁰ For most of the winter, the hens would not lay, and would only start again around Easter.

In sum, keeping poultry did not add much to the household, and the average Norwegian’s consumption of poultry – especially its meat – was much lower than today. In fact, it was close to nothing. On the other hand, poultry keeping did not require a whole lot of effort, and was tolerated for the meager supplement that it did indeed provide.¹¹¹ This nevertheless meant that poultry and poultry keeping had low value and status. A circumstance that undoubtedly added to this overall evaluation was that poultry keeping was generally considered to belong to the female domain. As one writer put it, “The keeping of poultry is a part of the household, as it were, and preferably, should therefore be among the housewife’s chores.”¹¹²

With the establishment of *Foreningen til Fjærkreavlens Fremme* (the Norwegian Poultry Association), in 1884, the low status of poultry would slowly begin to change.¹¹³ Consisting largely of urban bourgeois poultry hobbyists, the organization was determined to improve the quality of the Norwegian poultry stock – in part by importing animals from abroad. As a result, the prospect of making a financial venture of poultry slowly emerged, a prospect that was boosted when Norway’s agricultural college, from the early 1900s, began providing instructions in poultry keeping.¹¹⁴ Thus, in the first decades of the 20th century, a first “rationalization” of poultry keeping in Norway began – one important component of which was the writing of manuals for effective poultry keeping, which in many ways mirrored those written for pig keeping.

In the system advocated by those manuals, the basic idea was that a happy hen was good for business, for, as one such manual writer stated, “if the hens do not thrive, neither can one expect them to create a surplus.”¹¹⁵ Several of those who wrote on poultry keeping were preoccupied with understanding the natural behaviors of the hen, in order to better accommodate them in domestic systems. One writer, Nilsen, explained:

In the wild state, hens are most at ease in high grass and on the margins of forests, where they find their food (both animal and vegetable), such as worms, insects, berries and seeds, and therefore they are also better off in domestic settings if they have the greatest possible freedom to roam and to procure a significant portion of their food themselves.¹¹⁶

Another writer, Høie – incidentally the same author who took over as editor of Holtmark’s *Husdyrlære* – acknowledged that some poultry farmers

had begun to keep their hens indoors, but argued that: “The sun, the grass, and the movement outdoors will serve a function in the long run.” A third, Brandt, wrote: “In summer, the hens must be allowed outdoors in adequately large grass-covered yards, amply lit by the sun [...] Life outdoors is of great importance if the hens are to thrive.” Finally, Engnæs wrote that one ought to “let them have the chance to move,” and added that, “This promotes the growth of muscle and bone.”¹¹⁷ These semi-scientific injunctions were translated into all sorts of practical advice, like how to construct a hen house and yard, what to feed the animals, when to take them indoors, and so on. One writer advised, for instance, that when building a yard, the best sign that one had allotted enough space for each animal was that they did not destroy the grass growth, which he suggested would require about 15 square meters per animal.¹¹⁸

This interest in poultry based on an emerging scientific expertise did not, at first, set Norwegian poultry keeping off on a path of industrialization. The industrialization of animal farming relies, of course, on gaining control over the animals’ lives – over what they eat, when and for how long they sleep, to what extent they move about, and not least, what pathogens they are exposed to – but these writers were not yet oriented toward *control* but toward *accommodation*. They sought poultry keeping practices that identified and tried to support the natural behavior of the hen.

Further down the line, the industrialization of egg production would of course be greatly facilitated by the introduction of the battery cage – a signal event in the industrialization of poultry keeping. But while the Americans and others had already begun, by the 1920s, to experiment with industrializing poultry production, none of the leading Norwegian writers on poultry recommended the use of cages.¹¹⁹ In fact, the Norwegians did not recommend keeping hens indoors at all, and even those who mentioned this practice still pleaded that the hens ought to be let out at least an hour each afternoon: “This hour of freedom is a consolation to them – they kick around and go searching for many a delicious worm, and around 6 o’clock they often return inside by their own will.”¹²⁰

Until the 1950s, the growing class of agricultural experts, as well as writers of manuals and many farmers, thus contributed to consolidating a particular constellation of poultry management ideas and methods which Kjersti Berger, a historian of the industry, calls “the traditional notion of good poultry keeping.”¹²¹ The fact that this notion was so deep-seated might help explain why the battery cage was so belatedly introduced to Norway. A company history of the Norwegian poultry cooperative, Prior, notes that in the early 1960s, there was not only a lack of knowledge and experience when it came to cage systems, but that there were many objections against cages, and that those were “were backed up by animal ethics concerns, and because the cage systems allowed bigger farming units.”¹²² Admittedly, though, there were also many other factors at play: One was Norway’s moderately scaled agricultural sector, combined with its characteristic semi-planned

agricultural economy, which was oriented around quotas and cooperatives which were given the role of “market regulators.” Another was the fact that a battery cage facility required a large capital investment. To justify a transition to the battery system, the farmer had to go big; medium-scale battery cage egg production was – and is – null, and the prospect of scaling up did not make as much sense in a small country like Norway as it did in, say, the United States.

If these were factors that stalled the introduction of the battery cage system to Norway, they did not hold back that transition for very long. After all, this was the 1950s, and a wind of progress was blowing across the Western world, including – not least – its agricultural sector. By this point, cages had already been used in specialized hatching facilities for more than two decades, and there was no great leap to the idea that similar cages could be used in egg production. In the 1950s, a couple of farmers on the Western coast of Norway built their own battery cage installations, and within just a few years, the system was sold commercially to Norwegian farmers. In 1964, the first Norwegian supplier of battery cage systems arrived, catering to the Norwegian market. British cages were sold in Norway from the same year.

Bird on the Wire (Floor)

Given that the traditional notion was so engrained, there was, for many years, a palpable ambivalence around the battery cage. An example of how the battery cage was first greeted in Norwegian news media came in an article from 1968 – four years after the cages had come into widespread use – in *Verdens Gang*, a leading tabloid.¹²³ The article left no doubt that a new, technological, era was descending upon the feathered creatures. “He collects a million eggs a year,” stated one heading, suggesting that poultry farming was now in the process of becoming a truly *industrial* business. As an example of the emerging industry, the article interviewed an egg farmer who managed one of the largest and most modern hen facilities in the country, with up to 5000 egg-laying hens. The writer pointed out that, with scales like these, we were no longer talking about a farm, but a *factory*: “In two short weeks, 3000 new hens will be inserted into these three-story apartment buildings, so this can truly be called factory production of eggs.”

The main thrust of the piece is to convey how this new system works. Obviously, with industry comes technology, and large parts of the article consists in a curious, but still somewhat nervous, infatuation with the efficiency of industrial egg farming. The facility “is so mechanized,” the piece continues,

that one man can single-handedly manage all the work. Last year, more than a million eggs passed through the hands of Egil Isumhagen, as the only thing the manager has to do is collect and sort the eggs before they are shipped to the Egg Central.

The near ubiquitous buzzword in the agricultural sector during the 1960s was of course “rationalization,” and what could be more “rational” than having *one* man handle *millions* of eggs? Although the general tone of the article reveals a certain awe of this progress, that sentiment is coupled to nostalgic concerns for the hens and their welfare. Another heading reads, for instance, “A Light Switch Determines the Life of a Hen,” an implicit reminder of the older notion that hens need natural light to thrive. Indeed, the whole article struggles to reconcile the new developments with a concern for the hens’ needs.

Production and effectivity, rationalization and profit, these are words that in recent years have caused large transformations in our world of animals. It is a rarity where a small hen [...] can cackle and kick in the proximity of a rooster – or lay an egg, at her own convenience, when she needs to. According to the experts, she is just as productive, however, even if she is born in an incubator and has never been awakened by a rooster’s happy morning melody.

As this piece conveys, the agricultural sector had, since the introduction of the battery cage, turned on its head what had been a premise in poultry keeping for several decades. Previously, to ensure a “natural” life for egg-laying hens had been seen as a prerequisite not just for their productivity, but for their overall wellbeing. Now, the experts insisted there was no such connection; hens were just as productive if they had been born in an incubator and never seen a male of their own species, and even if they were not allowed to cackle and kick. But although the extract establishes that caged hens are just as *productive*, it does not say they are just as *happy*.

So while farmers were gradually overcoming their economic doubts about the battery cage system, they had also to deal with concerns about hens’ welfare. According to the traditional notion, hens led good lives only in environments where their natural instincts and species specific behaviors could be expressed, but life in a cage literally closed off that possibility. According to Kjersti Berger, the new system therefore had to come with an attendant notion of how hens should (or *could*) be treated: “Earlier, rational management was synonymous with sensible management, and sensibly managed was a poultry system that accounted for the natural behavioral needs of the hens. Now rational management came to be synonymous with less time-consuming management.”¹²⁴

This was made possible because one had come to realize that the productive capacity of the hens was not, or at least not closely, tied to their welfare. It was simply not true that hens would be productive only if and when they had access to sun, grass, fresh air, and plenty of space. The link between a *natural* life and a *productive* life was severed, but that did not mean the concern with “natural behavioral needs” simply disappeared. Importantly, among consumers, who were growing ever more estranged from the increasingly

industrialized practices of poultry keeping, the traditional notion of poultry was kept alive throughout the entire life time of the battery cage, all the way up to the EU's 2012 ban on those cages – a ban which itself was motivated largely by concerns similar to those we find in the old manuals.¹²⁵

Going back to the piece above, we can observe the writer struggling to incorporate the new, industrial way of producing eggs with the established notions of what constituted a good life for an egg-laying hen. Apparently, the writer is keen to know what this new system entails also for the welfare of the hens, and asks, “Do the hens not become ill from being stuck in a cage?” to which the poultry farmer responds, “The rate of illness is very low, but occasionally, one dies.” The journalist does not relent immediately, and asks “From a broken heart, perhaps?,” to which the farmer responds with emphatic rejection, “What nonsense! You wouldn't think the wellbeing and production would be like this if the hens were lacking in anything?” Whereas the earlier discourse focused on how hens should be kept in order to make them happy, and thus productive, the logic was now reversed: Caged hens are eminently productive, hence they cannot be unhappy.

It is important to note, however, that this reversal was far from universal. A new, *industrial*, mindset was increasingly required of poultry farmers, since they needed a way to account for hens' welfare within the cage system. Ruth Harrison's book, *Animal Machines*, had been translated into Norwegian in 1965, the year after its release in Britain, and it helped put the issue of animal welfare in industrial systems into focus in Norway too. But while poultry farmers were reconsidering their ideas about hens, most consumers were not. In fact, they had little impetus to think anything at all about the issue, since at the time when this industry scaled up, most of them had already left the countryside, and they had no experience with industrial poultry keeping. Instead, to the extent the public had *any* notion about the lives of hens, they were left with something like the old, “traditional,” notion of poultry keeping described above – which was now increasingly becoming an outdated, if not to say anachronistic, notion of the good life for egg-laying hens.

What is on display here, we would argue, is what we have called spatial and social alienation: Most consumers were no longer present at the sites where poultry was kept, and, partly for that reason, what little knowledge they had of hen keeping was growing increasingly detached from actual practice. Poultry keeping thus industrialized behind the backs of consumers, one might say, most of whom had no idea about hen keeping other than the traditional, pre-industrial one.

The Great Egg Carton Controversy

It is true that this industrialization arrived rather late in Norway: Not until the 1960s was there a proper consolidation of the egg cooperative, Norske

Eggcentraler (the Norwegian Egg Centrals). While the cooperative had originally been established in 1929, farmers and enthusiasts complained for decades – in the industry’s journal, *Fjørfe* – that it was virtually impossible to make a decent living as a poultry farmer. Poultry thus remained for a long time a so-called *binæring*, a secondary source of income. In the 1960s, however, this would change once and for all. The battery cage provided a great leap forward in terms of efficiency and profitability for poultry farmers, and the authorities enacted a set of regulatory changes that worked to the benefit of the industry, especially the cooperative, which now become the undisputed mover on this market.¹²⁶ Profitability was closely related, however, to poultry becoming an *industry*. As the numbers clearly show, the trend toward industrialization has been unequivocal, and although the absolute numbers are still relatively modest compared to what one finds elsewhere, the industrial logic that underlies poultry farming is very much the same in Norway as in other, more heavily industrialized, countries.

But while the production itself was industrialized, it was imperative to retain the image of another – in essence, older – type of production vis-à-vis the consumer. This imperative was quite logical, because, as we have argued, the average consumer now had increasingly sparse knowledge about how hens were kept.

Perhaps the most notable example of how a certain image of animal lives was communicated to the consumer was so-called “Sun Eggs,” a brand that was first established in 1934, by the Egg Centrals, and which had been in continuous use since then. The brand name obviously created an association between poultry – at this point, still primarily eggs – and the outdoors, and we may speculate that it, quite ingeniously, created what must have seemed like a “natural” link between the bright, yellow sun and the ditto egg yolk. While the brand was arguably clever from a marketing viewpoint, it was not, at this point, a sham. In fact, in the 1930s, most egg production still allowed hens to move about relatively freely outdoors.

By the early 1970s, however, when the production had taken significant steps toward becoming an industry, this form of communication had, to

Table 1.1 Hens per farm, on farms with hens, over time

	<i>Farms with Hens</i>	<i>Total Number of Hens</i>	<i>Hens per Farm</i>
1959	85 588	2 668 394	31
1969	40 653	3 270 423	80
1979	14 655	3 827 799	261
1989	5 930	3 441 719	580
1999	4 064	3 181 174	783
2009	1 855	3 897 049	2 101
2017	1 995	4 314 118	2 162

Source: Statistics Norway, <https://www.ssb.no/jord-skog-jakt-og-fiskeri/artikler-og-publikasjoner/hoysesong-for-honer>

some, begun to appear in quite a new light. The design on the Sun Eggs cartons in the early 1970s showed free-roaming hens strutting about in a roomy yard, in front of a cozy henhouse, the whole scene set in the great outdoors. While we have no access to the average consumer's reaction to such images, the carton clearly appeals to an "implied reader" whose knowledge about the lives of hens had not changed with the same speed as had those lives themselves. In fact, although a clear majority of Norwegian poultry farmers now used battery cages, the scene presented on these cartons matched quite closely what we referred to above as the traditional notion of the good life for hens. The hens pictured on these egg cartons were outdoors, in fresh air and sunlight, where they could search around for food, run about freely, moving indoors to perch and lay at their own convenience. In essence, the egg industry was selling Norwegian consumers a 40-year-old scene, one that had since that time become more or less obsolete.

In a later chapter, "Buy," we shall elaborate on this sort of nostalgic beautification of animal lives as a subclass of what we call "welfare washing." And indeed, as a technique of visual rhetoric – whether it is used in information material or in branding and marketing – the tendency to sell animal products using bygone representations of animal lives is widespread, and can be found not just in connection with poultry, but for most all animal products on the market. One might think that the rationale behind this phenomenon is to appeal to the consumer's nostalgic longings – their yearning for a simpler, perhaps more authentic past – but we want to suggest that the effect is actually somewhat more insidious. For when a large portion of the audience of this kind of representation is either plainly ignorant or otherwise detached and alienated from how animals live in contemporary production systems, then what they suffer from is not strictly speaking nostalgia – as they are not quite aware that the past has been lost – but rather a peculiar form of socially organized *denial*. Part of the appeal of this kind of marketing comes, then, from the fact that many consumers do not see (or that they do not want to be confronted with) any kind of mismatch between the carton and its content.

The discrepancy between marketing and reality was not lost on everyone, however. Notably, a leading figure in the – admittedly marginal – Norwegian animal movement, Kåre Knutsen, made a rather big deal of this egg carton in his 1974 book, *Dyrenes rettigheter* (Animal Rights). In one of the book's chapters, Knutsen used the hypocritical Sun Eggs cartons as an entry point into a critique of the increasingly industrial nature of poultry farming. "The cartons are decorated by a drawing of a farmyard, where hens are walking leisurely about, pecking on grain and straw," began Knutsen.

In the background is a romantic red hen house, with plenty of windows and a few steps of stairs, making it comfortably accessible for the hens to exit and enter. It is summer, and the weather is beautiful. Everything smells of sunshine and health. Eat SUN EGGS!¹²⁷

Knutsen wanted to know whether the “Egg Central does not agree that the ads on these cartons smell rotten?” considering that, “The hen strutting about at liberty can today be found only on these cartons and in children’s ABCs.” The illustration on the egg carton was highly unreal, he argued, since, “In this most modern of realities, hens never get to see the sun, but are kept their entire lives inside. There – where there is often very little light – she can exert her full efforts on laying Sun Eggs.”¹²⁸

What is interesting about Knutsen’s critique is, first, how he echoes the concerns of the traditional notion of good poultry keeping, but more importantly, that egg producers, with their cartons, appeared to appeal to the very same notion. The Egg Centrals was advertising industrially produced eggs, from battery caged hens, using images of poultry keeping as it had looked more than 40 years ago: Outdoors, open space, small scale, free range, etc. Not even the producers were able to square their system of production with animal welfare, but reverted instead to the image of a previous, traditional system. (Another possibility, of course, was that they had no problem with the development themselves, but realized that they public did, and decided, cynically, to mislead Norwegian consumers about how eggs were produced.)¹²⁹

Knutsen’s critique helped inspire the *Campaign against Caged Hens*, whose associated members contributed pieces – most often readers’ letters and short op-ed articles – to the newspapers throughout the latter part of the 1970s, creating a steady stream of protest against the changes in the egg industry. It is important to note, however, that while some of these protesters were impressively persevering, they were nevertheless consistently relegated to the readers’ letters columns and other such *marginal* areas of the public sphere.¹³⁰ Ultimately, nothing much would come of them. By 1981, the daily newspaper *Aftenposten* announced that it would no longer print letters about egg-laying hens. The theme had been a “never-ending event in *Aftenposten*’s letters column,” the editors wrote, and added that, “At this point we cannot continue this repetitious debate. The space in the columns is too tight, and the contributions too many.”¹³¹

Money in Poultry

In a visit we made to a large-scale egg farmer outside Oslo, we got more context for the story about how the hen’s life changed during the 20th century. The farmer, now in his late sixties, explained that the choice was not felt to be as simple as “to cage or not to cage,” but that a farmer in fact faced several options, and that the decision about where to place one’s investment did not make itself. He remembered well how his father, in the 1960s, had switched to the so-called Pennsylvania system, in an attempt to scale up, but with only moderate success. This system divided a room into two separate indoor “yards,” with an aisle running down the middle, to which the eggs would roll, and then be collected by a farm hand. This system, which had come into quite widespread use in Norway at the time, was plagued by

all sorts of problems, however, and was generally no success. Some even considered it a “misfortune.”¹³² This farmer’s father was a case in point; in particular, there were problems with disease and pecking. Not until the introduction of the battery cage system, a few years later, did everyday life for the egg farmer really change, he explained. The cage drastically reduced the need for manpower, since one man, thanks to automatic feeding systems, could now care for thousands of animals.¹³³

Being admitted into one of the farm’s massive egg-laying halls, we began to wonder whether “care for” was really the appropriate phrase: The huge hall was filled with long, tall stacks of cages, which, in turn, were filled with hens, so that hardly a meter of superfluous space was left over. It was as if the entire facility shouted out: “Economy!”

As the farmer proudly explained, the main need for human manpower in this facility was for programming and maintaining the feeding systems, which were fully automatic, as well as for cleaning down the hall in between batches. When we raised the issue of animal welfare in systems like this, he replied that it was all a question of cost-benefit analysis. Certainly, being encaged had a certain cost for the animals, he admitted, but on the other hand, the cage system allowed a much closer monitoring of the health of each animal, and in this sense, the industrial “health care” that he provided was superior to what one had in older, free-roaming, systems – where everything had been much more random. When pressed to explain what that health care consisted in exactly, he conceded that it had mostly to do with removing hens that were hurt, or ones that were hurting (that is, pecking on) others. But then he shifted his ground of argument, and pointed out that the industrial scale that he, and other farmers like him, maintained was a prerequisite for the Norwegian consumer’s appetite for eggs.

When we started out, there were about 60,000 poultry farmers in Norway, now there are less than 2,000. And poultry farmers produce more now than we did back then! So, of course, we could opt for a free-roaming system, but that would mean that a substantial number of Norwegians would have to come back to the countryside to farm poultry. And do they really want that?

We believe the farmer’s point is well made. It underlines, importantly, how the present lives of animals is not the result of some conspiracy concocted by an evil meat industry, but rather a function of how production and consumption have developed in tandem.

There is a larger context even here, however, and it is that these systems work not just to keep up with demand, but to create it. Simply put: By scaling up production, the farmer can lower the price on his products, thus incentivizing the consumer to buy more, which, in turn, is what gives the farmer a return on his investment. Our claim here is certainly not that farming is particularly lucrative; a great many farmers in Norway rely on a combination of

subsidies and second jobs in order to live. Nevertheless, when huge halls are filled to the brim with battery cages, that is clearly – on some level – a function of a drive to maximize profits. And poultry farming has in fact been an area where certain actors, even in the strongly regulated agricultural sector in Norway, have actually made money. As if to underline the profit motive of modern poultry industry, this farmer, showing impressive entrepreneurial spirit, had developed a side-venture which extracted and developed antibodies from eggs. The company’s web pages inform us that it offers “polyclonal chicken antibodies (IgY) customized to your application, specifications and quality requirements,” and that their “quality management system is ISO 9001 certified since 2016 (current certification NS-EN ISO 9001:2015).” Explaining the process in more detail, the webpage states that,

The avian equivalent of mammalian IgG, IgY, is isolated from the egg yolk of hyperimmune chicken eggs. Hyperimmune eggs are defined as eggs laid by chickens repeatedly immunized with the selected antigen. IgY is extracted and affinity purified through a series of carefully developed biochemical processes and ultimately analyzed to secure a high level of quality.

With this visit, and the whole hi-tech agri-industrial complex it opened up for us, we had been confronted with an animal that every consumer thinks they know – the egg-laying hen – but also, with ways of using that animal that very few are aware of. The visit brought home to us not just how far the lives of hens have deviated from the traditional notion of poultry keeping, but how alienated most consumers must be from how these animals live today.

Chicken: Feed-to-Meat-Transformer Superstar

Our visit to the high-tech egg farmer also underlines another relevant circumstance, namely, that, while we saw thousands of hens – more than we had ever seen in one group – there was not a single chicken in sight. This is explained by the fact that during roughly the same historical trajectory that our egg farmer recounted to us, the production of eggs has been made entirely distinct from the production of chicken meat – also known as “broilers.”

Before this split took place, poultry farmers had struggled for a long time trying to do both. As the 1935 edition of Holtsmark’s *Husdyrlære* recounts, various factors were involved in creating ideal conditions for production of good chicken meat, including the choice of breed, the living conditions, the feed, and so on. Unfortunately for poultry farmers, what were ideal conditions for *chickens* was not exactly the same as what were ideal conditions for egg-laying *hens*. For instance:

Some of the lighter breeds, and even some of the semi-heavy ones, will not make for good meat, because they are small, dry, and bony, with

very little meat on their bodies. Several of these breeds have a yellow skin color, and are likely to display a yellow, unappetizing fat. Upon choosing a breed, one has hence to account both for what opportunities exist to sell egg and meat and to one's own interests and capacities.¹³⁴

In short, the genetics of *Gallus gallus domesticus* represented a constraint on making an all-round industry of poultry. For a long time, this meant that egg production was given a clear priority, while meat from poultry was marginal. In fact, eggs “dominated completely,” and “meat production from poultry has only been a modest side production, something that came with producing eggs, or as the ‘refuse’ of that production.” Until about 1960, the chicken sold on the Norwegian market consisted largely of “tired hens and spring chickens.”¹³⁵

But during the 1940s and 1950s, several enthusiasts and professionals from the Norwegian poultry industry traveled to the United States, where the production of “broilers” had been streamlined as a separate form of production, a practice that of course allowed a degree of freedom in making the ideal choices, as outlined by Holtsmark above. In 1960, the first broilers were imported to Norway. With a mix, initially, of “White Plymouth Rock” and “White Cornish,” chicken meat would quickly grow to become a sizable industry in Norway too. In fact, the Egg Centrals noted that,

[I]n order to be competitive [in the chicken meat market], we had to organize everything so that the benefits of large scale would accrue, but at the same time eliminate the threat of disease. For this reason, the set-up was such that chicken breeding and chicken production would be isolated from each other. The producers were placed such that they could provide a steady supply to the abattoirs, and were hence placed at a natural distance from the abattoirs, to minimize the costs of transport.¹³⁶

The quote is quite revealing. First, it gives a sense of the crucial role played by the poultry cooperative, the Egg Centrals. And second, precisely because it was such a dominant force in this market, the cooperative could plan and organize almost the entire emerging industry “rationally,” making decisions down to where each producer of chicken would be located. Since it had control over every part of the vertical chain, the Egg Centrals could also decide, from the start, that the production of chicken would rest on a division of labor – unlike what had been the case for egg production, where this division had taken several decades. This meant that, unlike most other forms of production of meat and other animal products, chicken production in Norway was an industrial system from the very start.

This approach would turn out to be a huge economic success: By the mid-1960s, the number of broiler chickens produced per year had begun to grow, and a decade later, Norwegian chicken farmers were producing more than what the market could absorb. There was a situation of “overproduction.”

In the short run, this was dealt with by way of a targeted downscaling,¹³⁷ but in the longer run, the main tendency for chicken meat has, more or less uniformly, been one of market growth, helped by propaganda efforts to push lean, “white meat” – just as we saw with the efforts to increase demand for pork. For chicken, however, the real thrust of the growth set in even later. Chicken production did almost double between 1969 and 1979, but from no more than 5.2 to 9.8 million kilos. In 1999, Norwegian chicken farmers still did not produce more than 36.5 million kilos chicken. In the new millennium, however, chicken production in Norway has been in a period of enormous growth, reaching a temporary peak in 2014, of 106.1 million kilos.¹³⁸

While we – quite naturally – did not see a single chicken at the egg farmer’s farm, we did, on another occasion, visit a man who ran what was reportedly one of Norway’s biggest chicken farms. What we found most interesting in this case, was that the chicken farmer had little to say about his own production. We wanted him to speak about the changes on the farm in his time, but he could hardly recount a single one, except that the feed had changed. The chicken, he said, is already a very effective “feed-to-meat-transformer,” so feed was an obvious area in which to develop this production. He could not tell us anything specific about how the feed had changed, however, since it was all bought from external actors. All he could say was that, over time, the feed had developed in such a way as to allow the chicken to transform feed even more efficiently into meat. To put it simply, today’s chicken grows larger, faster, but on less feed. We asked him whether this change had also something to do with breeding, with the “animal material” as we had learned to call it, and though he conceded that this was probably true, he insisted that the feed was the main factor.

We had a hard time understanding why this farmer had so little to say; after all, he had been in the chicken business for almost three decades, and one would think that he would have more to convey. And while some people are just not very forthcoming in conversation, this particular farmer was emphatically not *that* type; he was friendly, talkative, and outgoing, and had a hearty laugh which surfaced regularly throughout our conversation. There were certain hints, however, that pointed toward an explanation, and the more we learned about the development of the poultry industry, the more this farmer’s attitude made sense to us. He had told us at one point that he hardly spent any time inside the sheds that housed his chickens, and when we asked him why not, he replied that “they’re just not very pleasant places to be,” adding that, “besides, I have workers who help me out in the everyday – a Lithuanian, mostly, who is in charge of running things.”

As he guided us around the facility, we bumped into this Lithuanian, though not inside a shed, but outside, doing maintenance on some farm equipment. The farmer added that not even the Lithuanian had much actual contact with the animals, since the actual tending to the animals was taken care of by automated systems. Whenever one of the farm’s huge chicken sheds had been vacated, trucks would arrive with a new batch, which would

be deposited straight into the shed. As feed, water, light, and ventilation were all automated, there was usually no need to tend to the animals in person. The only exception, he explained, was that they – that is, the Lithuanian – regularly walked through the shed to check whether any animals were hurt, and if so, removed them.

The farm produced up to the license limit of 280,000 animals per year in a tiered system that is a widespread form of chicken production in Norway (and elsewhere). In three different sheds were chickens of three different ages: In the first shed, the chickens were only a few days old; in the next, they were halfway to slaughter; and in the final one, they were about to be sent off to slaughter. This system is sometimes called “isolated” breeding, but is known in Norway as the “all in–all out” system, since every animal within each unit is brought in to the facility at the same time, just as every animal within each unit is collected for slaughter at the same time. After one batch of chickens is collected for slaughter, the relevant shed is sanitized and prepared for a new batch – and on it goes, throughout the year. This system makes for maximum efficiency, since it ensures that the tasks associated with various stages of the growth process do not compound, thus clogging the system, and it also avoids problems that arise by mixing animals of different ages. It is a product of an industrial logic, which constantly looks for ways to get more for less – by way of automation, standardization, and isolation and division of various tasks.

On our tour, we were taken, first, to the shed with newly arrived chickens, just a few days old, and we were surprised at how spacious the shed felt. Each animal had plenty of space, the room was bright and actually quite agreeable. It was not such an unpleasant place to be as the farmer had intimated. Our impression would change dramatically, though, as we came to the next shed, where the birds were about mid-way toward slaughter, about 15–17 days old. The chickens now filled most of the floor, and the level of noise was disconcerting. There were chickens moving, to the best of their ability, this way and that. This was nothing, however, compared to the third and final shed, where not a single dot of available space was left on the floor, but where the animals were packed like sardines – or as industrial chickens, as it turns out. This shed was much darker; and there was less sound and movement, which we could not make sense of except to assume that they were pacified, apathetic as it were, by the lack of space. When we asked the farmer why it was so dark, he told us it was to keep the chickens calm.

Everything about this visit underlined the industrial nature of chicken production – from the huge number of animals, to the automation, to the lack of human-animal interaction, to the systematic – and fine-tuned – control of the animals’ lives by way of automation and the all in–all out system. But there was also something unnerving about this particular farmer. For instance, he responded to our questions about the welfare of the chickens in his sheds by saying that, “I don’t believe they mind. I don’t believe they feel anything, I don’t think their feelings are hurt from being in one



Figure 1.9 Close-up of chickens from modern Norwegian chicken farm.
Source: Dyrevernalliansen.

of those sheds. They get food and drink, I think that's all they care about." More generally, we were struck by his apparent detachment from the animals that were at the center of his own enterprise. He simply did not seem very interested in chickens, and appeared glad to have nothing much to do with them. He was more a factory manager, one might say, than a farmer.

The industrial nature of chicken production was brought home to us in another way too, in an interview with a chicken farmer in a Norwegian weekly newspaper. The paper explained the various facts about industrial chicken farming, including some of the circumstances we have mentioned here, but also information about how long they live (approximately 32 days), what breed they are (Ross 308), how much they weigh at the end of their lives (1,400–1,500 kilograms), and so on. But when the journalist asked the chicken farmer how the chickens are slaughtered, he responded: "I have never seen it. When they come to transport them, the chickens are collected onto a truck. Then I believe they are put into a gas chamber, but I have never seen it." The journalist followed up by asking whether this was because he did not want to see them die, to which the farmer replied that, "Oh, that doesn't bother me. The animals' death is a natural thing to me."¹³⁹ While we do not want to suggest that this farmer was being disingenuous, the interesting thing about his response is that it shows how, within the industrial system that modern chicken production has become, someone performing a specific task (chicken rearing) in the overall labor-divided system of tasks,

does not have anything to do with another task (chicken killing) within the same system. To the contrary, it is quite natural within a system like this that a chicken farmer does not know how his chickens are killed. And while extreme division of labor enables this industrial system to run smoothly and efficiently, it is, at the same time, an image of the alienation that this system engenders. A chicken farmer is removed, as are the rest of us, from the site where his animals are killed. He has not in fact seen it, and has no more than vague ideas about how it happens.

As the preceding sections have made clear, the industrial production of poultry in Norway has entailed that egg production and (broiler) chicken production have become entirely distinct phenomena. For all practical purposes, “hens” and “chickens” are different animals in the modern agricultural system. Egg production uses different breeds than chicken production does, and while egg-laying hens are kept either in cages or in special multi-story “free-range” facilities, chickens walk and sit on open floors in large industrial sheds. One notable consequence of this split is that, while the poultry Norwegians ate as late as in the early 1960s was mainly “spent” hens, egg-laying hens are no longer used for human food. Instead, they are “destroyed,” as the industry itself likes to put it, and used for non-edible purposes, for instance, to make concrete.

Despite being entirely distinct, both egg production and chicken production have certain things in common, however. They have both become multinational business ventures, where only a handful of companies control the genetic material for almost all the eggs and chickens produced in Norway. While Norway had a national breeding program for poultry until the mid-1990s, it was discontinued when the EEC agreement opened the borders for the use of international – and superior – “animal material.” In contrast to pigs, where Norway has itself become a global actor, with poultry, it is entirely at the mercy of multinationals in which Norwegians have no role. Two huge actors dominate the Norwegian market in poultry, as they dominate many other national markets: For egg-laying hens, the great majority of the grandparent animals are imported from the Germany-based multinational Lohmann, while for chicken, the main actor is the American multinational Aviagen, who supplies the ubiquitous Ross 308. Since 2005, however, it has not necessarily been accurate to talk about these companies as two different actors, since at that time, the chicken mega-enterprise Aviagen was purchased by the owner of the egg mega-enterprise Lohmann, Erich Wesjohann. Both of these companies breed animals with the same mindset one would apply to any other technological development. Here, for instance, is how Aviagen presents itself on its own webpage:

Aviagen broiler breeders supply day-old grandparent and parent stock chicks to customers in more than 100 countries worldwide under the Arbor Acres[®], Indian River[®], and Ross[®] brand names. These brands are among the most recognized and respected names in the industry

and each has a proven record of success in addition to a large and loyal global customer base.

Aviagen also offers specialty breeding stock aimed to give customers flexibility in their product choice and meet specific market requirements. The Rowan Range[®] brand of specialty birds, with variable coloring depending on male choice, is available in select regions and meets the needs of selected niche or emerging markets, including the slower-growing, free-range, and organic segments. The Specialty Male[®] portfolio is a line of males aimed to meet the needs of customers who are looking for specific performance traits in their broiler breeding stock, including high breast meat yield, adaptability to environments where elevated temperatures prevail or live production attributes such as FCR and hatch.¹⁴⁰

In short, from being a marginal presence on each Norwegian farm, where the birds walked around outdoors, feeding themselves, before they were taken indoors during winter to stay in the family kitchen, poultry has transformed into not one but two distinct multinational and bio-technological industries. Here, these animals are no longer seen as a nuisance – as in the old days – but they are also hardly seen as animals. Instead, they are seen as tiny machines, which, when placed in top-notch animal factories, will transform feed, water, light, and heat into eggs, meat, and concrete.

Gauging Ignorance

Given that what we have described has become the reality of most poultry produced in Norway, how does the Norwegian consumer relate to all of it? In short, we have found that most people have very little knowledge of any of these things. For instance, we became aware at one point that most of the people we talked with about poultry did not – actually, *could* not – distinguish between hens and chickens; rather, they appeared to take the two as identical, oblivious to the fact that eggs and chicken meat, respectively, come from animals that are genetically different and that they are also produced within distinct production sites.

To get some sense of what people know – and do not know – about the animals that become their food, we did a pilot survey, a few years ago, of just that. Our initial plan was to develop the pilot into a full-scale questionnaire, but for various reasons, we never got further than the pilot: We approached a total of 18 random people on the street in Oslo, and asked them various questions about meat production in Norway today. What this study suggested was that not only do people have very little knowledge about the animals they eat, but they are confused, in all sorts of ways, about how those animals live.

When asked, for instance, about how long an average egg-laying hen lives today, only a single respondent was absolutely correct, in stating that they

live until about 1.5 years. The responses varied from 3–4 months to 5 years, and the latter – wildly inaccurate – answer was in fact the most common one. We do not know why so many of our respondents overestimated the average life of hens so, but it might have something to do, again, with their being stuck in an anachronistic idea of the lives of these animals. In a less industrial state, hens can actually live until 7–8 years, sometimes even up to 10 years, and they keep laying eggs far beyond the age of 1.5 years. But because hens become less profitable over time, they are replaced – killed and destroyed – for economic reasons.

Another thing to note is how big the discrepancy between the lowest and the highest estimates is. This might simply be a sign that those we spoke to were largely ignorant of the issue, and thus forced to *guess*. But it might also be a sign that some are vaguely aware that egg production has been industrialized, and hence assume – correctly enough – that one function of industrialization is a shortening of the animals' life span. Given the confusions we ran into in other parts of our pilot, however, it seems just as likely that our respondents were confusing the egg-laying hen with the broiler chicken, which of course have much shorter lives. For while most of our respondents thought chickens had shorter lives than hens, some responded that the chicken too lives for five years, while others suggested it lives for four months, one year, eight–nine months, six months, or eight months. Again, a greater number of respondents chose the wildly inaccurate eight months than the accurate one month – which only a single person gave as a response.

Next, we asked people what proportion of egg-laying hens were used as human food after their egg-laying days were over, and again, the responses were thoroughly off the mark. Several respondents suggested that 60 percent of hens were eaten, one said 70 percent, and the most common answer was 80 percent. A couple of respondents said that *all* hens were used for human food, while another safeguarded with 90 percent. In this case, three respondents did correctly respond that no egg-laying hens are used for human food, but an average from across our respondents gave an estimation that 50.6 percent of egg-laying hens are used for food. The reality, meanwhile, is that practically *no* hens are used for human food in Norway today. They are not even used, as one respondent suggested, for animal feed, since – as noted above – most egg-laying hens are simply destroyed, or used to make non-edible products.

Because we had some indication, already at this point, that people were confused about the difference between hens and chickens, or even ignorant about there being any difference at all, we had included a few questions to poke into this issue. One of the questions asked people what happened to the males, given that only female chickens can lay eggs. Several respondents answered that they did not know, but a good number felt like they had an idea: One respondent claimed they were “used for all sorts of things, like feed for other animals,” while certain others responded even more cryptically, that

“they carry on the family line” or that “they are a product of the reproduction.” One said, interestingly, that “they are used to get the hen to lay eggs,” while some responded that “they become broilers,” that “they become food,” that “they are slaughtered,” or, in several cases, that “we eat them.” One small group of respondents said, correctly, that they are “separated from the females and ground up,” “killed” or “squashed.”

Finally, every one of our 18 respondents replied in the affirmative to a question about whether egg-laying hens are kept in cages in Norway today – apparently an indication that consumers are not *totally* ignorant about the lives of animals in industrial agriculture. At the same time, when we asked the same question about broiler chickens, all but three responded in the affirmative again – in other words, wrongly. For while a notable percentage of Norway’s hens are still kept in cages, this is not, and has never been, the case for broiler chickens. Interestingly, while we gave the respondents a chance to explain how chickens were kept, if they believed they were not kept in cages, two were not able to add anything, while the final respondent said they were “free-range.”

In our ongoing ethnography, we continued to explore some of the issues from our questionnaire, typically by inviting people we spoke with to explain the difference between a chicken and a hen in food production. The confusions surrounding this issue have surprised us. A great number of people admit that they quite simply do not know. “I don’t know,” “I couldn’t say,” “I have no idea” are all normal responses. Others, in contrast, believe they have an answer, but need, as it were, to tease it out, to make sense of it. Typically, this has produced answers along the lines that egg-producing hens are females while meat-destined chickens are males. Some of those who gave answers like this, have a vague image of having seen or heard at some point something about the sorting of chickens into females and males (“is it something done by Japanese people?”), and reason their way to the conclusion that the function of this sorting must be to decide which individuals will go on to produce eggs (that is, females) and which ones will go on to become meat (that is, males). To be clear: Despite the reasoning, this conclusion is incorrect.

One might wonder why people are so confused about such things, and the first explanation, we believe, is simply that they have been removed from the sites and the occupations where knowledge about the lives of animals are gained. In the vocabulary we have suggested, most people have been spatially as well as socially alienated from the animal origin of meat (and other animal products), and this alienation, in turn, leads to denial: As consumers, we are often fed slanted and nostalgic information about the lives of animals, and in many cases we meet what can only be classified as misinformation; in the absence of first-hand experience and knowledge, those misrepresentations become all we have to go on to make sense of where meat comes from. A lot of the time, ignorance is also the most comfortable position to be in.

The Chicken or the Egg(-Laying Hen)

We came across a fascinating example of this phenomenon a few years ago, in the form of a television program for children, which aired on the Norwegian public broadcaster, NRK. The show was called *Barnas restaurant* (Kids' Restaurant), and presented a group of children with an extraordinary interest in cooking – a sort of *Master Chef* for kids. In each program, six ambitious young chefs would prepare a three course meal for 30 celebrities. As a warm up, these young gourmets were placed as apprentices with Norwegian celebrity chef, Terje Ness, and each week he would give them a new cooking challenge. The whole program was very likeable; what could be more sympathetic than kids who were eager to cook? What at first seemed like a case of food education for the whole family, however, soon became a prime example of denial of where our food comes from.

In one episode, the show's host takes the group of children to a farm. "Today, our apprentice chefs will visit a farm with both hens and ducks," the host says, adding: "Here they will attempt to singlehandedly debone an entire chicken." This mixing-up of hens and chickens continued throughout the program. The difference in names – between hens [*høner*] and chicken [*kylling*] is even more marked in Norwegian, where the word *kylling* refers exclusively to young animals of the family *Gallus gallus domesticus*. One might think that this was just a slip-of-the-tongue, but it would later turn out it was not.

The episode gets going as the children arrive at an idyllic farm, where we see hens roaming freely about outdoors. "Explain why you have brought us here, Terje," the host asks the master chef. "Well, because this farm has hens and ducks, so that you can all *see where our food comes from*." The more we get to see of the farm, however, this lofty objective appears increasingly disingenuous. We see a handful of happy hens strutting about in a cozy garden, adjacent to a small, romantic hen house. Admittedly, the master chef does make an apparent effort to sort hens from chickens, when he says, "When you cook a hen, you should boil it, because its meat tends to be rather tough," and adds, "while chicken, which is also lean, has more fat in it, so that can be fried, like a chicken breast." But if this was an attempt at a realistic distinction, it arguably falters, since hens are not eaten – either fried or boiled – in Norway today. Of course, Norwegians *used* to eat them, but that is precisely the point: Shows like this one address consumers as if the production and consumption of poultry had not changed in 100 years.

"Now I want you to come in here and pick some eggs," the host announces, obviously postponing the deboning of the chicken. The children enter the old-fashioned hen house, where they watch, hold, and cuddle the hens. "It is a bit weird to see the animals we eat," one of the kids says, revealing that even young *gourmets* are confused about what we eat and what not. Of course, one would think that to actually see the animals we eat would be even more than "weird" – that it, given the realities of modern egg and

chicken production, would even be *uncomfortable*. In fact, the experience of trying to cuddle a battery caged hen is reportedly not very pleasant, since the animal has hardly had any contact with a human being in its life, and has also lived in a stressful environment. While one could perhaps argue that what the program does is simply to protect children from certain realities that are deemed too unpleasant for them to process, such an objection would in itself be quite revealing, as it would tell us that we produce eggs and chicken meat in ways that we cannot justify to our children. Also, the program does rather more than protect the children; it actively feeds them untruths, like the notion that we eat hens, or that the chickens we eat live under conditions that resemble the ones these kids go to experience.

The program's creative rewriting of uncomfortable truths reaches a peak when one of the kids says that she has learned what "poultry" is. She now knows that there is a particular way to hold them; that one needs to be calm and have respect for them. This child has not, however, learned the difference between an egg-laying hen and a chicken; she has not learned that we no longer eat egg-laying hens; she has not learned anything about where our meat *actually* comes from; and she has also arguably mislearned the thing about holding hens, since modern egg-laying hens are not something one *holds*. Nor has she been initiated into the discussion about what "respect" for poultry means, or should mean, in an industrial system of production.

After this episode in the hen house, the master chef, Terje, announces that he has a challenge for the kids, and the whole bunch walk into a kitchen, where a skinned chicken awaits each one of them. As they announced at the start of the program, the chicken is to be deboned. But where, one wonders, did this chicken come from? And where did the hens go? The act of taking the animals' lives has been conveniently edited out of the program, and of course it had to be – not just because one does not want to display animal slaughter to children, but because the animal in the kitchen is, in fact, another animal than the one in the hen house. For on this idyllic farm, there are not, as far as we have been able to detect, any living chickens.

While the program places the children in an idyllic hen house to help us see where our food comes from, the license limit regulation for eggs in Norway today is 7,500 – which means that an egg farmer can have up to 7,500 egg-laying hens at one time. Meanwhile, the license limit for broiler chickens is 280,000 chickens per year.¹⁴¹ The discrepancy between the image on the screen and the reality as defined by Norwegian law speaks for itself, but to make it explicit, the point is that *Barnas restaurant* – like many other cultural products – feed consumers with radically unreal and wrong representations of how animals live in today's meat production. They demonstrably fail, we argue, in doing what they claim they want to do – which is to help us *see where meat comes from*. Practically none of the eggs or chickens consumed in Norway emanates from farms like the one on display in this program. Rather, as we have seen, almost all of it comes from what we more accurately would have to describe as "animal factories."

This episode tells volumes about the contemporary consumer's alienation from the animal origin of meat. It is, at the same time, paradoxical, for it is precisely this alienation that the show's hosts profess they want to counter. They want, as they say, to show us where our food comes from. But this program is also a good example of how we deny the animal origin of meat, first because it presents an entirely unreal image of where poultry comes from today, and second because it repeatedly and emphatically confuses two strands of poultry production – chicken and egg-laying hens – that today have become entirely distinct. It thus aids us in averting our gaze, again, from how the production of both eggs and chicken are now results of an advanced industrial logic.

The Trojan Cow

The two compressed histories we have now provided – of pigs and poultry – account for an important part of the growth in meat consumption in recent decades. Between 1969 and 2017, the consumption of pork more than doubled, while chicken increased almost twentyfold.¹⁴² This development means that less than a third of the meat consumed in Norway today stems from grazing animals.

As we have shown, pigs and poultry were once quite marginal activities on the Norwegian farm, but over the course of a few decades, they have become the objects of multinational, hi-tech agro-industries. Given this development, one might wonder what ever happened to *the cow*, which we at the outset of this chapter described as central not just to the old Norwegian farmer's self-sufficiency, but in some ways to his identity as well. Interestingly, while cattle has been outpaced by the tremendous growth in pigs and – especially – poultry, the cow has lost little of its symbolic importance. To the contrary, considering that most of the growth in meat production and consumption has taken place with pigs and poultry, one might argue that the cow has retained a *peculiarly* central role in the image of Norwegian agriculture. This peculiarity can be read, we suggest, as yet another denial mechanism, one where our attention is focused on the animal whose life appears to have changed the least during the last few decades – where our relation to the animal, as well as the animal's relation to the land, appears largely intact. In reality, however, the cow's function as a sort of smoke-screen for pigs and poultry is disingenuous, for cows' lives – not to mention, the cows themselves – have also changed dramatically, and their relation to the land has been radically altered.

In the beginning of this chapter, we described the cow as a transformative tool – a kind of walking capital for the Norwegian farmer. After all, the word cattle etymologically stems from the Indo-European word *chatal*, which is also the root of the word *capital*. Cattle is capital on four legs; in the Middle Ages, a cow was the most stable unit of value in Norway.¹⁴³ The very reason farming was possible at all in Norway, was that grazing

animals – notably, the cow – could turn grass into dairy products and meat. As we have seen, the Norwegian geography is not particularly suitable for cereals: It is mountainous and divided by deep fjords, and was more accessible by boat or packhorse than by horse and carriage – at least until good roads were developed in the 20th century. For this reason, the old Norwegian farmers were self-sufficient, independent, and free in many ways, and the Danish crown (which ruled Norway from the late Middle Ages to the beginning of the 19th century) often had a hard time controlling and taxing the Norwegians. The “Free Norwegian Farmer” became an important national symbol in the negotiations during which Norway again became an independent nation, in 1814, and then a constitutional monarchy, from 1905.¹⁴⁴ But this farmer is, as we have seen, tightly connected to an associated national symbol: that of *the free grazing cow*, an animal who lives in harmony with the inhospitable and inaccessible – yet beautiful – Norwegian landscape. While the Norwegian cow has changed dramatically in the last century or so, the free grazing cow has remained remarkably stable as a symbol of Norway.

With the cow as with both pigs and poultry, it was in the post-WWII-years that modernization really took off. In 1950, *Statens rasjonaliseringskomité* (The State Committee for Rational Action), decided that rationality and effectiveness should be both means and end for Norwegian agriculture, and the cow, like the other animals on the farm, became a target for improvement.¹⁴⁵ The agricultural sector sought help from pioneers in computer science as well as in veterinary science to develop modern Norwegian cow breeds.¹⁴⁶ More specifically, their aim was to create a new dual-purpose animal, the *Norsk Rødt Fe* (Norwegian Red Cattle), which would be a good dairy cow *and* produce fairly high-quality meat. By using the larger local breeds from eastern Norway as a starting point, rather than the small mountain climbing old breeds from western Norway, a highly systematic breeding program took shape. Thirty-three Norwegian breeds were turned into one, as cows became larger and began producing more milk.¹⁴⁷

With the same determination as we have seen with the Norwegian Pig Breeders’ Association, agricultural scientists focused on creating this ideal cow. By inseminating animals rather than letting the local bull to the job, the systematic breeding program changed the small Norwegian herds of cows into high-yielding dairy cows as rapidly as the government built roads. As it happens, roads were central to the modernization of the Norwegian cow, for while sperm did not have to be deposited by a bull, a road was needed for the vet to be able to approach with sperm tubes. In 1979, 98 percent of all Norwegian cows were artificially inseminated, and the work proved to be both rational and efficient: In only twenty years, from 1959 to 1979, milk yields per cow doubled.¹⁴⁸ There was an additional reason for this success, however, and it was that consumption of feed concentrate had also doubled in the same time frame: from 814 tons in 1959 to 1575 tons

in 1979. Rationalization, efficiency, growth, and yields became the leading mantras for new farmers. Not only did the cow milk more, it grew to produce more beef, as its carcass weight increased from 155 kilos in 1949 to 230 kilos in 1979.¹⁴⁹

In short, the cow changed immensely in the post-war years. But not only did the cow itself change, its living quarters changed too. Many cows moved out of all-purpose barns, in which they had been tethered in stalls, and into high-tech milking parlors, where they could move about freely. They were stripped of their bells and given computer chipped collars, enabling the farmer to digitalize the concentrated feed supply allowed for each cow according to how much milk it yielded. High-tech milking parlors like this are expensive, however, and their cost is easier to defend for a large dairy herd than for a small one. Thus, the dairy herds have grown too.

The mechanization and digitalization of the Norwegian cow has come at a cost. For one, letting dairy cows out to graze was too much of a palaver for many farmers. Bringing them to mountain dairies requires transport of both people and animals, not to mention the additional cost of building secondary milking parlors in the mountain dairies that fulfill both the animal welfare and health and safety regulations. Gathering them from outfields in the outskirts of the farm and chasing them indoors to milk (when they might prefer to stay outdoors), is obviously time consuming. A much less labor intensive practice was simply to keep the cows inside, and bring feed, whether it be roughage or concentrated feed, into the hall. Because keeping cows indoors throughout the year was considered bad for animal welfare reasons, in 2003 EU legislation required tethered cows to be let out to graze for at least eight weeks per year.¹⁵⁰ When the EU in 2003 required Norway to implement loose-housing for dairy cows to improve the animal welfare standards, the Norwegian government postponed the implementation, arguing on the farmers' behalf that the expense of abandoning the tethered system and building new loose-housing halls would be very high for small farms.¹⁵¹

Loose-housing milking parlors had been exempt from this "eight weeks outdoors rule," but in 2012, EU legislation required cows kept in loose-housing to be let out for eight weeks per year too. Referring to the dairy cooperative, TINE, one headline in the farmers' daily paper, *Nationen*, read: "TINE fears that grazing orders for dairy cows in loose-housing can lead to decreases in milk yield."¹⁵² Others claimed it would lead to mud, chaos along the roadside, and problems with food safety.¹⁵³ In 2014, tethered cows were given an extension to their right to be outdoors – the minimum requirement was increased to at least 12 weeks if the conditions were unsuitable to keep them outdoors for as long as 16 weeks (which was now the formal requirement). The cows in loose housing were still only allowed out for eight weeks of the year.¹⁵⁴ In 2016, the Norwegian government again negotiated an extension for the implementation date for loose-housing, and at present, many Norwegian cows are still waiting to be untethered, and will still have to wait until 2034, according to the latest estimation.¹⁵⁵

While grazing used to be highly important for the economy of Norwegian farmers, it has over time become increasingly less so. While mountain dairies used to be the norm, today they are hardly used at all. Around 1900 there were about 100,000 traditional mountain dairies or shielings in Norway, and today less than 1 percent of these, only about 900, are still in use.¹⁵⁶ The move away from grazing has in fact continued until the present day: A recent report shows that while grazing contributed 16 percent of the total feed in 2003, it had decreased to 10 percent in 2013, and has since then continued to drop even further.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the image of the cow as a creature who could utilize Norway's vast grazing areas – chewing the cud in breathtakingly beautiful landscapes – is routinely projected by the farmers' organizations.

In some cases, this type of projection is quite unashamed, if not to say untrue. The dairy farmers' cooperative displays on its webpages a stalwart farmer standing in a lush, flowery meadow, patting two red cows. The headline is "Milk from the Shieling," and the accompanying text reads:

Cows grazing cows on green flowery meadows, surrounded by snow-capped mountains against a blue sky. Romantic? Yes maybe. But still part of the reality of Norwegian milk production. Every single summer, around June-July, people and animals in Valdres will go up to the shieling, or *stol* as it is called there. This is not just because it is a tradition. No, it is about utilizing an important resource, a rich mountain pasture surrounding the *stol*. Here, the cattle will graze the natural plants in the outfields, like herbs, grass and heather. This gives milk of outstanding quality, combined with the fact that the animals can live free, close to nature. Healthy animals in close contact to nature give good milk.¹⁵⁸

The text gives the impression that taking cows up to shielings is still a general practice, but in fact, only about 15 percent of Norwegian cows still do so.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the imagery of the mountain dairy cow is part of the dairy farmer cooperative's official narrative about where Norwegian milk comes from. Nortura, the meat farmer's cooperative, makes abundant use of grazing cows, in their advertising, in informational materials, as well as when they engage in public debates. On their webpages on "Keeping Cattle in Norway," for instance, they use a photo of a grazing cow in a meadow. The accompanying text reads:

Keeping cattle is the cornerstone of Norwegian farming, and influences both dwelling, place of employment, and the shape of natural landscapes all over the country. Cattle eat grass and silage, and because of this, cattle farming is usually carried out in places that are unsuitable for growing grains.¹⁶⁰

Visually and with words, these examples suggest that Norwegian farming is carried out in close connection to nature, and also, that this nature is

particularly well-suited for grazing. Another photo on the same page shows a farmer holding a bucket of feed concentrate in his hand, on his way down to a herd of cows on a field. One might presume that this image presents a crack in the narrative that understates the role of concentrated feed and rather focuses on the cows and the field. This crack is very narrow, however, because most Norwegians probably look at the fields and the cows and have no idea what the bucket is for. Modern cows require more than grass to be as productive as they are – in fact, they are bred with concentrated feed in mind. This is one of the many reasons why rough grazing and mountain grazing are uneconomical for Norwegian farmers today. Moreover, mountain dairies need staff, and finding skilled seasonal labor willing to work for uncompetitive wages is also a challenge. Due to these challenges, mountain grazing has become a thing of the past for a large majority of Norwegian cows.

The industry’s way of framing things suggests that producing meat in Norway is a sustainable use of resources, and this point is often also made explicit in argumentative discourse. According to Nortura’s spokesperson, Norwegian cows are not just sustainable, they can also enhance public health and handle global challenges: “Daisy helps to save the world [...]. The grass and the protein-rich, red meat is one of her biggest contributions to saving the world from hunger and maladies.”¹⁶¹ In an article entitled “Five Reasons to Buy Norwegian Red Meat,” Ola Hedstein, former CEO of the



Figure 1.10 “An Ode to the Grass-Eaters Among Us.” Gilde advertisement featuring a version of the iconic free range, grass-fed cow. The caption reads, “Many advocate for a greener diet in Norway. Luckily, someone is already at it.”

Source: Nortura.

Norwegian Agricultural Cooperative,¹⁶² makes a similar argument. He lists five reasons to maintain eating Norwegian meat: The first reason is that, “To leave the outfields ungrazed is a form of food waste.” He points out that 95 percent of the land area in Norway consists of non-arable land, and that half of this is suitable for grazing.¹⁶³ The author’s next three points address the resource efficiency around the NRF cow; that the NRF cow is climate-friendly; and that Norwegian domestic animals receive the least antibiotics in Europe. The final point takes us back to the rhetoric about the grazing Norwegian cow. He writes: “The Norwegian cow also has statutory exercise! For a minimum of eight weeks a year, Norwegian cows and calves exercise outdoors.” Under this point, Hedstein also writes that, “Norwegian farmers and producers are very concerned with animal welfare and are constantly improving animal welfare to attune to society’s expectations, norms and new knowledge.”¹⁶⁴

The reality, however, is that the cow does not spend all that much time out of doors. As a result, Norway’s grazed mountain areas – which played such an important part in the creation of this myth in the first place – have been greatly altered. As areas that were formerly used for grazing are left untouched, brushwood and forest have begun invading these areas, while the potential feed is left to wither, in the process known in Norwegian as *gjengroing* (encroachment).¹⁶⁵ Consequently, Norway looks increasingly less like the images that are used to sell and justify Norwegian cattle production. Granted, here and there farmers maintain the traditional way of life and actually do bring their cows out to graze the fat mountain grass in summer. Their main reason is neither economy nor animal welfare, however, but the desire to uphold the cultural heritage as well as heritage landscapes.¹⁶⁶

But while the vast majority of Norwegian cows are locked up in a barn most of the year, they are still projected as the healthiest and happiest grass fed cattle in the world. The following statement was given by a representative from the meat farmer cooperative, Nortura, who also used the past to tell a story about the present:

Norway’s cows are the healthiest and happiest cows in the world. Have a look at the statistics on animal welfare. Norway is best in class. Good old Clover is a cow that gives us both milk and meat. She is not fed antibiotics unless it is necessary, or steroids to grow larger than she is. She is not locked up in her own dung. Clover is healthy and fit and she contributes with what she can so we humans can stay healthy and fit.¹⁶⁷

The fact that Clover – or, at any rate, 85 percent of all Norwegian cows – are locked up in a barn for 10 out of the year’s 12 months, seems to be forgotten. The cow of the past is used today to conceal the fact that the Norwegian cow has also become an industrialized creature, who stays inside most of the time, and who is milked and fed by a robot. But because the cow still has to eat roughage (grass and silage) for her metabolic system to work as it should,

the cow is still anchored to the land, with its seasonal cycles and authentic rural life – at least more so than the pig and the chicken, who can survive on cereals and other feed concentrates alone.

This circumstance has allowed the agricultural industry to use the cow as a sort of Trojan horse: The highly industrialized pig and poultry industries have been “smuggled” into the everyday lives of Norwegians, as it were, and this has happened thanks to their being enveloped in a distinctly *less* industrialized image, in which the cow – let us call her the Trojan Cow – has played the main part, in such a way that she distracts everyone’s attention. Despite being in some ways different, the cow comes to stand for Norwegian animal husbandry as such, what allows the sector to maintain that, not only should Norwegians have no concerns about meat, but they should in fact produce and eat *more* meat, since this, they claim, is the sensible and sustainable option. The cow is projected as a solution which allows us to maintain traditions, uphold rural employment, ensure food security and national self-sufficiency, and not least, utilize all the grazing resources that we have in such abundance – all while the animal itself is allowed to roam free on lush pastures. The problem is that not much of this is actually true.

Notes

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- 2 Taksdal, *Bondeyrket*.
- 3 Visted and Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur Vol. 1*, 152.
- 4 Erik Aas, *Husdyrlære* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1939), 25.
- 5 Visted and Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur Vol. 2*.
- 6 Berger, “Why Look at Animals?,” 3.
- 7 Aas, *Husdyrlære*, 125.
- 8 See also Karen Lykke Syse, “The Ebb and Flow of Trees and Farmland: Symbols of Nationhood in Scotland and Norway,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 4 (2013): 219–228. We will get back to this point at the end of this chapter.
- 9 Andreas Holmsen, *Før bonden ble forretningsmann* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1982), 9–10.
- 10 Holmsen, *Før bonden ble forretningsmann*, 12.
- 11 Stein Tveite, *Jord og gjerning: Trekk av norsk landbruk i 150 år* (Det Kongelige Selskap for Norges Vel, 1959), 53–55.
- 12 Anne Austrem Bunger and Vilde Haarsaker, *Færre og større melkebruk – hva skjer med seterdrifta?* (Oslo: Agri analyse, 2020).
- 13 Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 155.
- 14 Herman Ruge, “Valdresia Reserata,” *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* 2 (1917 [1743]): 142.
- 15 Tveite, *Jord og gjerning*, 22.
- 16 The term shieling is from *shiel*, from the Northern dialect Middle English forms *schele* or *shale*, probably akin to Old Frisian *skul* meaning “hiding place” and to Old Norse *Skjöl* meaning “shelter” and *skali* meaning “hut.” In Scotland it is used for a dairy up the hills, and we use it here to translate the Norwegian words *seter* or *støl*, which are the places in which the animals are moved to during summer, and which are often, but not always, situated in the mountains.

- 17 Torkell Netland, "Stølsbruket i Sirdal," *Stavanger Turistforenings årbok* (1943): 20.
- 18 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1897), 45.
- 19 Harald Skjervold, *Husdyravl* (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1983).
- 20 Harald Skjervold, "Storfeavle gjennom hundre år," in *Norske Melkeprodusenters Landsforbund 100 år 1881-1981* (Oslo: Norske Melkeprodusenters Landsforbund, 1981), 385–455.
- 21 "Sau," NIBIO. <https://www.nibio.no/tema/mat/husdyrgenetiske-ressurser/bevaring-sverdige-husdyraser/sau>. Accessed: November 27, 2021.
- 22 Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," 3.
- 23 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 121.
- 24 Harald Espeli, *Fra hest til hestekrefter* (Ås: Norges Landbrukshøgskole, 1990), 665–666.
- 25 Vidar Asheim, *Kulturlandskapets historie: Jord- og skogbruksområdene slik det var og slik det er i flatbygdene på Østlandet* (Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1978).
- 26 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 123.
- 27 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 215.
- 28 N.N., "Utviklingen i norsk kosthold: Matforsyningsstatistikk og forbruksundersøkelser." Report (Oslo: Helsedirektoratet, 2017), 19.
- 29 Arthur de Capell Brooke, *Travels Through Sweden, Norway and Finmark* (London: Rodwell & Martin, 1823), 116.
- 30 Brooke, *Travels Through Sweden, Norway and Finmark*, 118–119.
- 31 Leopold von Buch, *Travels through Norway and Lapland, during the Years 1806, 1807, and 1808* (London: Colburn, 1813), 88.
- 32 James A. Lees and Walter J. Clutterbuck, *Three in Norway (by Two of Them)* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1882), 54.
- 33 Eilert Sundt, *Om renligheds-stellet i Norge* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1975[1869]), 210.
- 34 Brynjulf Jakob Hovde, *The Scandinavian Countries, 1720-1865: The Rise of the Middle Classes. Vol. 2* (Boston: Chapman & Grimes, 1943), 793.
- 35 Derwent Conway, *A Personal Narrative of a Journey Through Norway, Part of Sweden and The Islands and States of Denmark* (Edinburgh: Constable and Company, 1829), 102.
- 36 Arthur Bennet, *Travels in Norway, or Three Weeks in the "Land of the Midnight Sun"* (London: Grant and Co., 1879), 26.
- 37 Holtmark, *Husdyrlære*, 369.
- 38 In the same book, the statistics show that there were just over 100,000 pigs in Norway in 1875, see Holtmark, *Husdyrlære*, 390.
- 39 Lees and Clutterbuck, *Three in Norway*, 321.
- 40 Bergljot Børresen, *Kunsten å være tam: Folk og dyr i 18 000 år* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994), 74.
- 41 Karl Flatland, *Svinehold* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1911), 43.
- 42 The story is told in John-Arne Gundersen, "Den ensomme rytter," *Dagbladet Magasinet*, June 30, 2010.
- 43 Edvin Kile, *Landbruksskolen 1825–1990: Mål, innhold, arbeidsmåtar* (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1997), 36.
- 44 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1897), 12.
- 45 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.), 381.
- 46 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (3rd ed.) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1904), 387.
- 47 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (4th ed.) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1908), 411.
- 48 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (4th ed.), 393–395.

- 49 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (4th ed.), 392.
- 50 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.), 372.
- 51 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.), 375.
- 52 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.), 380.
- 53 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed.), 398.
- 54 Berger, “Why Look at Animals?” 5.
- 55 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (9th ed., Johs. Høie and Hans Tilrem) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1935), 503.
- 56 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (9th ed.), iiv.
- 57 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (9th ed.), 546.
- 58 See also Karen Lykke Syse, “‘Det er ikkje for hat, det er for mat’: Griseliv og grisedød i Norge før og nå.” *Arr Idéhistorisk Tidsskrift*, 3 (2020): 15–29.
- 59 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (12th ed., Johs. Høie and Hans Tilrem) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1951).
- 60 Bernt Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (13th ed., Johs. Høie and Hans Tilrem) (Oslo: Grøndahl & Sønns Forlag, 1957), 543.
- 61 The Norwegian word is *våkekone*. The term was used for women who would spend the night watching over fatally sick people in the past so they would not die alone.
- 62 Hans Kraggerud, *Hus for gris* (Ås: Norges Landbrukshøgskole, 1960), 14.
- 63 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 205.
- 64 Johs. Høie, *Ei lita bok om svineavl og fleskeproduksjon* (Oslo: Grøndahl & Søn, 1954), 13.
- 65 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (1st ed), 29.
- 66 Svein Bertil Dybesland, “Grisen og det jærsk jordbruket,” in *Sjå Jæren 2006* (Nærbø: Jærmuseet, 2006), 118.
- 67 Dybesland, “Grisen og det jærsk jordbruket,” 120–121.
- 68 Arnulf Jensen, *Fôrutnytting – ressurs sparing: Norsk svineavl* (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1974), 7.
- 69 Dybesland, “Grisen og det jærsk jordbruket,” 122.
- 70 Knut Presthegge and Ivar Engan-Skei, *Fôring og stell av husdyr* (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1982), 80.
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- 73 Arnulf Jensen, *Penger i gris* (Oslo, Landbruksforlaget, 1973), 5.
- 74 Arnulf Jensen and Bjørn Sagbakken, *Hus for Svin: Planlegging og planløsning, bygging og innredning, administrasjon og finansiering* (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1977), 83.
- 75 Jensen and Sagbakken, *Hus for Svin*, 13.
- 76 “Utviklingen i norsk kosthold,” Helsedirektoratet. <https://helsedirektoratet.no/Lists/Publikasjoner/Attachments/1022/Utviklingen-i-norsk-kosthold-2015-matforsyningsstatistikk-IS-2383.pdf>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.
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- 78 This phrase is in common use in Norway, and is arguably a central part of Norwegian political life. According to a Norwegian encyclopedia, it refers to “a policy which aims to secure an economic, social and cultural redistribution between the larger towns and cities and rural local communities” (authors’ translation). See: <https://snl.no/distrikt>. Accessed: June 16, 2021. For the

- quotas, see “Konsesjon og kvote,” Norges Bondelag. <https://www.bondelaget.no/konsesjonogkvote/>. Accessed: October, 19, 2020.
- 79 “Tall og fakta om svinekjøtt,” MatPrat. <https://www.matprat.no/artikler/ravarer/tall-og-fakta-om-svinekjott/>. Accessed June 16, 2021.
- 80 Jensen, *Forutnyting – ressurs sparing* 51.
- 81 Arnulf Jensen, *50 år med organisert svineavl* (Gjøvik: N.N., 2005), 31.
- 82 Jensen, *50 år med organisert svineavl*, 22.
- 83 See for instance N.N. *In-Gris Brukerhåndbok* (Hamar: Norsvin, 2002).
- 84 N.N., *In-Gris Brukerhåndbok*.
- 85 Jensen, *Fôrutnyting – ressurs sparing*, 55.
- 86 Arnulf Jensen, *Et avlsselskap i verdensklasse* (Hamar: Norsvin, 2008).
- 87 Jensen, *Et avlsselskap i verdensklasse*, 10.
- 88 “Om oss,” Norsvin. <https://norsvin.no/om-oss/>. Accessed: October 26, 2020.
- 89 Jensen, *Et avlsselskap i verdensklasse*, 144.
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- 98 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 74.
- 99 Gunnar Morsund, “Rystende forhold hos grisebønder avdekket,” *NRK.no*, December 4, 2017. <https://www.nrk.no/rogaland/rystende-forhold-hos-grisebønder-avdekket-1.13803803>.
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- 101 Ingjerd Sørli Yri, “Ber om opprydning før kundene reagerer,” *Nationen*, December 9, 2017, 8.
- 102 Annechen Bahr Bugge, *Mat, måltid og moral – hvordan spise rett og riktig* (Oslo: SIFO, 2015), 1.
- 103 Yri, “Ber om opprydning,” 8.
- 104 Jon-Fredrik Klausen, “Økokrim vurderer etterforskning,” *Nationen*, July 4, 2019, 10; Line Omland Eilevstjønn, “Svinebonde om dokumentaren: Verre enn eg trudde,” *Nationen*, June 22, 2019, 4–5; Benjamin Hernes Vogl, “Iverksetter tiltak etter dokumentar,” *Nationen*, June 22, 2019, 4; and Andrea Sofie Aasvang, “Butikkjedene merker ingen nedgang i svinesalget,” *Nationen*, July 4, 2019, 10–11. Incidentally, the authors of this book also got involved, with an op-ed about consumers’ trust in the meat industry, see Kristian Bjørkdahl and Karen Lykke Syse, “Bullshit om gris,” *dn.no*, June 24, 2019.
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- 106 See Ellen K. Silbergeld, *Chickenizing Farms & Food: How Industrial Meat Production Endangers Workers, Animals, and Consumers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

- 107 See Kjersti Berger, *Fri som fuglen?: Modernisering av hønseholdet i Norge, 1880-1975*. Cand.philol. thesis. (Oslo: University of Oslo), 24.
- 108 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 25.
- 109 Joh. L. Lofthus, *Jordbruk* (Bergen: Lunde, 1916), 316.
- 110 Børresen, *Kunsten å være tam*, 186.
- 111 See Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 26.
- 112 Lofthus, *Jordbruk*, 300.
- 113 Berit Foss, Nina Rishovd, and Ingvild Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år: Prior Norge 1929-2004* (Oslo: Prior, 2004), 12.
- 114 Arne Eskilt and Dagfinn Valland, “Norsk fjørfeavlslag gjennom 100 år (1884-1984),” *Norsk fjørfeavlslag 100 år, 1884-1984: Utviklingen av fjørfeholdet* (Mysen: Laget, 1984). See also Foss, Rishovd and Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år*, 15.
- 115 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?* 53.
- 116 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 54.
- 117 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 90.
- 118 Lofthus, *Jordbruk*, 303.
- 119 Ellen Silbergeld writes, in *Chickenizing Farms & Food*, that various anecdotal stories circulate about who came up with the idea of producing chickens – so-called “broilers” – exclusively for meat, which was the decisive decision for the subsequent industrialization of both egg and chicken (meat) production, see pp. 50–51. There were demonstrably pioneer efforts, in the United States, in the 1910s and 1920s, but the industry grew rapidly there first from the late 1920s and early 1930s, and this is also when the Norwegian poultry farmers’ magazine, *Fjørfe*, began reporting on the Americans’ innovations. In Norway, though, the separation between egg and chicken production – and thus industrialization – did not happen for some time still.
- 120 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 90.
- 121 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*
- 122 Foss, Rishovd, and Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år*, 94.
- 123 Kari Bay Haugen, “Han plukker 1 mill. egg pr. år,” *Verdens Gang*, November 14, 1968, 14.
- 124 Berger, *Fri som fuglen?*, 93.
- 125 Kristian Bjørkdahl, “Caged Welfare: Evading the Good Life for Egg-Laying Hens,” in *Sustainable Consumption and the Good Life: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Karen Lykke Syse and Martin Lee Mueller (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 204–223.
- 126 Foss, Rishovd, and Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år*, 79.
- 127 Kåre Knutsen, *Dyrenes rettigheter: Ulovlig og lovlig dyreplageri i Norge* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 1974), 25.
- 128 Knutsen, *Dyrenes rettigheter*, 25.
- 129 This is a common tactic in much animal advertising. Norway’s dairy coop Tine has been reported repeatedly to the Consumer Ombudsman for misleading advertising. See Sune Borkfelt, Sara Kondrup, Helena Röcklinsberg, Kristian Bjørkdahl, and Mickey Gjerris, “Closer to Nature? A Critical Discussion of the Marketing of ‘Ethical’ Animal Products,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 28 (2015): 1053–1073.
- 130 A comprehensive history of animal protection in Norway has yet to be written, but a summary is given in Rune Ellefsen, *Med lov til å pine?: Om bruk og beskyttelse av dyr* (Oslo: Inspirator/Fritt forlag, 2013). As elsewhere, the Norwegian animal movement went through a certain radicalization in the course of the 1970s, as it awoke to the idea that animals had “rights.” One sign of this was the establishment of the so called Rettighetsaksjonen (the Rights Campaign), another was the publication of *Dyrenes rettigheter* (Animal Rights), Kåre Knutsen’s book, in 1974. In contrast to what was the case internationally, however,

the concept of rights did not, in the eyes of most Norwegian animal advocates, entail an abolitionist stance. Animals could still be consumed by humans, they felt, but to “respect their rights,” we had to provide them with lives of quite another quality than what the emerging agricultural technologies and practices allowed.

- 131 NN, “Punktum for burhøns-debatt,” *Aftenposten*, April 8, 1981, 23.
- 132 Foss, Rishovd, and Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år*, 95.
- 133 A Norwegian study from the mid-1970s documented that while a farmer with “floorbased” systems spent 45 minutes tending to each “annual hen,” a farmer with a cage system spent only 15 minutes. The comparison was made on flocks of 2,000 animals, however, and presumably, the gap would grow even larger with bigger flocks, which is where the benefits of the cage system come to fruition. See Foss, Rishovd, and Skaufel, *Matglede gjennom 75 år*, 112.
- 134 Holtsmark, *Husdyrlære* (9th ed., Johs. Høie and Hans Tilrem), 588.
- 135 Arne Eskilt, “Fjørfeholdets utvikling – en oversikt,” in *Norsk fjørfeavlslag 100 år, 1884-1984: Utviklingen av fjørfeholdet* (Mysen: Laget, 1984), 180.
- 136 The Egg Centrals’ 50th anniversary text, cited in Eskilt, “Fjørfeholdets utvikling – en oversikt,” 181.
- 137 Eskilt, “Fjørfeholdets utvikling – en oversikt,” 181–182.
- 138 N.N., “Utviklingen i norsk kosthold,” 19.
- 139 Simen Sætre, “Et hardt liv,” *Morgenbladet*, April 3, 2009, 2–3.
- 140 <http://en.aviagen.com/>.
- 141 “Fjørfe,” Store norske leksikon. <https://snl.no/fjørfe>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.
- 142 Leif Jarle Asheim, Anne Kjersti Bakken, Klaus Mittenzwei, Ivar Pettersen, and Sjur Spildo Prestegard, *Konsekvenser av redusert kjøttforbruk: Scenarioanalyser med vekt på endringer i selvforsyning, arealbruk og struktur i jordbruk og kjøttindustri* (Ås: NIBIO, 2019), 6. In the same period, the consumption of beef also doubled, from 49.4 million kilos to 101.3 million kilos.
- 143 See Børresen, *Kunsten å bli tam* and Visted and Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur*.
- 144 For more on this, see Karen Lykke Syse, “The Ebb and Flow of Trees and Farmland”; Steinar Imsen, “The Union of Calmar: Nordic Great Power or Northern German Outpost?,” in *Politics and Reformations: Communities, Politics, Nations, and Empires: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady*, edited by Christopher Ocker, Michael Printy, Peter Starenko, and Peter Wallace, 471–490 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Kåre Lunden, *Norsk Grålysing: Norsk nasjonalisme 1770-1814 på allmenn bakgrunn* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1992).
- 145 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 199.
- 146 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 200.
- 147 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 201.
- 148 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 202.
- 149 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 213.
- 150 31 percent of Norwegian cows are still tethered. “65 prosent av alt storfe i løsdriftsfjøs,” Statistics Norway. <https://www.ssb.no/jord-skog-jakt-og-fiskeri/artikler-og-publikasjoner/65-prosent-av-alt-storfe-i-losdriftsfjos>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.
- 151 N.N. *Om dyrehold og dyrevelferd. St.meld. nr. 12, 2002-2003* (Oslo: Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2003), 177.
- 152 Bjarne Bekkeheien Aase, “Krav om ku-trim kan gi mjølkemangel,” *Nationen*, July 11, 2012.
- 153 Anne Viken, Anne, “Noreg – ikkje eigna for kyr?,” *Dagbladet*, September 21, 2012.
- 154 “Forskrift om hold av storfe,” Lovdata. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2004-04-22-665#shareModal>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.

- 155 Eivinn Fjellhammer and Astrid Een Thuen, *De lavhengende fruktene er høstet – løsdrift i norsk storfehold* (Oslo: Agri Analyse 2017), 5.
- 156 Kari Stensgaard, “Kun ein prosent av norske setrar er framleis i bruk,” NIBIO, July 4, 2017. <https://www.nibio.no/nyheter/kun-ein-prosent-av-norske-setrar-er-framleis-i-bruk>; Bunger Haarsaker, *Færre og større melkebruk*.
- 157 Fjellhammer and Thuen, *De lavhengende fruktene er høstet*, 8.
- 158 “Melk fra setra,” Tine. <https://www.tine.no/presserom/nyhetsarkiv/melk-fra-setra>. Accessed: September 23, 2019.
- 159 Kari Stensgaard, *Hvordan står det til på setra? Registrering av setermiljøer i perioden 2009-2015* (Ås: NIBIO, 2017), 15.
- 160 “Storfehold,” Nortura. <http://www.nortura.no/naturlig-kvalitet-fra-norske-bonder/storfehold/>. Accessed: September 23, 2019.
- 161 Ragnhild Nilsen, “Slutt å mobbe kua!,” *Aftenposten*, November 16, 2017.
- 162 This is an organization that adjoins 17 different cooperatives in the Norwegian agricultural sector.
- 163 “Gardsbruk, jordbruksareal og husdyr,” Statistics Norway. www.ssb.no/stjord. May 23, 2019.
- 164 Ola Hedstein, “Fem grunner til å kjøpe norsk rødt kjøtt,” *Aftenposten*, January 19, 2019.
- 165 Stensgaard, “Hvordan står det til på setra?,” 166.
- 166 Stensgaard, “Hvordan står det til på setra?,” 167.
- 167 Nilsen, “Slutt å mobbe kua!”

2 Die

In 1892, a young landless man of 22 from a mountain farm in Western Norway decided to take on animal slaughter to add to his meager income. Had he been able, there and then, to sell the meat of the animals he had slaughtered, his story might have been forgotten. But as it happens, the story of Rasmus Fatland is meticulously recorded. As there were no customers for his meat in the vicinity, he took his brother along to the nearest bank, Vikedal Sparebank, where he asked for a loan of 50 kroner (approximately US\$6). Funds in hand, he traveled all the way to the capital to find a market for his meat.

The journey up and down hills and mountains to a suitable port was all but easy at a time when roads were poor or even non-existent, when horses pulled loads over land, and when boats ferried goods over sea. Rasmus was not deterred by such logistical obstacles: He made the journey, arrived in the capital, set up a stall at Youngstorget, an outdoor market, where he started his trade. It must have been a good venue for his business, for Rasmus decided to stay in the capital, commuting back a few times during the year to fetch more animals. The meat he peddled in this manner was sold on commission for farmers in Western Norway, and shipped by steamboat from Stavanger, all the way around the southern tip of Norway. The boat's timetable was not always predictable, but the steamer had a chilled storage facility that helped keep the meat fresh.

In Oslo, then called Kristiania, the downtown area Grønland had been a key site for trade and slaughter of animals and sale of meat since the mid-1800s. In 1914, a municipal slaughterhouse had been built, and adjacent to it stood Kristiania Meat Hall. This venue became Rasmus' new work place – a gigantic leap from the quayside trade on the west coast. He rented one of the many stalls provided by the meat hall, and used it as an outlet for his expanding business. Around 1920, Rasmus' five sons would begin to help out, traveling back and forth to Oslo.

During the war years, the Nazi occupation prevented the Fatlands from running their operation as usual, and the family returned home to Western Norway. When the war ended, Rasmus' son, Severin, took over, and the

business again grew rapidly. The trips between Oslo and Western Norway now became ever more regular. Roads had been built and improved, and the family had purchased a Ford truck as their new means of transport. With a local partner in Sandeid, on the west coast, Severin operated a small village slaughterhouse, where the animals were killed in the morning, thrown onto the back of a truck, and driven all the way across the mountains to Oslo by Severin's younger brothers, Sverre and Ole. Today, this is a seven hour journey, but back then, it took twice as long – not to mention that it was dangerous: The roads were steep and had hairpin bends; in winter, the road over the mountain was often closed due to snow and ice, and whenever this happened, Sverre and Ole would have to drive around the tip of the country hugging the coastline, a detour that threatened to spoil the meat, and which was also freezing for the two truck drivers. Their first trucks had neither heating in the cab nor chilling in the back, so they had to cover the windows with glycerin to keep the frost away. Sometimes the journey back and forth, including stops at various pick-up points, would take as much as a week.

In the late 1950s, Severin's partner on the west coast died, and Severin took charge of the local slaughterhouse, in effect establishing what would become the Fatland company's central business strategy: Building a strong regional presence on the west coast in order to serve the market in the capital and other major cities. This strategy has proven extremely successful for the Fatlands: Today, their company is Norway's biggest private slaughter and meat packing company, after several decades of taking market shares from smaller businesses.

We were intrigued by the Fatland company's history, so we got in touch with one of Rasmus' great-grandsons, Svein, who is now the managing director of the company. Despite being the manager of a multimillion kroner company, Svein sported blue overalls and spoke in the thick accent typical of his part of the country.

You know, in the old days, there were no more than 500 or 1000 people in many of the small villages around here, but each one had a dairy and a slaughtering facility. The trouble was that none of them had access to a proper market. They could try to get to Bergen or Stavanger [cities on the west coast], but they could not reach Oslo. So our access to this market has really been the key to our operation.

Fatland grew *because* of this lack of access – since they were able to fill the vacuum left by the smaller actors, who had been forced to give up. Svein underlines that when many of the small actors found themselves in a trying situation, this was also, in part, due to a wave of official regulations and requirements that washed over farmers and slaughterers in the 1950s and 1960s:

There were new rules about classification of animals, there were farmers' settlements and subsidies, and there was plenty of administration,

what with the Food Safety Authority and the VAT, which was introduced at this time ... and it all become too much for many of the small operators, who no longer managed to keep up the pace, so to speak. And so the small slaughterhouses disappeared.¹

By 1959, Fatland had built a new and more modern slaughterhouse in the vicinity of the old one, maintaining the steady stream of carcasses heading to Oslo.

The Fatland family also had another idea, however, which set them apart from the rest: Rather than running carcasses to Oslo and driving back to Western Norway with empty trucks, they would fill their westbound vehicles with livestock, which they brought back to the farms on the coast. In this way, they provided a steady supply of high-quality livestock and new animal breeds to the farmers in Western Norway, slowly and steadily improving the quality of the end product that the very same farmers would want them to slaughter. Svein explained how this had worked:

At one point we got some local farmers to build some huge pigs' houses, a couple of thousand animals in each, which were almost like factories, and we went to Eastern Norway to supply them with animals, and to follow them up. And this, of course, was to our mutual benefit: We got more animals to slaughter, and they got more business.

In this, and in many other ways, the Fatlands created a network of loyal farmers. One thing they did was to allow farmers to pay for livestock with credit that lasted until their next batch of animals was sent to slaughter.

The Fatland company faced its own problems, though. There were trivial ones, like when the company, in the 1960s, took a downturn because a couple of the Fatland brothers who were stationed in Oslo had grown a bit too fond of partying. As Svein recounts:

Well, there were these two brothers, and they had been placed in Oslo to sell meat, but then, after each sale, they came into the habit of going for a drink, and so there was too many pints and parties for a while there, and the business took a turn for the worse.

The problem was solved easily, however, when Svein's uncle replaced the two brothers, and got the Oslo side of the business back on track.

The bigger challenge for the company was structural, more specifically the growing dominance of the slaughtering cooperative. "At this time," Svein told us, "the coop grew, and built a series of new facilities. Today there's only one cooperative company, Nortura, but back then, there was one in each county." Svein explained that one important occasion for the growth and consolidation of the cooperatives from the late 1950s onwards was the so-called *omsetningsavgiften* (the marketing tax), which had first been

established in 1935,² in order to regulate the market. Before the war, meat had been a difficult commodity, in that it was difficult to calibrate supply to demand. In order to regulate the price, ensuring both a predictable income for the farmer and steady price for the consumer, the farmers paid a tax on selling their meat which, in turn, was used to offset market fluctuations. This tax dovetailed with technological development, since the increasing use of cooling and freezing allowed slaughterers and meat sellers to freeze meat in excess of demand and put it onto market when demand was back up.

The cooperatives were put in charge of managing this fee, and were even allowed to use part of it to build cooling and freezing facilities, so it became very difficult for people like my grandfather, in the private meat industry, to compete. From the 1960s onwards, the private industry was weakened, and this was made all the worse in the 1980s, with rising wages and whatnot. The result was that, around 2000, the private meat industry in Norway was more or less broken.

Fatland survived, he explains, mainly due to a loyal customer base and also, because they in the 1980s shifted to producing brand products. Starting in the 1970s, animal carcasses were no longer sold whole or in large parts from butcher shops, but were increasingly cut and prepared at the slaughterhouse and adjacent facilities, and packaged for the consumer, to be sold in supermarkets. While the influx of machinery into the slaughterhouse had been ongoing for a couple of decades already, radically transforming the craft of slaughtering into an industry, the move to cutting and brand product preparation and packaging entailed a need for further industrial specialization. Now, increasingly, each facility would begin to focus on a particular type of meat product, and a new, large facility that Fatland had built, in 1974, was refitted for the purpose of cutting and brand production.

Although Fatland adapted better than most private meat businesses, it found itself, around the year 2000, approaching bankruptcy. At this point, however, the large supermarket chains, which had taken over most all of Norway's food retail market, realized that the weak position of the private meat industry in Norway was not to their benefit: If the chains did not act to "save" the private industry, they would be left with only a single supplier – the cooperative – with which to negotiate quality and price. Consequently, the chains began developing their own meat brands, and approached Fatland with a request to produce them. Twenty years later, the chains' ambition of capturing ten percent of the Norwegian meat market has been more than exceeded, as their brands now command around 44 percent of the market.

This tremendous growth has trickled more than a little on Fatland, which has grown to become the largest private actor in this market, a

local Norwegian equivalent of the colossal meatpacking companies abroad. The development during the last couple of decades was made possible not just by Fatland's partnership with the chains, but also, importantly, through an accelerating technological development. Svein told us that, in the last ten years, they have doubled the output per employee, a clear sign of the automatization of slaughterhouse labor – which, according to Svein, will not stop any time soon, as he is expecting another doubling in the coming seven years. New machines allow reduced wage costs, explained Svein, but also enhance the quality and aesthetics of the product, and are also a key to adapting the supply of meat products to demand, which is something that has been in constant development during the last couple of decades. Furthermore, the increasing importance of machinery has also added to the existing tendency toward consolidation in the meat industry:

To give you a couple of examples, to cut beef steaks to a set weight, we use a machine that costs 7 million kroner. And we are now developing a smoking line here, to smoke bacon and other products, where we are going to use 10–12 workers, and it costs 35–40 million kroner. It is just so amazing. And we have a minced meat line too, where we make half-kilo packs; we have three guys on it, and this line makes 5 tonnes worth of minced meat an hour – it is ground, cooled, packed, labeled, put in transport containers, placed on pallets, and prepared for pick-up by the driver. And for this, we use no more than three guys!

The story of the Fatlands, an entrepreneurial pair of brothers and their sons, who became Fatland, the industrial meat and slaughterhouse corporation, encapsulates how the context surrounding the act of killing animals has changed during the last 100 years or so. When the Fatlands first started out, slaughter was carried out all over the country, on innumerable farms in every nook and cranny of the long Norwegian territory. Slaughter was seasonal, and invariably involved a small number of animals. While a movement to modernize slaughter had by this time slowly begun to take shape, remnants of superstitious rituals that surrounded the act of killing animals still abounded; the killing of animals involved parting with a sentient creature with which one had lived and cared for over some time – almost like a member of the household.

During the period in which the company has existed, however, slaughter gradually disappeared from farms, and would increasingly be performed by professionals – and later, largely by machines – inside large-scale slaughterhouses. Today, slaughter is big business, and Fatland is an example of the enormous growth and consolidation of slaughter worldwide as part of the meatification process. As one historian of the modern slaughterhouses argues, this institution has today become “a social instrument” that responds

“to the demands of a gargantuan belly,” consequently producing “serial death along with saleable meat.”³

The industrialization of animal killing dramatically changed the relation between those being killed and those doing the killing, since there was no longer any bond to speak of, no history, no shared household. Over time, animals up for slaughter became rather more like raw material to be processed in factories – epitomized by the conveyor belt, which would become a key technology in the industrialization of slaughter. This shift exemplifies most perfectly what we have called the three axes of alienation.

First, the movement of the act of slaughter from multiple farms distributed all across the country into large slaughterhouses involved *spatial* alienation. Naturally, there were much fewer slaughterhouses than farms, so the shift meant quite simply that the killing of animals would now take place at a much smaller number of sites. This trend has continued all the way up to today, where the animals we eat are killed at very few sites indeed. This obviously entails that each of us live farther from a site of animal killing than what used to be the case – and that is so also because slaughterhouses are no longer located in city centers. The shift from on-farm slaughter to slaughterhouses also entailed another type of movement, namely from outdoors to indoors – making it harder for the most people to witness the act of slaughter. These two aspects have, in turn, been exacerbated by the fact that slaughterhouses over time have grown to be bigger, but fewer, so that the number of sites for slaughter has gone even further down, as the slaughter business has industrialized. What is more, a whole range of laws and regulations have made access to these sites ever more restricted, and today, very few people have ever visited a slaughterhouse, and not many have ever seen an animal be killed.

Furthermore, the development we describe in what follows has entailed a *social* alienation, first in the sense that we no longer spend any time caring for and living with the animals we kill for food, but also because we no longer kill them or witness their killing ourselves. While slaughtering an animal and dressing its carcass used to be skills that a great number had some knowledge of – even if they did not necessarily master and perform these acts themselves – professionalized slaughter would increasingly take over the act of killing. This meant, among other things, that the detailed knowledge of animal bodies that one expected housewives to have – which was a parallel form of professionalism – was marginalized, as women moved into the workforce. And then, with increasing mechanization, even the slaughterer’s set of skills was changed, and arguably reduced, as this occupation came to resemble increasingly that of the factory worker: Today, most of them spend their days performing a distinct, mechanical task at a designated spot on a conveyor belt. In fact, this development toward skill fragmentation has gone so far that one does not always know who actually kills the animal.

This confusion surrounding who actually kills the increasing number of animals consumed each year is exacerbated by the fact that the moral

responsibility for animal killing has increasingly been taken over by a legal framework, wherein a vocabulary of ordinances and regulations replace the rituals of old. The legal framing of the issue tells the average Norwegian that they do not have to consider the issue; laws, regulations, inspections, and controls are already making sure that slaughter happens in a civilized and respectful manner. The result is that slaughter plays a truly *miniscule* role in contemporary Norwegian culture; most people pay it no mind, and when they very occasionally do, the purpose tends to be to denigrate certain “others,” whose slaughtering practices, unlike ours, bear remnants of the ritual.

The various factors that have removed slaughter from our everyday lives has led, we argue, to a situation where consumers are hardly ever reminded of the animal death – its scale or its manner – required to maintain our contemporary carnivorous lifestyle. What we have referred to as denial of the animal origin of meat appears to rest quite heavily, then, on our distancing – our *alienation* – from the sites, the skills, and the rituals involved in killing animals.

Paul McCartney once famously said that if slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian. While we are not necessarily convinced he was right, the fact that slaughterhouses do *not* have glass walls – and that the act of killing is, in fact, actively and in multiple ways removed from sight – is certainly a prerequisite for our contemporary meat culture.

“Die! This Is Why You Are Here”

In most places where meat is part of the diet, people have felt a need to place the killing of animals into a context where their deaths gain meaning, and to make sure this meaning is widely shared and accepted: The living, breathing creature must be transformed – not just physically, but symbolically – into inert matter fit for consumption. The *animal* must be made *edible*, to cite a telling book title.⁴ We should not be perplexed by this need for symbolic transformation: After all, the animals we eat are much like us, and up until fairly recently, people’s everyday lives were lived in close proximity to these animals, who were often considered members of the household. And it only stands to reason that we are reluctant to kill and eat our family members.

A central characteristic of our present meat culture is that it fails to perform this symbolic transformation, allowing us instead to avert our gaze from animal deaths altogether. To end up in this situation, our culture had to shed the various rituals that, in previous times, circumscribed the killing of animals. To envelop animal killing in rituals was a widely used cultural mechanism which allowed Norwegians of old to cope with the transition from caretaking to lifetaking. This tendency was not, however, peculiar to Norway; in fact, various cultures have erected different rituals, taboos, and traditions that helped remove some of the moral and emotional burden of the killing.⁵

According to historian Keith Thomas, rituals were used to reduce the possibility of things not going as planned; rituals were used, in other words, to appease providence. In his classic work, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas explains how rituals provide confidence and grant agency and control to those involved in a practice. A magical rite, Thomas wrote, “lessens anxiety, relieves pent-up frustration, and makes the practitioner feel that he is doing something positive towards the solution of his problem.”⁶ Magic, chants, blessings, and other rituals help bridge the gap between what a person can control and what they cannot control. Slaughter was considered an action where many things could go wrong, and the farm’s economy was dependent on this process going well. People were dealing with matters of life and death: Those involved had to change from caretakers to lifetakers, and ensure that the meat did not, for any reason, spoil. Any action that could tip the scales of fortune was crucial.

According to the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, another function of rituals is to transfer blame and responsibility from an individual to the collective.⁷ We find examples of this from Norway, where the killing of so called “soul-animals,” such as horses, cats, and dogs, was taboo.⁸ There were two ways of solving the fact that killing such animals had to take place every now and again. One of them was to offer the community an escape from the problem, by letting outsiders do the deed: A special class of slaughterers, called *rakkere* – who lived almost as untouchables, ambulating in the countryside – offered to slaughter and skin the animals that no one else would kill. In remote rural places, where there was no *rakker*, another solution came into play: The community would agree that everyone had to somehow partake in the process, so that no one in particular could be blamed for the deed.⁹ This coincides with what the anthropologist Victor Turner claimed: that rituals could be used to appease conflicting social norms.¹⁰ On one hand, slaughtering a horse was taboo, on the other, occasionally it still had to be carried out, and by introducing a ritual, the opposing norms of *not doing* something and *doing it after all* ensured that a heinous deed nevertheless became socially acceptable. Because the community regarded the slaughter of a horse with disgust, the ritualization of its slaughter (which included everyone on the farm) nevertheless allowed the deed to take place. Rituals were thus tools of agency in situations where people would rather not act, and slaughter was often just such a situation.

While the role of rituals in making the animal edible appears to be a transcultural phenomenon, one finds rather *different* rituals, taboos, and traditions in particular cultural contexts, and even, that adherence to a particular set of animal killing practices is often tied to identity. Jonathan Burt even argues that “the manner in which we adhere to this or that mode of animal slaughter is one of the constituting elements of our particular social identity.”¹¹

In Norway, the tendency to envelop slaughter in various rituals goes far back in history, and many of the old slaughtering practices were recorded

by the Norwegian cultural historian and folklorist, Nils Lid. He was himself the son of a slaughterer, but he would become Norway's first professor of ethnology, and among his research interests were the customary precautions relating to slaughter.¹² A key aspect of his research on slaughter was to document the prevalence, in the traditional Norwegian farming society, of a belief in reciprocal agency between animals and people.¹³

Although slaughter was part of the annual calendar within any traditional rural society, it was still an *extraordinary* part of this cycle. Like other important peaks of the annual calendar, such as sowing or harvesting grain, various customs and rituals surrounded slaughter, which were connected to each of the phases of the process: preparation, slaughter, and butchering. While the slaughter of large animals like cows, bulls, and horses was most often left to professionals, it was common for Norwegian farmers, well into the 1960s, to slaughter sheep, goats, and pigs for private consumption.¹⁴ They were small enough to handle even for someone without professional skills. Animals were friends and companions, and it was even common for animals to be blessed, christened, and given personal names.¹⁵ Yet the time would come when the animal would have to change from friend into food.

In good time before slaughter, one had to make sure that any unwanted traits from the animal were not passed on to humans through the consumption of its meat. For instance, male animals were usually gelded. This was particularly important for bucks and rams. The practical reason was that the rut would make the meat taste bad, but the practice was also tied to a belief that was prevalent at the time: In the same way that a man would take on the strength of a bull by drinking its blood,¹⁶ he could become horny like a ram by eating the meat of an uncastrated ram. In some districts, an unruly and promiscuous girl would be called a goat.¹⁷ These traits might have been unwanted because they posed a threat to the social structure and stability of society, and social control was important.

Many such practices lived on in Norwegian culture for quite some time. Admittedly, in many cases, they were probably passed on merely as relicts of the past, perhaps even tongue in cheek, but it is nevertheless significant that they surface so amply in the ethnological sources from the period 1917 to 1950. Some practices were continued simply because they were tradition, while others were carried out due to a strong belief that it was better to be safe than sorry when dealing with important things in life.

Before slaughtering could take place, the timing had to be right. Again, there were practical reasons for this: After the bounty of summer came the harsh winter, and it made sense to limit the number of animals to feed during the cold months. Timing was also important, and often moon cycles were observed, as it was considered best to slaughter during the first quarter of the waxing moon; people believed the meat was at its fattest this time of the month.¹⁸ Slaughter at flow tide was also deemed beneficial, because something filling up rather than running out seemed good.¹⁹ Since those who lived far from the coast could observe the ebb and flow of the sea only with

great difficulty, various ideas about assessing the tides could be found. For instance, there was a belief that goats' eyes changed during flow, and this could be observed and taken into account when deciding when to slaughter.²⁰ Finally, certain days were more beneficial than others, and the ordinance against breaking the Sabbath made Saturday night through Monday morning a bad time for slaughter. The term *griseotta* (pig-early) refers to getting up in the middle of the night – a relic from when pig-slaughter was carried out this early. It was important to get up early so there would be enough daylight to finish the whole process.²¹

Once the time of slaughter was established, other rituals needed to be observed. Slaughtering was a serious and risky undertaking, and needed to be assisted by magical precaution. Precautions were necessary to prevent small misfortunes, like a particular piece of meat spoiling, but more existential matters were also at stake, not least one's so-called *krøtterlykke*, that is, one's good fortune in animal husbandry. Pregnant women had to stay away. Menstruating women should also keep to themselves, as there was a belief that their mere presence could taint the meat.²²

People dealing with animals often made small offerings to fairies or to fortune. Everyone attending the slaughter had to be absolutely silent; this was a solemn act. No strangers could be present, as they might look at the beast with jealousy or the evil eye, and thus magically spoil the animal's meat. Another rule was not to feel sorry for the animal being led to slaughter. Children would be scolded if they shed tears, because this would lengthen the animals' suffering, making its death long and painful: If one felt sorry for the animal, it was believed that it would understand what was coming, and hence would refuse to let go of its blood. The blood would, in turn, coagulate, and spoil the meat. If one felt pity for the animal, this was admitting that it was not right to kill it.²³

Indeed, taking pity on the animal about to be slaughtered was not a prevalent issue in the material we have studied: In Lindås, outside Bergen, an informant states that “they thought that if you chased the animal before you slaughtered it, the blood would leave the body faster. So the pigs were ridden hard before they were slayed.” In Fjærland, in South-West Norway, “one would pull at the harness, the other in the tail, and they would pull the pig around and upset it so it would bleed a lot.” A bit further west, in Gulen: “[t]hey pulled the pig and topped it over until it was totally exhausted.” Perhaps the most disturbing quote comes from the south of Norway, from Håland in Jæren:

Before the [time of the] enclosures, the village would share a pig and would take turns feeding it. When it was time to slaughter it, the whole village got together. It was time to “knead” it. They would get sticks and rods and would beat and whip it, they would run around the farmhouses and across the fields, beating it when they could, and when they

finally had kneaded it well enough, they would beat it with sticks until it collapsed.

Then they would say: "This is not for hate, but for food," to confirm that it was right to kill it.²⁴ Similar practices can be found in the unpublished material later in the period.²⁵ A source from Sweden says that if it took too long before the animal died, the person who held the rope should shout: "Die! This is why you are here."²⁶ Before stabbing the animal, it was common to say, as a kind of blessing: "In the name of Jesus." The slaughterer could also say: "Glorify my stroke." Other blessings were physical in nature, and involved drawing a cross on the animal's back with a piece of coal, or crossing its forehead with a hand movement.

Until the early 1900s, it was common to strangle smaller animals such as sheep and even pigs by hanging them. Pigs were scalded while they were hanging. In certain areas, newborn calves were deemed unclean, and were slaughtered at a different site on the farm, away from the usual place of slaughter. There are descriptions of hanging and in part skinning calves before slitting their throats, and also accounts of decapitation.²⁷ Another practice was to bleed the animal to death, by slitting it open without stunning it. Slitting or bleeding animals without stunning was a practice common all over Norway, and was not restricted to certain districts. It was maintained the longest with pigs. Accounts also describe scalding the pig around the neck before slitting its throat. In fact there are several references to scalding the pig before its life ebbed out, since pig's bristle was supposedly easier to remove on a live animal. Later in the century, larger animals were stunned while smaller animals were still simply stabbed with a knife. The variation in terminology reflects this, as larger animals are "beaten" while smaller animals were "slaughtered."²⁸ The blood of the animal was also part of some rituals, and occasionally, blood from some animals was ritually drunk by the slaughterer as it spewed out of the wound. The informants who commented on this ritual maintained it was something hunters and semi-professional slaughterers did to demonstrate bravery, rather than a common practice among farmers.

A certain part of the heart (the *auricula cordis*) of any slaughtered animal was cut off and thrown away. It was not, like other unwanted offal, fed to the pig or to domestic foxes kept for fur, it was simply cut off and discarded. None of the informants in the source material know why this was done. However, a well-argued explanation traces it to a pagan offering to either the Norse god Odin or the god Ull: It is called "the raven's bit" (Odin had two ravens that would keep him informed about everything in the world) or Ullsøyro (Ull's ear).²⁹ The spleen was also disposed of in this manner. Several other rituals were carried out while the butchering took place. A part of cartilage connected to the ribs was cut off and thrown with force against a wall. If it stuck it meant good fortune. A cross was scored in the liver using the butcher knife. These practices were still carried out in the 1950s.³⁰



Figure 2.1 Farm slaughter of a pig.

Photographer: Dagfinn Grønøset.

Source: Anno Glomdalsmuseet.

In the material we have studied, we find a constant underlying anxiety about provoking destiny and chance which is often solved by a small offering. One of the informants warns that it is dangerous to make use of “the animal or animal parts that *should be wasted*,” as this may lead to death and destruction.³¹ By observing a set of rituals, a certain balance between taking and giving from nature is maintained. Again, it was important to play along with the forces of fate, and to give the required offering.³²

Many of the practices, customs, or rituals described by these informants suggest that the human-animal relationship was so close that it became problematic when slaughter day was approaching. Some sort of symbolic transformation had to take place. For instance, the beating and chasing ritual

described above may have been a way of transforming the animal from a subject with personhood, which had been fed and probably cherished by the whole village, to an edible object devoid of sentience. The collective beating might be a way of beating this personhood or soul out of the animal.³³ It was a social ritual, which ensured that no single individual would have to be responsible for eating an animal friend; a ritual of maltreatment transformed the friend to foe, and this ritual was acted out collectively.

Most of the rituals we have just described would over time disappear in Norway, as part of the complex process of modernization. This process was closely tied to urbanization and social division of labor, which meant that, over time, a growing number of people would no longer have the everyday experience of caring for, or killing, the animals that become their food. Instead, animal killing would become a specialized function, circumscribed by professional norms and regulations – leaving most meat-eaters alienated from the practice, the experience, and the skills involved in killing an animal.

Civilizing Slaughter

The first impetus toward greater regulation of slaughter came with the building of public slaughterhouses in cities, wherein the process of killing could be monitored and controlled, thereby limiting on-farm slaughter. As historian Dorothee Brantz notes, slaughterhouse reforms were carried out all over Europe in the 19th century, starting with the first public slaughterhouse in Paris in 1818, and spreading to most major cities of Europe as the century progressed. These reforms were driven forth by a program of urban development, where issues of disease, hygiene, and food safety had become central concerns.³⁴

The concerns that motivated the establishment of public slaughterhouses in Norway were much the same as those elsewhere in Europe, though here, it happened somewhat later than on the continent. On the old Norwegian farm, slaughter usually took place in autumn, when there was a surplus to be had after summer's bounty – or incidentally also at other times of the year, when there was an opportunity to sell or need to eat an animal. In many cases, animal carcasses were sold from the farm itself, but animals were also driven alive to towns and cities, and increasingly so as the country was urbanized. In such cases, the animals were slaughtered somewhere fairly close to the market, which was practical in terms of transport. They were driven by drovers, and walked on their own four legs to the destination of their killing. What was practical in a farmyard, however, was less so in a town. On a farm, the unwanted parts of offal would often be fed to the pigs, and spillage from urine, manure, and blood was returned to the nutrient cycle of the farm itself. In towns and cities, this constituted a problem. The polluting remains of slaughter attracted dogs, rats, flies, and other vermin – and this kind of pollution was not only an aesthetic and hygienic concern, but also a food safety issue: The animals themselves might be infested with

parasites that could be transferred to humans, and a lack of hygiene during slaughter meant that various bacterial pathogens would thrive.

The first public slaughterhouse in Norway was established in Kristiansund, in North-Western Norway, where we learn, from a 1896 letter to the editor of the newspaper *Romsdals Amtstidene*, about the results of urbanization combined with unregulated slaughter. The letter writer expressed severe grievances about the two new slaughter venues that had been placed behind the town of Kristiansund's main church. Slaughter waste was simply left outside the slaughter venue, and dogs were seen running about town with slimy strings of entrails and other unspeakable animal parts dangling from their jaws. Not only were the townspeople forced to witness such disgusting sights, they could also smell what was going on. In fact, there was no legislation to separate the townspeople from the odor of death, which must have been a particularly despicable situation because of the geography of the slaughter venue. They had set up shop right behind the church and cemetery, and according to the critic, "such a stench of warm blood mixed with the stench of old offal etc. is neither healthy nor respectable for the town."³⁵

Just a couple of months later a resolution was made to build the first municipal slaughterhouse in Norway. It would be a modern facility in which local slaughterers rented a table and paid a fee per animal killed, which was deducted from the price the farmer was given for his animal. The municipal slaughterhouse in Kristiansund opened for business in 1898, and all farmers within the town's area were required to use slaughterers who would kill their animals here – though exceptions were made for pigs and calves slaughtered for home consumption.³⁶ The charge per animal was so high, however, that both slaughterers and farmers found ways of avoiding the municipal slaughterhouse, so as to go about their business as before. Pigs were as a rule slaughtered "for home consumption" to avoid the per pig tax, or the slaughter would be carried out on farms outside the town's catchment area, where the legislation and associated duty did not apply. The scale of rural slaughter therefore remained high: In 1907, as little as 15 percent of all meat that was slaughtered and checked by the municipal veterinary in Kristiansund had actually been slaughtered at the municipal slaughterhouse, a number that remained unchanged until the 1950s.³⁷

Nationally, a major event was the decision to establish a municipal slaughterhouse in the capital, Kristiania. Here, as elsewhere, meat had been sold in the slaughterhouses' own stores or by sellers on the town squares. The main site in the capital was Nytorvet – later renamed Youngstorvet – where meat would be sold in open air all year round – just as Rasmus Fatland did when he first came to the capital.³⁸ When a set of new regulations from the late 1800s and early 1900s banned the sale of meat from private slaughter, this created a demanding situation for farmers, who were left with fewer options. The city would soon be dotted with small slaughtering businesses, not all of which were particularly neat. In the decades leading up to the 20th century, Kristiania was in a period of intense growth, and was quickly becoming a

key site for the processing of animals into meat. Slaughter was increasingly becoming a large-scale activity, and the urban consequences of slaughter were growing ever more apparent – not to say annoying. As the municipal slaughterhouse was about to open, in 1913, the newspaper *Aftenposten* wrote:

It is well known that the condition of private slaughterhouses in this city have made it a sanitary necessity to move beyond the present state, as they, by their location, were a great annoyance to their surroundings. Conditions have been wretched and primitive, unworthy of a big city. It is apparent that meat from animals slaughtered in tight, miserable, and overfilled (and for that reason insufficiently cleaned) venues, will be a less valuable and healthy food than meat produced under good conditions. In addition, animals for sale and slaughter are also kept in tight and miserable styes and byres. The new central slaughtering facility with the adjacent cowmarket, which was opened yesterday, is a definitive step out of this accumulation of sanitary wretchedness, over into timely and modern care.³⁹

As the piece clearly indicates, the building of Kristiania Meat Hall, in 1908, and the municipal slaughterhouse, which was completed in 1914, were



Figure 2.2 Oslo Slaughterhouse, interior, ca. 1935.

Source: Oslo Museum.

signals of a new and more hygienic – even a more civilized – era. Its architecture symbolized new and modern times, as it enabled industry, efficiency, and better working conditions. The Meat Hall was an imposing art nouveau building reminiscent of Victorian era train stations. These industrial buildings were carefully planned and constructed to maximize throughput and productivity. Kristiania’s slaughterhouse incorporated a vaulted roof which supported the multiple suspended steel rails on which the gambrels and meat hooks, hung with carcasses, could be moved through the butchery process. The roofs were also designed with large sky and roof lights which provided natural light supplemented by electric lighting. Both light sources improved working conditions and lengthened the winter working day. The decorative, arched, glazed lintels above the entrance doors, influenced by Georgian fan lights, also increased light into the building. Photographs of the slaughterhouse also show water taps and slop drains in the floors for sluicing down work areas, fretted interior windows to aid the flow of air and dispersal of smells and easily cleaned tiled walls.

This architecture signaled modernity and progress in every way, and alongside the other public slaughterhouses that were built in Norway around the same time, it was one of several indications that Norwegians had begun an effort toward “civilizing slaughter.”⁴⁰ As Jonathan Burt argues, legal ordinances concerning slaughter in the late 1800s and early 1900s grew from an impulse that was at once humanitarian and economic: So-called “humane slaughter,” which was identified not least by its requirement to stun animals before slaughter, removed needless infliction of pain. At the same time, it entailed a tidier, more efficient, and more hygienic slaughtering process.⁴¹

In one book, from 1917, about the “care and keeping of animals,” the old ways were criticized in no uncertain terms, and a new and more enlightened way of thinking about animals was laid out. “The quality and nutritional value of the meat depends significantly on the treatment to which the animal has been subjected before and after the slaughter,” the author pointed out, and added that rest was good while stress was bad: “Meat from tired and strained animals is neither so delicate nor so fit for human consumption as meat from healthy, well-rested animals.”

For that reason, an animal meant for slaughter should have at least a day’s rest before it is killed. To let the animal starve the last day of its life is cruel, and can only bring loss [...] The old slaughtering ways, in which the animals in their lengthy death struggles must endure the most horrible suffering, is unworthy of sensible people. Slaughter is in itself a grim thing, but under these circumstances, it is a barbaric form of cruelty to animals. Therefore, we must introduce new and easier ways of slaughter. Considering that the meat, as mentioned, is better and less perishable when the animal is killed swiftly and without pain, this issue is also of economic importance. *And likewise for the animals, it is our undeniable duty to slaughter them as swiftly and as painlessly as possible.*⁴²

The two motives elaborated here, economy and animal suffering, were couched in a wider rationale of *civilization* – that is, of finding “sensible” and “rational” ways to rise above the vulgar horrors of animal killing. The phrase “slaughter is in itself a grim thing” gives us a hint. As the author specified, slaughter was not something to be performed openly and as a spectacle: “At slaughter, there should not be more people present that absolutely necessary,” he wrote, adding that, “Children should never be present or help in this work.” The owner of the animal should feel a duty to be present, or to see to it that some other “completely reliable person” could, so as to “make sure that no unnecessary suffering is placed on the animal at its time of death.” Interestingly, the growing prohibition against performing slaughter in plain sight would now also be applied to other animals. “*No animal is to be killed with other animals as onlookers, or in the immediate proximity,*” as they could “sense the approaching threat, and at the tiniest incident be struck by fright and fear of dying.”⁴³

The most significant practical expression of these sentiments was, of course, stunning, and this author did in fact go on to write that, “When slaughtering large animals, one should use either a so-called bouterole or a rifle action bouterole.” In a neat integration of practicality and morality, the author emphasized how these tools would simplify slaughter, while removing suffering in the process:

With the bouterole the animal is stunned in such a way that an iron nail, upon a single stroke with a club, is driven into the animal’s brain. The animal immediately falls down, unconscious. After the stroke, the mask is removed. [...] The rifle action bouterole is easier to use than the bouterole. The animal is, in this case, not simply stunned, but falls dead to the ground at the moment the shot is fired.⁴⁴

The swiftness (and hence economy) of the kill, and the implications this had for the animal’s suffering, were presented not just as a progress of sentiments, but as an advance or reason – and in concert, sense and sensibility formed the broader ideal of civilization. Clean and orderly stunning, in designated ways and sites, was the civilized thing to do, while the alternatives were typically rendered as *cruel* or *barbaric*.

One can today buy rifle action bouteroles with a safety device in the stores, and when slaughtering cattle, the rifle action bouterole is the best option. After the animal is stunned or killed, the carotid arteries are slit, at which point the letting of blood begins. *To pierce or slit the animal without preceding stunning is a horrible form of cruelty to animals.*⁴⁵

In the last couple of decades of the 19th century, and the first of the 20th century, ideas like these would spread, and before long, they made their way into legislation. After the British installed their “Protection of Animals

Act,” in 1911, and the Danes did likewise in 1916, a momentum arose also in Norway to establish proper laws for the protection of animals. There had been certain provisions in existing laws; for instance, in the Norwegian general penal code of 1842, abuse of “creatures” was disallowed, and in the one from 1902, “gross or evil abuse of all animals” was criminalized. Then, in 1920, the phrase “gross or evil” was removed, “making all abuse [of animals] a punishable crime.”⁴⁶ In 1929, stunning was made obligatory, and in 1935, Norway got its first, proper Animal Protection Act, which actually attracted international attention for some of its progressive clauses. The central paragraph held that, “One is to take good care of animals and consider their instincts and natural needs, so that they do not risk suffering needlessly.”⁴⁷

The Act of 1935 is an expression of emerging notions of animal welfare. The determination about instincts and natural needs, for instance, clearly recalls the views laid out in the manuals for keeping pigs or poultry which we reviewed in the previous chapter, where farmers were advised to accommodate to the animals’ needs in every way. That said, ideas about how animals should be kept and killed were never uniform, and in the 1920s and 1930s, there were certain tensions between progressive forces, among them those who were responsible for the Act, and forces perceived to be decidedly less so. The farming – and slaughtering – population had, in short, to be civilized. Certain centrally placed actors in the agricultural sector confessed distrust in the average Norwegian farmer’s willingness and ability to embody the new and progressive program – and this became especially clear around the issue of slaughter.

An illustration can be found in a booklet on slaughter which was first published by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1923, and then in a second edition in 1938, where the public veterinarian, E. Laukvik, regretfully pointed out that, “Unfortunately, there are still only a few slaughterhouses in this country, and in many places, people have to slaughter at home, both for their own consumption and to sell.” His little book, called *Heimeslaktning* (Home Slaughter), was intended as a short guide to “those who have to do home slaughter but who are not professionally trained as slaughterers.”⁴⁸ The Director of Agriculture wrote a foreword to the book, where it transpired that the injunctions it contained were motivated in part by utilitarian-economic concerns, and in part by moral ones:

Norwegian meat sellers often get a low price, because the meat is presented in a poor condition. This is due in part to incompetent slaughtering, and in part to careless packaging and inadequate transport. As long as more attention is not devoted to such circumstances, Norwegian farmers will continue to forfeit a great deal of profit. The killing of animals is often done in such a way that needless suffering is inflicted upon them. This is a form of animal abuse which cannot be excused, as it can easily be avoided with some care and caution. The present text aims to

better these conditions, as far as both the humanitarian and the economic aspects are concerned.⁴⁹

The book's author went on to give a series of concrete requirements and suggestions of quite different kinds, which can be understood as aspects of the ideal of civilized slaughter. On the practical side of things, Laukvik explained that the animals needed to rest for a specific period of time before being killed, otherwise the meat would be tough and more perishable. He also listed the practical requirements for performing slaughter in a clean and orderly fashion, by making lists of the necessary equipment: "Tools to keep at hand include: gun, axe, sharp knife, saw, butcher's bench, pulley; tray, bucket and whisk for the blood; a cart or a trough for the entrails; washbasin, soap, towels, and plenty of water." At the same time, he emphasized the need for humane treatment of the animal to be slaughtered: "The law mandates that when slaughtering livestock or reindeer, the animal is to be stunned before the bloodletting. The effect of the stunning should be so immediate that the animal loses consciousness before any sensation of pain sets in." The moral injunction was somewhat more complex than simply to avoid inflicting pain upon the animal, however, as the author adds:

During the killing, other livestock and children under the age of 14 must not be present. A slaughtered animal should not be flayed, scalded or ribbed until one can ascertain death. The slaughter should be performed by an adult and, as far as possible, by a competent person.⁵⁰

With the new Animal Protection Act of 1935, which shifted the weight somewhat from injunctions against abuse of animals toward a positive obligation for their welfare, the principle of humane treatment of animals was firmly established in Norway. The law was intermixed, however, with a more fluid concept of civilization – which said that to treat animals as one had in the past amounted to a form of barbarism, a vulgarity. It was certainly not the kind of thing one would want children to witness.

The act of killing animals increasingly became something to be "cleaned up," and the main way to do so was to make it into a professional practice, which was performed by specially trained people (slaughterers) at designated sites (public slaughterhouses). This process did not remove animal killing, but it did remove animal killing *from sight*. As Chris Otter points out, this process is thus part of what the sociologist Norbert Elias called the civilizing process, where, "Civilization [...] advances by distancing itself not from killing itself but from the perception and reminder of it."⁵¹

Bloody Farmwives

Although slaughter, in the early 1900s, was brought into more ordered and regulated – more *civilized* – forms, this change remained, for the most part,

an urban one. Slaughter was still a common, and a fairly traditional, event on many Norwegian farms. In rural Norway, slaughter was part of the farmwife's many tasks, and was still very much associated with the annual agricultural cycle – an autumnal activity starting at the end of the grazing season and coming to a close with the slaughter of the farm's pig before Christmas. Slaughter was an important part of the home economy, and although the men typically performed the actual killing, slaughter also required the involvement, and indeed the skills, of the women on the farm.

We can gain a certain understanding of the traditional farmwife's role in slaughter and butchering work by exploring textbooks from home economics colleges, since these books were written to equip housewives with the skills needed to run a household. Because of the historical context in which these books came on the scene, however, they tell us just as much about how the farmwife's labor with meat changed in the first half of the 1900s.⁵² The home economics colleges themselves are interesting testaments to change: They evolved in the wake of an international trend which focused on a particular kind of women's liberation, where the agenda was to educate women, appreciate their work, and professionalize that work by establishing formal education in the form of home economics schools.⁵³ The purpose of these schools was not simply to preserve the old ways, but to modernize them. Incidentally, Norway's national league of home economics teachers was established in 1914, just a year after Norway awarded women universal suffrage.⁵⁴

Home economics textbooks were instruments to professionalize and formalize rural skills that up to this point has been transferred informally from mother to daughter. There was still an emphasis, in these books, on the benefits of the autumn slaughter as part of a traditional agricultural cycle, but at the same time, there were calls to dissolve this cycle, for practical and economic reasons. Finally, the discourse of these books revolved around a program of civilizing slaughter which, as we saw in the previous section, also motivated new regulations in the cities, emphasizing aspects of animal protection before the associated legislation was in place.

Slaughter was no marginal task for the housewife. In the introduction to the text book *Slagtebok (Slaughter Book)*, which was published in 1913, we read that slaughter was indeed the most solemn and essential task for a rural housewife:

It is necessary to kill domestic animals. This is after all the nature of things. But this labor must not, due to mindlessness or indifference, be carried out in a troublesome, cruel, or inhumane manner. In many German slaughterhouses you can read the following reminder: "Bloody is your craft, slaughterer! Practice it humanely!" We, too, could do well in recalling this. Remember that the animals are conscious beings. Because of this, we are right to presume that they under the preparations understand what they have coming, and that during this moment

of death, every second seems like a whole eternity of anxiety and suffering. Because of this, the animal should be killed as quickly and painlessly as possible. Anything else would be a shameful return for the services the animal has given us while it was alive.⁵⁵

We can read this reminder about animal suffering, and its instruction to limit that suffering, as an ideological call for civilization. Instructions such as these, which focus on the animal as a sentient being, are a stark contrast to the ritualized beatings and bleedings that we found in the research on old slaughter rituals. While the old rituals focused on justification through ritual transformation from animal to meat, there was little explicit regard for the animals' suffering in the process. In the "rational" and professionalized approach of home economics, this changed. Animal protection, hygiene, and ideas of civilization were consistently projected as ideals throughout the home economics colleges and their textbooks.

While the *Slaughter Book* was published in 1913, before the Animal Protection Act of 1935, the way these instructions were written reflects how a new ethic of slaughter was gaining hold in Norway early in the century.

Stabbing the animal without having first stunned it by beating its forehead or shooting it through the brain can only be characterized as raw and outrageous cruelty to animals. Ensuring this from happening should in our day and age be a law – albeit unwritten – for all to follow. No husband or housewife would allow such a barbarian form of killing if they have their heart in the right place and love their animals.

The teaching conveyed in these books went far beyond an attempt to make sure that future housewives had "their heart in the right place." Or rather, to have one's heart in the right place *was* a practical concern; it had to do with knowledge about and skills in how slaughter and processing of animal bodies should be carried out in practice – and, one might add, in minute detail.

One central piece of knowledge concerned timing. The instructions on when to carry out the slaughter reveal that the traditional annual cycle still ruled daily rural life; the book detailed how slaughter had to be timed just right, and also pointed out that the need to plan slaughter well ahead was obvious.⁵⁶ There were, however, certain indications that one had begun to conceive of a situation where slaughter would no longer be tied to closely to the traditional cycle. The authors of the *Slaughter Book* question, for instance, whether slaughtering only once a year is economically wise: Surely, distributing the slaughter more evenly throughout the year would have benefits? Not only would one limit the peaks of labor that slaughter required, but by slaughtering six times a year, say, rather than one, there would be a more even supply of fresh meat throughout the year. When all slaughter is done in the autumn, fresh meat is available only once a year, but in principle, one could organize things so that it was available every other month.

Although the authors conceded that these ideas made sense, they could not disregard the great benefits of slaughtering in early autumn. By sticking to the traditional cycle, one made sure the weather was cool, that there were fewer bothersome flies about, and that the days were still fairly long and light – not to mention that early autumn was when the animals' returned from pasture, and were thus fatter and more plentiful than later on in the winter or in spring.⁵⁷

Before slaughter day was due, it was important to procure the salt and the spices, cook the brines needed, and clean and lay out all the required tools. Wooden troughs, boards, and tubs should be thoroughly cleaned, either using a brew of cooked juniper (which was the time honored cleaning liquid) or using chemical components such as lye and soda. The axe and saw had to be cleaned and placed within arm's length, all knives should be sharpened, and the meat mincer should be squeaky clean.⁵⁸ These serious and time consuming tasks needed to be well prepared, and in strict order, to get the slaughter done efficiently and with success. Efficiency was important in the scheme of things; after all, a woman's work was never done, and slaughter added to the many other tasks at hand.

It was advisable to begin the work as early as possible in the morning, both on the day of the slaughter and on the days that would follow, when the carcass was cut and made into sausages and other foods. Large animals like cows and bulls should be killed before the pig, so the carcass of the large animal had time to cool off before the daylight faded. Once everything was ready, the slaughter itself could commence.

The authors explain that the killing ought to be carried out in a calm place with plenty of air and a clean floor covered in saw dust to soak up any spilled fluids. In preparation for slaughter, animals should not be fed, but should be kept fasting for at least 12–18 hours before the time of killing. No other animals should be present, nor should people irrelevant to the act, or any children, be present. While these appear like very practical injunctions, these too were motivated by ideas of civilization: The practice of keeping the animals' guts empty would limit manure and urine, and a clean floor covered in saw-dust would sponge up and hence keep blood and other traces of slaughter away. By making sure that "irrelevant" people did not attend the slaughter, the sight and awareness of the deed is kept at a socially safe distance: The act of killing itself was to be carried out by an experienced and swift man, while someone, presumably the farmwife or a maidservant, should help – not least with stirring the blood, so that it did not coagulate. In this way, the farmwife took on a role as a slaughtering professional, who would face up to the deed. Farmwives had to learn both the theory and practice involved in this important undertaking, which required practical knowledge, experience, and – not least – dexterity.

The *Slaughter Book* was indeed a sort of housewife's slaughter manual, designed to equip her for precisely this professional role, and it provided her with directions for each step of the process of transforming animals into

meat. The first step was stunning. The authors acknowledge that many people simply use the butt of the axe to stun the animal, but they advise against this somewhat unreliable mode of stunning. If the blow does not strike quite where it should, or if it is not hard enough, the animal will neither go down nor be stunned. In such cases, a hurt and excited animal will need to be struck again, and the commotion this results in is unpleasant, to say the least. To avoid this, it is much better to use a *bouterole*, which sent a bolt straight into the animal's brain, stunning it.⁵⁹

If the slaughterer is experienced with the use of weapons, the authors write, a rifle may be an alternative to the *bouterole*, particularly for pigs. Another precaution listed is to ensure that nobody stands behind the animal within range of the rifle or *bouterole*. The animal should be blindfolded so it does not see what is coming, and then the slaughterer should walk up to the animal and without hesitation shoot or bolt the beast using the *bouterole*. If it is a large animal, like a cow or a bull, it is important that the animal is pulled over on its right rather than its left side, so the slaughterer gets easy access to its heart. Large animals should be pierced in the heart, while small animals like sheep and calves should be bled by slitting their throats.⁶⁰

As soon as the animal is dead, it must be bled. The task of draining the animal of its blood is a key point to ensure high-quality meat – since if any blood is left in the carcass, it affects the flavor as well as how long the meat stays fresh. Ensuring that all the blood is drained while collecting it

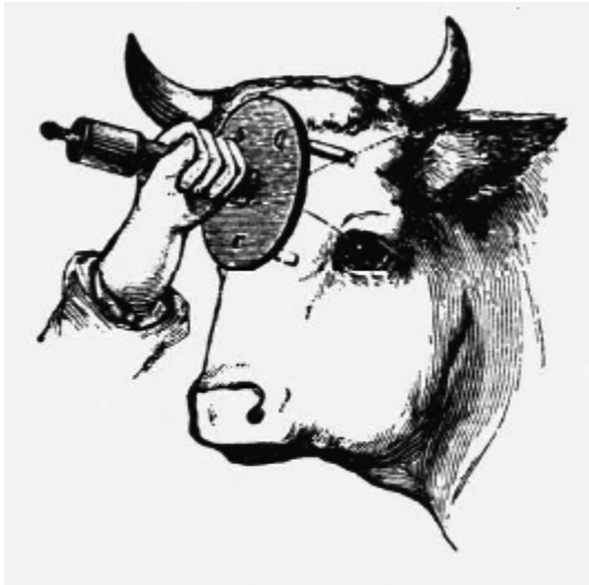


Figure 2.3 A *bouterole*, or “slaughter mask.”

Source: Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok* (1913).

in tubs and bowls, rather than on the sawdust-covered floor, is obviously important. The blood will later be made into puddings, sausages, and pancakes. As soon as one has made sure there is no blood left to drain, the animal should be turned over on its back, so the flaying can start. This task must be carried out as accurately and hygienically as possible, which again requires tubs of water and yards of cloth. The easiest way of flaying an animal is to use a knife with a curved and blunt tip, but a sharp edge. The skin should be edged away rather than cut off, taking care not to slit the meat or cut into the skin. You start undressing the animal at the highest point of the chest, following the chestbone down to the belly. You then cut the skin up to the first joint of each leg, easing it off with the knife to assist. The belly, legs, and neck are flayed in this position, and if you are flaying a large animal you use an axe to split the breast bone at this point. Now the animal needs to be lifted or craned up to a beam, so the flaying can be completed.⁶¹

The work has merely begun; now comes the time for disemboweling. The first organs to be released are those in the chest, like the lungs and the heart. Then the organs in the belly should be pulled out; the guts should immediately be carried out of the slaughter room, so their contents do not pollute the meat. Housewives are instructed to clean the carcass using a moist, though not wet, cloth. It is important to wipe it down and dry it off without soaking it. Now the carcass should simply hang until it cools down.⁶²

The above instructions differ for pig slaughter, because “as one knows, a pig is not flayed but scalded.”⁶³ Carrying this out in the proper manner required a lot of very warm but not boiling water. The scalding loosened the bristles, which could then be scraped off. Here the trick was to use a blunt knife, or a sharpish rather than sharp tool, like the side of a large ladle, for instance. If you used a too sharp knife, you would shave the pig, leaving an unpleasant stubbled rind rather than a soft, hairfree, and whitish pink skin.

While textbooks such as this one did take certain knowledge for granted, such as the fact that “everyone” knows that a pig is not flayed but scalded, their primary purpose was to professionalize skills that had in the past been transferred through tradition. To identify the relevant skills needed for slaughter and meat processing, outline the various tools to be used, specify how one should use them, and so on, was an ideological and pedagogical exercise designed to make sure that new generations of housewives, who now found themselves in the midst of a society that was changing fast, had the knowledge and skills they needed. But these books wanted to do more than preserve; they wanted to *advance*.

One indication of this were the injunctions about animal protection and another were the discussions about the possibilities of breaking the annual cycle. A third was the fact that the authors combined teaching on traditional skills and knowledge with science, including theories on animal anatomy,

the biology of pathogens, and more. After the sections on the slaughter and dressing, follows a long list of recipes for how to conserve the meat or convert offal and other meats into meals that for practical reasons needed to be eaten at once. Thereafter follows an entire section on the inspection, classification and stamping of meat. A meat inspector would stamp the carcass.⁶⁴ This official classification was followed by an explanation about the health hazards associated with meat, such as parasites, like for instance tapeworm and trichinosis, both of which were meticulously documented and illustrated.

But while books like the *Slaughter Book* do provide an illustration of how society was changing, it is perhaps just as significant, from our perspective, that the changes in subsequent editions of this book, and in other books of the same type, were relatively modest. While there was change, much did also remain the same. Changes to slaughter practices during the early 1900s was more like a steady trickle than a watershed. The *Slaughter Book* was updated published and reprinted six times, each time with no more than subtle changes.⁶⁵ And even if we compare this book to a later book with the same purpose, *Slaktestell (Slaughter Care)*, which was first published in 1951, the difference, across a time span of almost 40 years, is very subtle.⁶⁶ For example, in 1951, the introductory discussions of the pros and cons of slaughtering once a year or several times a year were still of interest; slaughtering throughout the year clearly comes into conflict with the annual cycle, the authors noted:

Households that have to purchase animals for slaughter, ought to do this in autumn, in October or November. Many of the animals returning from pasture are nice and fat. You may slaughter then, or wait a little so that you can have fresh meat for Christmas. [...] They should be fat, but not overly so. Too much fat makes for too much waste. [...] Pigs are in their best season before Christmas. Calves are more plentiful in spring, and apart from this, only sheep have a particular season, which is in autumn, when the animals return from pasture. This season can be as early as in August.⁶⁷

The most obvious difference between the two books is the level of detail in the instructions, and this is indeed interesting, since it tells us something about how the required skills and knowledge for a farmwife changes between 1913 and 1951. In short, the newer book, *Slaughter Care*, was even more detailed. For instance, where the older book simply told its readers to use juniper brew for cleaning, the newer one gave step by step instructions on how to make juniper brew. Presumably, knowledge that was taken for granted in 1913 was no longer as widely held in 1951.

A set of instructions that, to the contrary, were *less* detailed in the newer book were those on how to flay an ox or a cow, which we suggest is due to the fact that slaughtering for some time had grown into a profession of its

own – and that this profession was exclusive to men. Consequently, in the 1951 book, the women studying home economics are no longer told what to do during slaughter, they are told what the slaughterer does. The required personal traits of the slaughterer are considered carefully; not only should he be experienced and swift, but also calm, hygienic, and goodhearted – so that he spares the animals from unnecessary anxiety and pain.⁶⁸ But while the traits of the slaughterer were specified, it seems as if the gender of his assistants had changed and now also needed specification; while, in the 1913 book, the assistants were labeled “maidservants,” the 1951 book mentions that “one or two men” were required,⁶⁹ in addition to an assistant of unspecified gender to stir the blood. In the progress of these books, we can thus observe slaughter moving from being a household task carried out in the junction of women’s and men’s domains, to becoming a professional task, preferably carried out by men.

Educating Butcher Boys

The agenda of civilizing slaughter went hand in hand with a program of professionalizing the work of butchering. The actual slaughter, the first step of the process, was the one that was professionalized first. In rural areas, slaughterers would ambulate, assisting farmers with this task, particularly for larger animals and animals destined for the market. Carcasses that were not brought to market, would be treated on the farm, in the second step of the process, the dressing and cutting of the meat. This was generally left to the women, and was a laborious and demanding process. Meat from the farm’s animals was chopped and minced and made into sausages encased in the animals’ guts, which had also been cleaned and made ready for stuffing. Each step had to be carefully carried out. Hams and shoulders and ribs of sheep and pigs were cured and dried. Most of what was processed in this manner was consumed on the farm itself. On-farm slaughter enabled farms to be partly self-sufficient, a self-contained economic unit where one had to be a jack of all trades. The situation was very different, however, for the non-farming population in market towns and cities.

The population boom in the late 1800s had led to a surplus of people in the countryside, and towns and cities with their associated industry absorbed some of this surplus. Obviously, the urban population worked for a living to *buy* their food, and did not themselves *produce* it: The demography and geography of the city required people fill various, different roles, and the work carried out by each person was fairly specialized, and would become even more so over time. This meant that the butchering that had been practiced in rural areas could not simply be transferred to cities without a certain adaptation; urban butchering needed to be organized differently. For one thing, rural slaughter had been allowed to carry on without much interference or regulation, but this, as we have seen, was not viable in the city. A growing urban society required both slaughtering, processing, and

sale to adhere to *rules*. This was the only way to make sure that butchering took place in a safe and civilized manner.

In Norway, truly professional slaughterers were found predominantly in urban areas, but up until the mid-1800s, towns and cities had been few and far between – not to mention thinly populated. Although some of these slaughterers had been organized in local guilds around the country, a nationwide guild of slaughterers was not established until 1910. One of the guilds' main concerns was to address the lack of skilled and talented young men entering the profession, and the guild consequently made recruitment and training of butchering professionals its main priority. It was imperative for the slaughterers to revise, renew, and upgrade their learning, the founding members thought, so that it was in tune with the new times. At the guild's very first national meeting, one member expressed the situation thus:

At the moment, one can without exaggeration presume that the majority of apprentices cannot be regarded as fully fledged artisan craftsmen, but can only be seen as slaughtering *laborers*, whose education have essentially been carried out in one or at the most two particular directions.⁷⁰

With a more formalized system of apprenticeships, it was argued, this situation could be corrected. This scheme meant that a butcher boy with no experience would be taken on as an apprentice, and after four years of strictly regulated wages, he would be allowed to sit a formal guild's examination and become a slaughterer. During his four years in training, he was under contract to work for his master. If he breached this contract, the other guild members would refrain from employing him. In other words, either the apprentice fulfilled his obligations, or he would be unemployable within the guild itself.⁷¹ To prepare young apprentices for their future jobs, a preparatory school was established in Kristiania, in 1919, welcoming butcher boys between the ages of 14 and 18 to prepare for their apprenticeship.

The guild was not just concerned with recruiting new apprentices, they also worked for equal treatment of everyone working within the meat trade. Why, the guild asked, did the national rules and legislation vary depending on where slaughtering and butchering took place? In the early 1900s, a slaughterer or meat monger who had slaughtered an animal in a rural area could bring its carcass to the city, dress it, and sell it from a sale stall or through a butcher's shop. This was not possible, however, for urban slaughterers, who were subject to a strict set of rules and regulations. From the perspective of the urban-based guild slaughterers, this unfair situation was exacerbated by the fact that rural slaughterers often had no formal training or real competence in the butcher's craft. These "out-of-town non-craftsmen [...] are not victim to any of the orders, whether about education or operations, to which we, professionally trained city craftsmen, are subject," noted

one local guild director, since unprofessional tradesmen could, “simply by living outside the city centre [...] trade freely within the city.”⁷²

Some of the frustration stemmed, of course, from the fact that much of the growing trade in meat now took place in the big cities, and the urban guilds were not too pleased to see “out-of-towners” eat into the markets that they felt they should own. The bounty to be had from trade in meat was already plentiful and growing fast: In 1919, 210,414 carcasses passed through Oslo Meat Hall, but by 1933, this number had more than doubled, to 444,159 – causing the architect responsible for Oslo’s city planning to estimate that new and more spacious facilities would soon be necessary. The building would be financed through a slaughter tax, and by letting out offices placed in the first floor above the actual Meat Hall.⁷³ When the adjacent Oslo Slaughterhouse celebrated its 25 years of existence, in 1938, it boasted of having transformed no less than 8.5 million animals into meat.⁷⁴

The story of how the slaughter trade developed alongside the modernization of Norwegian society would perhaps have been more straightforward had it not been for WWII. The war hit Norwegians hard, and the mode of living changed dramatically for the vast majority. While output from the public slaughterhouses remained fairly stable, meat from private tradesmen suddenly plummeted.⁷⁵ If animals were slaughtered privately at all, their meat entered an unofficial private market. While town and city people had grown accustomed to buying their meat from a professional butcher, the war required all people with gardens (whether these were urban or rural) to grow potatoes rather than flowers and lawns, keep pigs in their garden sheds, and chickens in the cellar, among other things.⁷⁶

There are several accounts of how difficult city people found slaughtering. Once they had become accustomed to buying their meat rather than raising it themselves, they had a hard time facing the emotional challenge of killing what, in practice, had become a family member. In Lillestrøm, just outside Oslo, a local historian gives the following account: “We also had rabbits and a house pig. The rabbits were not a success, because my father could not kill them. It was easier with the pig, because a professional slaughterer went from door to door to slaughter.”⁷⁷ Ambulating slaughterers were not available everywhere, however, so one way of dealing with the challenge of killing the family’s pig was to swap pigs with your neighbor, so that your neighbor’s pet became your dinner, and *vice versa*.

After WWII, there was a strong focus on rebuilding the country and ensuring food security. Meat production was part of this process, and consequently, the slaughterer as a professional gained even more of a standing than what he had had before the war. One significant event came in 1948, when all the various slaughter and butcher guilds, wholesalers and shops, merged their unions, to establish Norges Slakter- og Pøsemakerforbund (Norway’s Slaughterer and Charcutiers’ Union). This large organization encompassed the whole meat industry, from livestock traders to slaughterers to butcher’s shops and charcuteries.⁷⁸

In the 1950s, new slaughterhouses appeared all over Norway. An account from Tynset, a rural parish in Mid-Norway, explains how the lot next to the old dairy became a modern slaughterhouse, and a new place of employment for young men in the area. The plan was to kill 300 animals every day – quite a large number for what the local historians of the county’s cooperative slaughterhouse called “amateurs.” Although some of the slaughterers who were employed at the facility had previously been *bygdeslaktere* – country slaughterers – coming to work at the slaughterhouse was a big change for most of them.⁷⁹ One of these slaughterers explains:

They all turned up with different equipment and different experience. Some of the guys who were to be employed as slaughterers showed up with a plain sheath knife in their belt, along with an ordinary wetstone of the kind they had always had used during farm slaughter. Fortunately we were given equipment like oilskin overalls, suitable knives, and a steel to sharpen blunt knives. But stuff like boots, jacket, and shirt we had to sort out ourselves.⁸⁰

The slaughterers knew most things about the actual job – they had done this before, simply using a stool and a ladder to hang up the animal carcass once it was killed. Although the professional slaughter took place in a slaughter hall rather than a farm, the first year or so it was carried out in the same manner as farm slaughter, placing a bench on the floor, putting the animal on its back and then hanging it on a hook from the wall. To flay the animal, one would press a fist in between the skin and the flesh, thus loosening the animal’s skin without piercing it.

Being part of a team specializing in slaughter was a new thing altogether, and for these people, it coincided more or less with the arrival of various technical innovations – which also required skills beyond using the club, knife, and fist. A heavy ironclad wooden mallet was used for the stunning – an efficient tool, but one which required experience and accuracy. A man with these skills became the clobberer, while the rest sharpened their knives. Clobbering and stunning, bleeding, slitting, flaying, disemboweling – now the process of slaughter was increasingly divided into distinct tasks carried out by different people.⁸¹

The new slaughterhouse that opened in Tynset, in 1951, employed three kinds of staff: Six full-time staff working in administration, two drivers and a slaughter foreman. In addition to this, the temporary staff were maybe the most important employees, as they dealt with the actual slaughter. These were two slaughterers, three gut-cleaners (two of which were female), one man responsible for classifying wool, and two lumpers.⁸²

Sheep and lambs were still simply clobbered, while pigs, bulls, and cows were led from a shed and killed outside using a bouterole and a rifle or bolt without a silencer, making a loud bang that reverberated in the concrete walls and glass tiles. Everyone standing nearby had to place their hands over their ears when the shot went off. This represented a step up from the clobbering days of the past, but the slaughterers themselves emphasized an innovation to the interior of the slaughterhouse as more important: tiling.

No cleaners were employed, so the slaughterers themselves were required to keep floors and walls squeaky clean, ready for veterinary inspection; tiled floor and walls were great time savers to maintain high standards of hygiene.⁸³

While there were, as we have seen, great changes to how, where, and by whom animals were slaughtered during the first half of the 20th century, the Tynset case indicates that even into the 1950s, the modernization of slaughter had – at least in places such as this – still not advanced that much beyond its state at the start of the century. Two important things had already changed by mid-century, however: First, slaughter increasingly happened indoors, away from the sight of consumers, and secondly, it was performed by a professionalized (or fast professionalizing) class of workers. These developments can be seen as the first steps toward alienating the average consumer from the killing of animals – an act that previously had been experienced, in some way, by most people.

Industrializing Killing

In the previous sections, we have underlined that slaughter changed only with a modest pace up to around the 1950s. To some extent, this was a result of Norway's relatively late arrival to agricultural modernization as such. Even in Norway, many of the circumstances that called for a change – like urbanization, which more or less necessitated changes in slaughter practices – were in place well before that time. If we are to make sense of how the killing of animals has changed in Norway under industrial modernity, we thus need to consider the entire span of 100–150 years, and we also need to consider that many innovations had their origin outside of Norway.

This is not least important for the various technologies which are used to kill animals. Technology has indeed dramatically changed our ways of killing animals, and today, slaughter has become a thoroughly industrial activity largely thanks to technology. “Technology” refers in this context to everything from the railway, to cars and trucks, to knives, to stun guns, to conveyor belts, to electrified water basins, to mechanical decapitation blades, to automatic ventilation systems, to computers, to mention but a few. The sum of these technologies, we argue, is to support an industrial system that, on the one hand, makes slaughter more efficient, but on the other, creates greater distance between the person performing the killing and the animal being killed. And since most of us, meat-eating consumers, have outsourced the unpleasant job of killing animals to a slaughterer (or, perhaps more correctly, to the factory workers at industrial slaughterhouses), we are placed at an even greater distance from the act of killing the animals we eat.

One important impetus for the industrialization of animal killing in Norway came with the legal frameworks established in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and with the establishment of municipal slaughterhouses like

Kristiania Slaughterhouse and the attendant Meat Hall. As we have described, the ills associated with rapid urbanization, combined with unregulated urban transport of livestock, slaughter, and sale of meat made for a thoroughly chaotic and unhygienic – in short, a messy – set of circumstances. When this situation descended on Kristiania, it had been the reality for some time in several other cities around the world, and there were models available for Norway’s capital as to how the problem could be solved. The most notable precursor, which one could sensibly argue was the origin of the industrial system of meat-packing, was the city of Chicago.

In *Nature’s Metropolis*, historian William Cronon describes how Chicago was the original laboratory for the development of transport and other technological innovations that would later spread to the whole of the United States, and thereafter, to the rest of the world, including Norway. It was the original impetus, in a sense, for what is now called “meatification.” By the late 1800s, Chicago had organized the transport, killing, processing, and shipping of animals and meat as an industry – on a scale, and with a level of efficiency, never before seen in the history of the world. Due to its location, Chicago had already been a hub for all sorts of natural materials – grain, lumber, and meat, most notably – and small stockyards were scattered all across the city. Business grew rapidly in the first decades of the 19th century, however, leading to a long list of problems, not the least of which was congestion of the city’s streets. It was overcrowded by animals. The railroad, which had originally contributed to making Chicago an industrial nexus, had now become something of a problem, as uncoordinated railroad tracks criss-crossed the city to transport animals here and there, to the city’s many stockyards. The system – or rather, lack thereof – was confusing and increasingly inefficient. Something had to be done, so Chicago’s largest railroads got together with Chicago Pork Packers’ Association, bought a piece of land on the outskirts of the city, and started building on a site that would situate all slaughter and processing in one place, the Union Stock Yard, which opened in 1865 – an early model for Kristiania Slaughterhouse and Meat Hall.

Many were those who recorded for posterity their shock and fascination of seeing the Chicago stockyards with their own eyes. Rudyard Kipling notes spotting a young woman standing “in a patch of sunlight, the red blood under her shoes, the vivid carcasses tacked around her, a bullock bleeding its life away not six feet away from her, and the death factory roaring all around her.” Upton Sinclair wrote, “One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe.”⁸⁴ And Max Weber, when he visited Chicago and its stockyard in 1904, quipped, “This is what modern reality looks like.”⁸⁵

The new centralized system that now evolved, rested on the so-called “disassembly line” [...] that divided animals into their most minute constituent parts so that the greatest possible profit from their sale could be

gained” – a development that reportedly would later inspire Henry Ford’s automobile factories.⁸⁶ Over time, slaughtering moved from being done in “simple warehouses” to being done in “elaborate factories designed to slaughter animals and move them past a long chain of workers, each of whom helped disassemble a small part of the carcass into its constituent parts.”⁸⁷

The disassembly line was a first, important, step toward industrializing animal killing, but that process was taken further by another innovation, which would allow the slaughterhouses to manipulate the seasons, and make sure that one worked continuously, throughout the year, to turn a profit from the investment one had made in the new slaughterhouse factories. This innovation was refrigeration, which would typically be transported to the city centers where slaughter increasingly took place in exactly the same way as were the animals: by railroad. In many places, large chunks of ice would be cut from frozen lakes in cold areas, and shipped by rail to the city, where it could be used to change “the agricultural calendar, spreading [meat] production across the entire year.”⁸⁸

This way of organizing animal killing had wide repercussions: It “produce[d] enormous ecological changes” in the landscape, and “established intricate new connections among grain farmers, stock raisers, and butchers, thereby creating a new corporate network that gradually seized responsibility for moving and processing animal flesh.” This, in turn, created a change in people’s diets, as the superbly effective, industrialized system provided a steady stream of cheap meat. It made meat a dependable commodity, and consequently, consumers would increasingly come to depend on it. The United States not only pioneered this system of meat production, but has also placed itself at or near the apex of meat consumption – though the industrial logic that originated in the United States was later exported to large parts of the rest of the world. “[T]he whole point of corporate meat-packing,” writes Cronon, “had been to systematize the market in animal flesh – to liberate it from nature and geography.” He sums up the industrial animal killing system thus:

Death’s hand must be stayed to extend by hundreds and thousands of miles the distance between the place where an animal died and the place where people finally ate it. Prices must be standardized so that markets in distant places would fluctuate together if they fluctuated at all. An industry that had formerly done its work in thousands of small butcher shops around the country must be rationalized to bring it under the control of a few expert managers using the most modern and scientific techniques [...] The combined effect of these many managerial strategies was to make meat seem less a product of first nature and more a product of human artifice.

With this industrial system, Cronon adds, “came an increasing corporate control over landscape, space, and the natural world, so much so that by

the end of the century the new meat-packing companies had nearly freed themselves from dependence on any single location.”

The growing distance between the meat market and the animals in whose flesh it dealt may have seemed civilizing to those who visited the Exchange Building in the 1860s, but it also betokened a much deeper and subtler separation – the world “alienation” is not too strong – from the act of killing and from nature itself.⁸⁹

While the industrial system of transporting, killing, processing, and shipping animals that had been developed in Chicago did in fact spread across large parts of the world, it is important to point out that this diffusion took time. Certainly, the scale of animal killing in a country like Norway neither was nor is anything like what Cronon describes from the United States. What is more, in Norway, the changes have been driven forth more by *cooperative* than by *corporate* interests. That said, the technological development that made this system possible, not to mention this system’s social and natural effects, has been largely the same.

In Norway, three groups were involved in the trade, slaughter, and processing of animals in the early 20th century. The first was farmers, who came into town to either sell live animals in so-called *handelsfjøs* (trade barns) or to sell carcasses from the Meat Hall. The next was slaughters, who would purchase live animals in the trade barn, slaughter them, and sell them. The third was commissioners, who sold animals or meat for a fee. The latter two, in turn, relied on trading relations with so-called buyers. This was a class of itinerant tradesmen with a long history in Norway, who bought animals off local farmers, put them on pasture throughout the summer, and brought them to slaughter in the cities and towns.

With the coming of railroads and steam ships, the need for this class of buyers had already faded somewhat, but this group would be even more seriously challenged by the emergence of the cooperatives, who made the buyers a prime target. As the cooperatives saw it, the buyers contributed to the notoriously volatile meat prices, and were thus a part of the problem that the cooperatives promised to solve. A notable step in this direction was taken in 1931, when Norges Kjøtt og Fleskesentral (Norway’s Meat Central), was established as a national cooperative. Its prime purpose was to stabilize meat prices, but it also had the effect of shifting transport, slaughter, cutting, and packing of meat from *private* organization to *cooperative* organization. Although this path was quite different from what we have seen take place in the United States, the effect would, with time, be the same in Norway: Animal killing was made into an industry.

“Solidarity is the order of the day for Norwegian pork producers, if we are to create the market and price stability we need,” stated one 1934 advertisement, and “Norway’s Meat Central is the farmer’s best insurance in this area. For every new member that joins the Central, the efficiency of

its efforts increases, as we move closer to our goal.”⁹⁰ The Meat Central was helped in its goal not just by individual farmers, however, but also by the government, as the “slaughter cooperative became a tool for a publicly anchored regime of regulation.”⁹¹ The authorities realized, in other words, that the cooperative could be used to improve the market, and chose to enter into an alliance with the organization, to retain political control over just how that happened. Not everyone has been equally pleased with this arrangement, but over time, the cooperative organization of slaughter and meat processing became the source of a certain national pride, and the main brand that was used by the cooperative, Gilde, has quite consistently – and with great success – used appeals to Norwegianness in its advertising.⁹²

The emergence of the slaughter cooperative would over time entail a certain transfer of power from various other actors, including the buyers, to the farmers – who owned the cooperative. At the same time, it also meant that power was transferred from *individual* farmers to the *collective* that was the farmers’ cooperative. Many factors were involved in this transition, but one central mechanism was the so-called *leveringsplikt* (duty to deliver), which obliged cooperative farmers to deliver meat exclusively to the cooperative. In this way, the cooperatives became the main actors in the area of transport, slaughter, and processing of animals in Norway. The emergence of the big cooperatives in the 1910s and 1920s went hand-in-glove with a system of classification, which ensured quality control and helped determine meat prices – something the cooperatives, in turn, took advantage of by engaging in branding and promotion of their products in a way that Norwegian consumers had not seen before.⁹³ Helped by a ban on imported live animals or meat from most countries, Norway became self-sufficient in meat toward the end of the 1920s.⁹⁴

Cooperative Machines

Despite these steps toward an organized national system of transport, slaughter, and processing of animals, the industrialization of this sector in Norway was far from immediate. By the 1950s, slaughterhouses had been built all over the country, but in many cases, they were more the “simple warehouses” described by Cronon than “elaborate factories” with “disassembly lines.” And while the country’s biggest slaughterhouse, in Kristiania, was in fact a facility of a certain scale, it would still be some time until everyday life as a Norwegian slaughterhouse worker resembled that of a factory worker.

A retrospective narrative from a man who worked for 45 years in the slaughtering business around Røros, in mid-Norway, reveals what slaughtering work could look like in the 1950s in Norway. He recounts his early years in the business:

I went to the Work Office one day, inquiring for jobs. They sent me down to the slaughterhouse, because they needed manpower for the season. It

was far into the day, but I was put to work immediately, building crates for the offal.

The quote reveals some of the haphazard state of the slaughtering business at the time, what the same man underlines when he talks about how he got to work each morning:

We started work at around seven, and I would bike the 6–7 kilometers to work. But often we had to stop by somewhere and pick up an animal on our way to work, so there we were, leading the bike in one hand and a cow or horse in the other. And there was also a bicycle trailer, which we would use to transport piglets or small animals to slaughter.⁹⁵

He recounts further that, where he worked, everybody would perform every task around the slaughterhouse, from receiving the animals, to slaughter, to working the intestines and the skins, to classification and weighing of carcasses.

To transport slaughtered animals into town, they would mostly use trucks with high wooden sides mounted on the truck bed. The carcasses were placed across the truck bed, on top of thin paper which had been stuck on the bed and the walls; the same type of paper would then be placed on top, in an attempt to “wrap” the carcasses. Often, however, the paper was completely soaked by the time the driver reached town, and more often than not, the bumpy dirt roads in the country and cobbled city streets shifted the paper back and forth, so that, when he arrived, dust and dirt had made their way into the truck, and onto the meat. The sentiment was, however, that “one never heard that this caused anybody any harm.”⁹⁶

The modern facility in the capital, notwithstanding, the slaughter facilities around the country were often quite rudimentary. In 1950, a new slaughterhouse was under construction in Tynset, but while the facility was being built, animals were slaughtered in an adjacent building not built for that purpose. In the narrative about the slaughterhouse, workers report that

the working conditions were wretched. There was only a dirt floor, and with no more than clap board walls to keep us warm, the winter temperatures at Tynset were really cruel. There were no rails from which to hang the animals, so we hung the carcasses from nails in the walls.⁹⁷

The slaughterers were not the ones worst off, however, since “they had the animals to keep themselves warm.” The three women employed at the slaughterhouse had it worse, since their job was to process the stomachs and intestines, and “a stomach was not much to keep you warm.”⁹⁸ In 1951, the new slaughterhouse was completed. It took up 749 square meters, had a basement and an attic, and had two designated slaughter areas for cattle, as well as equipment to handle sheep and pigs.

Even in a facility that was state-of-the-art in rural Norway in the 1950s, slaughtering was still a rather messy affair. In narratives from the time, it is clear that the job of slaughtering a cow, for instance, was not always straightforward. “Before new animals were brought in, we had to tidy up the slaughtering space,” says one reminiscing slaughterer,

but it wasn’t always so easy to handle unruly bulls and cows on slippery floors, with nothing but a harness to hold onto, and with nothing to tie the rope to, so often we were forced on an extra lap around the facility, with one of the slaughterers in tow, and then back to the barn again.⁹⁹

Until the 1950s, most of the work had been manual. A knife was the main tool. Increasingly, machinery would move into the slaughterhouse, at first a bit randomly, to alleviate the manual labor, but later as part of the basic inventory. At the site in Tynset, the first piece of machinery was a skinning machine, which arrived in 1956 – an electric knife with two 10 centimeter saw blades attached to a grip handle. This tool made a huge difference for the slaughterers, since it alleviated one of the most physically demanding tasks they faced when slaughtering cattle, which are of course very large animals. Not only that, the machine was also much faster than a manual laborer with a normal knife, and the result, in terms of the quality of the skin, far superior to what one had been capable of before.¹⁰⁰ The slaughterhouse at Tynset also began using electric pulleys, a technology that with time would become ubiquitous.¹⁰¹



Figure 2.4 Nord-Østerdalen Slaughterhouse, ca. 1954–55.
Source: Anno Musea.

Another key technology that was brought into more widespread use in the 1950s was the freezer. At this time, most Norwegians had yet to purchase home freezers, and this incentivized slaughterhouses to build cooling and freezing facilities, which allowed the industry to distribute meat more evenly throughout the year. At Tynset, the basement was made into a freezing facility in 1952, where families would rent space for meat they had bought, allowing housewives to come and pick up meat at their convenience.

The coming of technologies like these was only the start of a process of technologizing slaughter that has continued all the way up to today. In Norway, this process started in earnest in the 1950s, and then gained tremendous speed in the 1960s, from which point the history of slaughtering is largely a story of technology – which even influenced the (national) organization of slaughtering. The increasing density of technology in the slaughterhouse and in adjacent processing facilities, as well as in the cooling and freezing facilities, involved radical changes not just in the speed, scale, and standardization of meat that came out of the slaughterhouses, but also to the slaughterer's profession. Almost before slaughtering had taken on the modern signs of a profession, with national organization and organized training, and so on, the work performed by this profession increasingly revolved less around slaughter, in the old sense, and more around operating the (increasingly varied) equipment one would find in a slaughterhouse. And because slaughter was increasingly predicated on the equipment within the slaughterhouse, the issue of what should be slaughtered where, and by whom, became quite central to the industry. Industrial logic tends toward specialization, and since it is generally more efficient to focus on a single activity, slaughterhouses have been rebuilt and repurposed almost continuously since the early 1970s and up to today, in order to optimize operations at each unit.

At Tynset, it was not long before the slaughterhouse from 1951 was dated – unsuited for the hygienic and technological demands of the day. As early as 1956, deliberations about a new slaughterhouse had begun, and when it was completed, in 1960, it was a much more modern facility in every way. The new facility used a slaughtering “carousel,” a circular iron rail on which the animals were moved forward, like a conveyor belt. Now, each slaughterer would have his distinct place, and would stay there to perform his designated task in the slaughtering process. Later, in 1968, the carousel would be replaced by two straight rails, which made for an even more efficient execution of the job. At this point, the slaughterhouse also began using a flogging machine, which again alleviated a tough part of the job.

These technologies entailed a radical change from earlier, when each slaughterer had slaughtered the entire animal on his own, more or less from start to finish, by hand. It was also a clear sign that an industrial logic had made its way into Norwegian slaughterhouses. One who lived through this change reminisces:

This principle of working on a belt, or a line, is more and more common in industry. It is effective in many cases, but it might also be an

inconvenience, for the simple reason that the job becomes more uniform, and that you only learn a small part of a type of work.

The same man mentioned a seasonal slaughterer he knew, who took part in the autumn slaughter year after year, but who was always placed at the same spot in the line, and who consequently was incapable of slaughtering a sheep on his own.¹⁰²

The industrial logic, in other words, involved a form of deskilling of the only recently professionalized slaughterer, a process which of course was exacerbated by the increasing ubiquity of technology to aid the act of slaughter. As the old “simple warehouses” evolved into “elaborate factories,” from the 1960s onwards, the slaughterers became less like craftsmen, and more like industrial factory workers. In her classic study of a modern French slaughterhouse, Noëlie Vialles shows that this industrial deskilling in some places has developed so far that what is lost is not just a skill, but also, thereby, a certain awareness – even in the slaughterers themselves – of the process as a whole.¹⁰³

A text book for slaughterers from 1965 is interesting in that it was published in the midst of radical changes in the sector in Norway, and hence, juxtaposes what had been with what was now fast becoming the norm. The book introduces traditional as well as innovative ways of slaughtering, and in the latter category it includes the so-called slaughter line. The description is interesting not just because it quite clearly explains the principles of the industrial system, but because it reveals some of the reactions, including the reservations, that some had at the time.

In later years one has, in many places abroad, begun using an entirely new system of slaughtering cattle. After stunning and hanging for bleeding, the animal is not released from the hanging rails. Instead, it moves constantly forward along a slaughter line and on its way it passes specific points or platforms, where specific persons perform their specific part of the slaughtering process. Each slaughterer, in this line-based slaughtering, will become a specialist in his field and learns to work correctly, quickly, and hygienically. One can object that the slaughtering profession by this way of slaughtering loses some of its character of being a craft. The entire affair is more like a factory-like disassembly of a slaughter animal.¹⁰⁴

The common way to slaughter cattle in Norway and its neighboring countries was not yet as industrial as this, but was based on something called the three phase system, where the animal would be stunned and hanged for bleeding (phase 1), then taken down and skinned while lying on its back (phase 2), and then hanged again, to have its back skinned, intestines removed, and finally, to be halved (phase 3). It would not take long before the fully industrial system was in use in Norway too, however, and even in 1965,

the authors noted that this system had several advantages: It was more hygienic, it saved space, and actually needed less equipment, since the animals would not be taken up and down and up again. Also,

There is no traffic with trolleys, organ stands or people, since skins, intestines, cloves, organs, and waste are just dropped into chutes, placed in movable rails or belts or placed in elevators, which, after control, takes each product where it is supposed to go.

This overall tidiness meant that the industrial system of slaughter had to be considered superior in terms of hygiene: “The chance of contamination of carcasses and organs is much reduced,” the authors noted, adding that the system had “certain hygienic advantages.” The only obstacle they could adduce was that “the system is unelastic and requires a designated staff,” which meant that “for this highly automated form of belt-slaughtering to be economically viable, it is necessary to have large and constant volumes of slaughter.”¹⁰⁵

That, of course, was just what would happen: The slaughterhouses got larger and had more constant volumes of animals to slaughter. This was partly a consequence of the parallel industrialization of animal husbandry, but in part it was also due to the growing capacity of the slaughterhouses, since these two processes were locked in a mutually dependent logic: If slaughterhouses could not process the amount of animals produced by farmers, farmers could not produce as much, but if the farmers did not produce enough, the slaughterhouses would be idle, and hence suffer economically. As it happened, the problem would not be a lack of volume; to the contrary, the growth in the volume of animals sent to slaughter was so substantial that it set in motion a decades long process of rebuilding, repurposing, and relocating, through which the cooperative Norwegian slaughtering industry consolidated, modernized, and specialized. This would have dramatic consequences for small slaughterhouses like those at Røros and Tynset.

First came consolidation: In 1963, the local slaughtering cooperative joined the regional cooperative, Hed-Opp, so as to increase their chances of maneuvering in a rapidly changing market. The result was not quite that, however. In 1965, the slaughterhouse at Røros was closed down, as it no longer satisfied the hygienic requirements, which had multiplied since the end of WWII. The cost of refashioning the facility to meet current demands were too high, and given the increasing tendency of competing slaughterhouses to modernize and specialize, it was too costly to keep the Røros facility in operation. The volumes from Røros were transferred to Tynset, which could consequently live on. This slaughterhouse now found itself part of a larger whole, however, where “rationalization” was the word of the day. The rational thing to do, in short, was to have each facility within the cooperative specialize on a much smaller number of activities – for instance, to specialize either on cattle, on sheep and pigs, or on cutting and

processing. At the Tynset site, there had been a cutting department attached to the slaughterhouse since 1962, and toward the late 1960s and early 1970s, cutting and processing into semi-finished products came to make up an increasing share of their activity. At this time, and largely thanks to refrigeration, new packaging techniques, and emerging consumer habits (specifically, increasing demand for ready-made products), the slaughterhouses had begun to take on a greater share of cutting and processing.¹⁰⁶ This was a boon to the slaughter cooperative, since it allowed them to build their brand, using tags and logos. And it was a boon for Tynset, which had been allotted a substantial part of this job in the regional cooperative.

In 1968, the cooperative had realized that the hotels, restaurants, and other “institutional kitchens” were changing: There was a dire lack of qualified personnel, and because of poor pay and inconvenient working hours, there was an increasing demand for meat that was ready-to-use in casseroles. Hotel and restaurant chefs were no longer keen on, and no longer had the knowledge to, deal with large pieces of the animal; instead, they wanted neat and tidy pieces of meat, which would be frozen, and which they could defrost at their convenience. The Tynset site became a pilot project for supplying meat to the hotel and restaurant industries, in vacuum packed containers. “We started with two men and a woman in the packing department,” one narrative recalls,

but already in our first year of operation, we had to take in more cutters and after that more packers too. There was a laundry in the Northern part [...] and it was rebuilt as a packing room when production really took off. At the most, in the mid-1970s, there must have been 12–15 people working in that department.¹⁰⁷

This development too would be increasingly mechanized in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. The above-mentioned textbook, from 1965, educates the meat worker in such wonders of technology as “fast-choppers,” “hydraulic sausage-fillers,” “transport belts with shrinking tunnels,” “sausage-linkers,” “shapers,” and “coaters.”

Despite the relative success with cutting, processing, and packing, the Tynset facility at one point became too small and inconvenient, just as the Røros facility had a couple of decades earlier. In the 1980s, plans for a new, large, and state-of-the-art slaughterhouse in the region began, and when it was completed, in 1990, the Tynset site was at a disadvantage. The manager at the time remembers that there was a “pull” toward the new facility. “It was too big and was not running at its full capacity, and constantly there was talk about filling up free capacity with animals for slaughter.”¹⁰⁸ In the end, this economic logic became overwhelming: One could not allow a brand new facility to run at anything but full capacity, so the only option was to close down other slaughterhouses, so that the new one could optimize its operation. This meant that the Tynset facility closed down its slaughtering

department, in 1999. This did not mean that everything closed down, however, for Tynset would remain as much a symbol of industrial specialization as would the large, new facility. More specifically, when it closed down its slaughter department, it was repurposed to focus exclusively on cured meat, with which it had already had great success, and consequently it became one of a very small number of facilities that specializes in just this.

Animal Killing and Death of Living Rituals

There are certainly some peculiarities in the historical trajectory of slaughter in Norway, not least due to its strongly regulated agricultural sector and the central role of the cooperatives. If we zoom out, however, and consider this history as a broad transformation of human-nature relations, the trend in Norway has been much the same as in many other countries: Slaughter has gone from being an activity familiar to most, which was tied to a certain set of skills and performed at specific times during the year, on a multitude of sites distributed all across the country, to becoming a multibillion kroner industry which centers on a few large facilities that are largely automated and which operate 20 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Our concern here is not just with how this has changed the technological and professional sides of animal killing, but also how it has changed its cultural – one might even say its existential – aspect. Now that slaughter has become an industry that almost nobody has either access to or knowledge about, what does the act of killing an animal *mean* to people? An extraordinary guide to this question is the French anthropologist Noëlie Vialles, and her book, *Animal to Edible*, which by now has become something of a classic within studies of human-animal relations.

In that book, Vialles offers a version of our basic claim in this book, namely that we have become alienated from the animal origin of meat, and that this alienation works through a series of denial mechanisms. Vialles' book is an ethnographic case study of slaughterhouses in a region in France, and the alienated and denying “we,” in this case, is made up of both the industrial slaughterhouse workers and the consumers who now require those workers for their eating habits.

The claim that even slaughterhouse workers deny the animal origin of meat might seem counter-intuitive, since if anyone knows about the animal origin of meat, it would surely be those charged with the killing? But, in fact, Vialles shows that, in modern slaughterhouses, the process of industrial specialization has been taken so far that a certain doubt arises about who actually kills the animal. Through a logic of distancing and dissociation, the act of killing animals has become ever more removed from our everyday lives, she writes:

[T]his killing is something we would rather know nothing about. In former times, sacrifices were solemn occasions celebrated in public. Later,

slaughterhouses operated in the middle of towns, when animals were not actually killed in the street. Nowadays, slaughtering has become an invisible, exiled, almost clandestine activity. We know it goes on, of course, but it is an abstract kind of knowledge. [...] [W]e demand an ellipsis between animal and meat.¹⁰⁹

The thrust of this demand, Vialles suggests, is that “We [have become] paradoxical carnivores, deeming suspect a job that has to be done.”¹¹⁰ As the slaughterhouses were increasingly removed from towns and cities, and in general, from sight, “slaughtering was made invisible – the more so, in fact, as technical improvements made it possible to conjure away more and more of the age-old signs of the business.” Even the physical sites themselves have become increasingly inaccessible, she points out, and “the surrounding walls [of a slaughterhouse] allow little evidence to escape of the almost clandestine slaughter of animals happening inside.” Sometimes, these sites are even marked with a *interdit au publique* (no entry) sign.¹¹¹

These, however, are just the first, and not even the most striking, of the many dissociations that Vialles observes. The most original part of her research is arguably her reading of what she calls the “compulsive job fragmentation that characterizes the industrial abattoir,” where the job of killing the animal is divided up into a series of tasks that are separated from each other, an aspect of industrial specialization that Vialles reads as symptomatic of our growing unease with the idea that we kill animals. In short, the first man stuns the animal, a second man hangs it up, and a third man bleeds it. But, as Vialles poignantly asks, “Who kills the animal?”

No only is such a doubt formally possible; it exists in reality. When asked, some will say that the bleeding alone causes death, which is true; but they will promptly add that, once stunned, the animal feels nothing: “it’s as if dead,” and bleeding merely finishes off a death that would in any case not be long in coming. Others consider the stunning crucial, and the reason they give is the same one: “it’s as if dead” [*il est comme mort*], and what follows can no longer matter to it. [...] The result of dissociating death from suffering in this way is as follows: since anaesthesia is not really fatal and since painless (or supposedly painless) bleeding is not really killing, we are left without any “real” killing at all, nor do we have any one person who “really” kills; by separating the jobs, you completely dilute the responsibilities and any feelings of guilt, however vague and held in check.¹¹²

The disjunctions that go on inside the slaughterhouse are a *pars pro toto*, as Vialles sees it, to our wider, societal alienation from animal death. “The urban consumer is never, in terms of his daily alimentary experience, brought face to face with the animal. [...] For him, the origin of that meat is entirely hidden from view.”¹¹³ This has become increasingly important as the killing

of animals has taken on an industrial scale, she suggests, since “one-to-one slaughter, in which the roles of animal and man persist right up until the act of killing, is easier to accept than industrial slaughter.” While “the individual act of killing [...] preserves a link, however tenuous and even purely imaginary, between eater and eaten,” this is no longer the case for the contemporary killing of animals, which, due to its “massive, industrial scale is harrowing and is therefore kept out of sight.” Industrial killing, she argues,

[H]as the effect of eliminating landmarks, imposing an anonymity on the animals (as well as on the men who face them) and giving rise to a general lack of differentiation that is experienced as disorienting: anything, including the worst, seems possible. [...] It is this frightening lack of differentiation that the town-dweller wishes to know nothing of (for the very reason that he senses it) and that others for various reasons seek to avoid.

Slaughter is uncomfortable not only because we find blood and offal and skin and slime *nasty* – even if this is probably also part of it. It is also, Vialles points out, because the “town-dweller” wants to remain ignorant of the total lack of differentiation between the individual animals that industrial slaughter enacts. The fact that the animals that meet their end in the industrial slaughterhouse have no names, no families, no histories, and no traits that would otherwise recognize them as individuals, frightens us, she claims, because it reminds us of “equally large scale exterminations of human beings.” The act of killing is simply too heavy a burden to carry for faint-hearted modern souls, and so, “All these disjunctions invite and combine with one another to keep mass killing of animals at a reasonable distance.”¹⁴

The industrial killing of animals is made invisible in at least two ways. First, it is physically removed from sight, as it is taken indoors, into large industrial slaughterhouses, and second, the specialized work tasks performed in these slaughterhouses ensure that the act of killing more or less dissolves. As we will argue in the following, this combination of *spatial* and *social* alienation creates a peculiar *cultural* situation: For while the killing of animals, as we have seen, used to be motivated, justified, and made sense of by a series of rituals, no such remain for the contemporary consumer. The person Vialles refers to as “the town-dweller” is thus left without any clear way to justify the killing of the animals they consume. Given that other factors have caused that same town-dweller to consume ever larger quantities of meat, this lack of cultural resources with which to justify meat-eating represents quite a conundrum, and it would not be far-fetched to think that this cultural lacuna exacerbates further the need that many have to distance themselves, or even deny, the killing of animals, and more generally, the animal origin of meat. If the truth one is asked to face is uncomfortable and discomfiting, one would want resources with which to justify it – one

would want to convince oneself and others that the practice is necessary. But if one has no such resources, some version of denial is more or less the only option left.

Denial of industrial animal death is certainly not absolute. As we explain in the next section, one way to understand the development of slaughter over the last 100–150 years, is to see it as shifting – and thus lifting – the burden of moral responsibility for the killing, away from the people performing or observing the kill, toward a set of formalized rules, laws, and regulations. This is an example of a more general move toward formalization, even “judicialization,” of everyday life, but in the area of human-animal relations, and especially when it comes to animal killing, it has the peculiar function of validating our looking away. The fact that justifications related to the killing of animals have increasingly moved into a legal, or otherwise formalistic, sphere, means that we are no longer individually, or even socially or collectively, responsible for animal deaths. It has placed this responsibility instead on “the system,” and in this way, we suggest, it too is a form of denial.

On a field trip a few years ago, we experienced a sort of reversal of this tendency, as we confronted what most consumers today never get to see: the inside of a slaughterhouse. In a formal capacity, we were part of a group invited for a guided tour of one of Norway’s busiest chicken slaughterhouses. It allowed us a glimpse into some of the mechanisms Vialles describes so well, only with 25 additional years of industrial specialization and technological development. Our group was welcomed by the manager of the facility. We were directed toward a long, sterile corridor that ran on the outer side of the long building. At a specific point in the corridor, we were told to step into a sort of sluice. Here, we were asked to put on a protective coverall suit, casing ourselves from head to foot. Next we were led onwards, into the corridor, up to a door facing inward, which our guide opened, and which would take us to the end of the conveyor-belt system on the inside, to the area where the various parts of electrocuted, decapitated, skinned, deboned, and parted chickens were being sorted and placed into plastic crates.

Moving along the conveyor belt against the direction of the belt was uncanny – almost like seeing animals being reassembled. As we walked through the facility, our guide kept providing facts and explaining the functioning of the conveyor belt and the slaughterhouse at large. As far as we could tell, though, the majority of our group had more than enough taking in the sight of it all. The belt took many turns, allowing each part of the process to be isolated or semi-isolated from the next, obstructing the sight line from one task of animal disassembly more or less absolutely from the next. Some sections were divided by doors or plastic flaps, and this was also true of the path leading to the final section of our tour, which was also the beginning of the belt. Here, finally, we witnessed the scene that the chicken farmer we quoted in the last chapter was perplexed about, namely how his chickens die. At the very start of the belt was an opening in the wall, up to



Figure 2.5 Slaughterhouse workers by conveyor belt at Nortura's chicken facility at Hærland, Norway's biggest. Almost completely robotized and automated, the facility at full capacity kills and processes 12,500 chickens an hour, or 3.5 chickens a second.

Source: Nortura.

which livestock trailers would arrive, carrying chickens ready for slaughter. Just as we walked over to it, a trailer pulled up, opened one of its doors, and a mass of plastic crates appeared, each one chock-full of chickens. Each crate was relieved of its contents, the chickens “dumped” into a huge funnel which placed the animals in a more or less neat row. From here, they were hung by their legs on the conveyor belt, and began their journey toward an electrified water basin, which would stun them, and a knife blade, which would decapitate them. And this would happen to around 10,000 chickens an hour.¹¹⁵

Judicializing Death

The industrial system of animal killing that we have described in the preceding sections was propelled forth by a combination of the practical problems relating to urban development, hygiene, and food safety; processes of professionalization and – later – machinification of slaughter and meat processing; as well as an emerging ethical ideal of civilization, which incorporated an imperative of protecting animals from needless suffering. Each of these components is to some extent distinct, but at the same time, there are good reasons to think of them as interlocked – as an ideological “bundle” that frames, motivates, and justifies the industrial system.

One key aspect of this ideological bundle, we argue, is how it lifts not only the *sight* of animal killing, but also, in subtle ways, the *meaning and justification* of this act, away from those who eat the animals. As we argued at the start of this chapter, to make an animal edible requires not only a material transformation of the animal's body, but equally, a symbolic transformation, that explains and justifies the act for us. This is precisely what the old Norwegian slaughter rituals offered people in the traditional farming society. The rituals allowed people to distance themselves from the animal and from the responsibility for killing it; by way of a whole assortment of chants, practices, beliefs, etc., they gave meaning and justification to the act of slaughter. With time, however, these rituals were shed, and would now be denigrated as barbaric "superstitions" of the old society, and replaced with a purportedly enlightened ideal of *civilization*, one central aspect of which was legislation.

The latter point is key – that the framing of animal killing increasingly would be phrased in judicial language, take the form of legislation, and in general become the domain of legal experts. It means that laws and regulations, in our time, have taken over the job of justifying and framing animal killing almost completely. During the last 100–150 years, the framing of animal deaths has moved from a cultural sphere, which was widely shared, to a legal sphere, which is dominated by technical expertise. By framing slaughter in a thoroughly technical manner, laws and regulations have contributed to removing the need for consumers to confront the fact that animals are killed for their consumption.

It is particularly clear for slaughter, then, that cultural alienation has run in parallel with spatial and social alienation. As several scholars have pointed out, the industrialization of slaughter meant that the killing of animals was removed from sight, in a process Paula Young Lee refers to as the "the extraction of animal slaughter from quotidian experience." Modern slaughterhouses, Lee argues, were invented "to eliminate the mundane horror of encountering hand-slaughter in the streets by displacing it to the urban outskirts, where the geometry of the killing system could expand without restrictions."¹¹⁶ The judicializing of slaughter is the cultural equivalent of this process, we argue, since when the cultural framing of slaughter moves out of the culture of everyday life and into the technical, specialized domain of legal expertise, the result is that the ordinary consumer and citizen no longer "owns" the meaning and the justification of the killing. Not only are consumers released from witnessing the killing, they do not even have to think about whether, and how, it can be explained and justified.

In many countries, including Norway, statutes such as the ones in the Ministry booklet, which we quoted from earlier, and the Animal Protection Act have indeed lead to less suffering in connection with animal killing. This means that the designation "humane slaughter" – which came on the scene with the thrust to civilize slaughter in the early 1900s, and is still the guiding ideal – is not wrong as such. Many of the ritual practices that we

described in the first part of this chapter have *rightly*, in our view, been cataloged as animal abuse, and should indeed be forbidden by law. At the same time, this progress has been double-edged, since alongside the emergence of humane slaughter, we have moved toward an increasingly industrial, large-scale, and therefore indirect and impersonal, relation to the animals we eat. In this connection, Jonathan Burt argues that “[t]he phrase ‘humane slaughter,’ when considered in the light of the scale of killing for meat and the de-animalizing (and dehumanizing) technologies that meat production entails, is a contradictory one.” Although the old ways of animal abuse have long since disappeared, he writes, one could reasonably argue that “the distinction between what is civilized and what is barbaric – mainly on the grounds of whether a creature is stunned before slaughter or not – takes place within a system that is deeply inhumane by virtue of its scale.”¹¹⁷

Our purpose here is not to pass moral judgment on modern slaughter. Rather, we want to understand the social and cultural consequences of the fact that the act of killing animals no longer engages us in a ritual that makes the killing meaningful and justified, but is instead regulated, more or less completely, by law. What happens when the act of killing animals moves from being a ritualized part of popular culture to being the exclusive domain of legal experts?

The basic part of the judicial transformation of animals to meat, of course, is the law itself, in the Norwegian case *Lov om dyrevelferd*, the Animal Welfare Act, from 2009 (which replaced an older law from 1974, and before that, the one from 1935). In this document, the killing of animals is mentioned at various points, including in a separate paragraph on the taking of animal lives, that is, slaughter. The main ordinance is that “the killing of animals and the handling of animals in connection with the killing must responsibly secure the animal’s welfare.” The law further stipulates that any animal to be put down “must be stunned before slaughter,” and that “the method of stunning must procure a loss of consciousness,”¹¹⁸ which must endure throughout the act of killing. Alternatively, the animal can be killed with a method that causes immediate loss of consciousness.

Clearly, this paragraph primarily responds to a moral call for humane treatment of animals, not just because it opens with the general requirement about securing the animal’s welfare, but also because it establishes that “animals are not to be slaughtered as an independent part of any entertainment or a competition.” The law forbids the killing of animals for fun or for sport, and hence acknowledges that animals are not simply commodities. In fact, the law states in a crucial paragraph that, “Animals have an intrinsic value which is independent of the utility they offer humans.” In this way, the Norwegian law rests on the idea of humane slaughter as outlined by Burt, which is (supposedly) a form of slaughter that answers “only to the abstractly conceived higher cause of humanity.”¹¹⁹ The whole purpose of the law, it appears, is to make sure that slaughter does not inflict pain, or at least no needless pain, on the animal; this ordinance removes some of the moral

and emotional stress associated with taking the life of an animal, since it allows us to tell ourselves that, while we do in fact kill, we are the type of people who kill *humanly* – we bring death, but not pain, on the animals. Because it strictly and successfully removes animals from “sources of pain and distress,” this judicialized humanitarianism allows us to “slaughter without quite the horror the word ‘slaughter’ should connote.”¹²⁰

This, however, is only the first, the humanitarian, aspect of the judicialized transformation of animals to meat, the other being the hygienic and economic. We can get an idea of how slaughter is circumscribed in our time by looking not only at the law but also at the more concrete, lower level regulations relating to this activity. In Norway, the entity responsible for these regulations is *Mattilsynet*, the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA). While the Animal Welfare Act comes across as a fairly readable document for regular citizens, the information offered by the NFSA illustrates just how far into a specialized, technical sphere slaughter has moved today.

NFSA’s webpages on “Production of meat and meat products” begin by announcing that, “There are comprehensive regulations in the area of food-stuffs, and there are special rules for foods of animal origin.” This communicates well enough, but the text then turns to listing a selection of the various regulations concerning slaughter. One such says, for example:

The requirement is for one stamp mark on each part of the slaughtered carcass. When pigs are divided in two, each half requires only one single stamp. Sheep are not divided, and in that case, one stamp suffices.

See the regulation on special rules for implementation of public control of productions of animal origin destined for consumption (the animal control regulation), cf. 854/2004 (H3) addendum I paragraph I chapter III (2) (b).

Another says:

On slaughtered cattle, SRM is to be removed.

See the regulation on prevention, control, and eradication of transferable spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), cf. 999/2001 addendum IV (4.1) (b) and (11.3).¹²¹

These excerpts clearly do not communicate to the general consumer and citizen, but that is precisely our point. The context in which we find these regulations is NFSA’s version of a FAQ, which is addressed to specialists in the agricultural sector, or even, to slaughtering professionals. What is significant for our purposes, is not what these regulations actually say, that is, how they regulate slaughter, but the fact that ordinances concerning slaughter are couched in highly technical language that tells the ordinary citizen and consumer of meat very little indeed.

The highly technical nature of these regulations is particularly interesting when one considers that these regulations have replaced the rituals of old. While laws to regulate animal welfare are in themselves a sign of judicialization of animal killing, the Norwegian act, as we saw, does appeal to public morality with its universalist statements concerning animals' intrinsic value. Meanwhile, the regulations that actually determine how slaughter should take place illustrate how the symbolic transformation of animals to meat has moved away from being a public issue to being a specialized, technical one.

The symbolic transformation of meat today takes place not with blessings or sayings or excuses, with offerings, or with particular ways of comporting oneself during slaughter. Instead of rituals that enact a symbolic transformation of animals to meat, we have been left simply with legislation – where the emotional and moral distress that used to be solved by a ritual of some sort is now, largely, taken care of by law. This legislative frame, on the one hand, takes the form of a judicialized morality – what Burt calls “humane slaughter” – whereas it, on the other, takes the form of regulative hygiene – that is, of specialized rules and instructions concerning how slaughter should take place in order to ensure food safety. Gone with the old rituals, then, is much of the messiness of slaughter. The act of taking an animal's life has been cleansed, one could say, on both a moral and a practical level.

If there is something to this reading, slaughter can appear to take part in a more general shift in our society toward the judicialization of politics, which is defined by law professor Ran Hirschl as “the reliance on courts and judicial means for addressing core moral predicaments, public policy questions, and political controversies,” and which he argues is “one of the most significant phenomena of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century government.”¹²² While there are some clear aspects of progress to this shift, we believe it also comes with certain challenges – in fact, we argue that it exacerbates certain problems that characterize our contemporary relation to the animals we eat.

While the laws and regulations of today still regulate, specify, and justify, as the old rituals did, we argue that the shift toward a legal paradigm goes hand in hand with, and might even enhance, the modern alienation from animal killing. Laws and regulations, while they undoubtedly promote animal welfare and help us avoid the worst cases of animal abuse – and hence, represent real progress – also have another, and more insidious function: They act as an efficient smokescreen for the industrial scale of current meat production and consumption.

When the killing is regulated merely by law, there is nothing – or at least nothing much – that forces us to confront the fact that we kill an animal to eat it. Accordingly, the alienation and denial that has resulted from the industrialization and modernization of animal husbandry is kept entirely in place. Seen in this light, laws about animal welfare do not encourage us to confront our own practices. Instead, those laws allow for a certain moral

outsourcing: Because the taking of an animal life is regulated by law, we – consumers and citizens – do not have to ponder that act any further. In this sense, the judicialization of slaughter obfuscates the act itself. The existence of a law that regulates the killing actually contributes, in its way, to making the killing less visible and, one might say, less visceral.

Merciful Norway vs. Muslims and Jews

If the development of legislation to regulate slaughter is, as we have suggested, tightly coupled to a program of civilization, then the new and updated Animal Welfare Act of 2009 claimed to make Norway the most civilized nation in the world. Much ado was made, not least of the fact that Norwegian legislation now acknowledged the “intrinsic value” of animals. Upon its launch, the Minister of Agriculture declared that Norway with this phrase had become a world leader in animal welfare, though he added – what was also pointed out in the law committee’s draft – that

the fact that the phrase ‘intrinsic value’ is now brought into the law, will have no consequences for animal welfare. As mentioned [in the draft] the phrase will only have symbolic value and will not in itself contribute to improved animal welfare.

In the draft, the committee specified that “the phrase intrinsic value is not to be interpreted so widely as to question regular animal husbandry as we know it today.” Despite the expressed intention for the law’s innovations *not* to have consequences, however, the committee was adamant about their desire to “be a good example for animal protection, also internationally,” and one parliamentarian told the media that the various political parties’ comments to the draft had been in such harmony that “they could actually have been accompanied by music.”¹²³

This apparent desire to make a new Animal Welfare Act into an occasion for something like Norwegian “nation branding” might seem perverse, but in fact, the linking of animal welfare and national identity is a recurring phenomenon. In Norway, the issue has surfaced not least when it comes to standards of slaughter, a theme which has been used by various actors to mark out Norwegian identity, as a paragon of agricultural civilization, in contrast to various more barbaric “others.”

One of the most memorable instances of this type of association between national identity and animal killing surfaced during a protracted public debate in 2009, when the discrimination ombudsman proposed that Norway should take a more lax – or rather, more generous – approach to so-called “ritual slaughter,” that is, slaughter which for religious reasons is performed without stunning. The proposal was, in effect, to align Norwegian practices even more closely with the EU, where stunning was indeed mandatory, but where exceptions were made quite freely, with reference to freedom of

religious expression. This proposal infuriated several Norwegian commentators, many of whom used the occasion to “nationalize” the practice of stunning as a civilized alternative to the ritual form of slaughter favored by some Muslims and Jews, which was labeled as more primitive, even barbaric.

One vocal opponent of this proposal was the philosopher, author, and cow farmer, Tore Stubberud, who began one of his op-eds by noting that the EU asked us to “obey the market in all things,” and that this could “mean turning one’s back on values that once made up Europe’s stock of ideas.” Revealing a resistance to the EU that appeared to reach beyond this single issue, he asked rhetorically whether “the EU has become no more than a bank, without assets?” There was a long philosophical tradition of considering the moral status of animals, he noted, but

in traditional halal and kosher animals have no moral standing. On the butcher’s block they are nothing but objects for the archaic, religious needs of Muslims and Jews. This is animal abuse, and it sidelines the European idea of empathy, knowledge, and rights for those weaker than ourselves.

At this point, the EU Council of Ministers had already decided that Norway would be allowed to retain its absolute requirement for stunning, but Stubberud criticized the discussion as such, referring to the process as “grotesque,” and sarcastically calling it a “sacrifice on the altar of integration true to the spirit of our times.” He did not naïvely assume that EU’s exceptions to the general rule were based on some ideal justification; rather, “in the EU’s money machine, one observes the market made up especially by Muslims. Here are big numbers and the fates of many animals. Here is the smell of money.” Meanwhile, “Consumers’ rights, respect for religious minorities, and the capital accumulation of abattoirs all work together. And the most important thing is the money.”

This writer asserted that we were confronted with two very different situations. “Two animals are to be slaughtered, and are met with rules and guidelines concerning animal welfare up to their killing. But now, one animal is led into panic and the religious sphere, while the other is gently stunned,” he wrote, adding (with pathos), “But does not the animal too have a face?” The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe had protested the exceptions, he noted, but as they had not had much success, were now opting for a list of measures that would reduce animal suffering in ritual slaughter. The writer noted some of the measures, but then added sardonically that, “These are good wishes in a cabinet of horrors.”

Toward the end of his article, the writer stated that, in contrast to the EU, which has, as it were, sold out the European heritage of considering animals in order to please the Muslim community – or, as he would have it, the Muslim “market” – “the only difference between ritual and normal slaughter in Norway is [the recital of the Muslim] prayer.” This is as it should

be, he says, since it means “the animals suffer a little less.” Hence: “The EU should follow Norway in animal welfare, and not let it float freely. The old Norwegian butchers used to say, ‘This is not for hate, but for food.’ That too was a sort of prayer.”

Stubberud’s intervention was not unique, nor has the controversy around halal and kosher slaughter been exclusive to Norway. We nevertheless find this piece interesting in that the writer makes very clear the underlying logic that in many other cases is somewhat understated. The first thing to note is the fact that while he says quite a lot about halal and kosher, he says rather little about “normal” slaughter, and when he does, he arguably paints a rosy picture, where the animals are, as he writes, “gently stunned.” Meanwhile, he spends several graphic paragraphs laying out the cruel consequences of halal and kosher, describing how “the artery is throttled and loss of consciousness delayed,” and how the result is “blood, slime, and vomit.”

The most significant effect of his refusal to describe normal slaughter is not the stark contrast between normal and “ritual” slaughter, but the fact that he validates a sort of *non-concern* for the former: The contrast with halal and kosher does not simply allow the writer to present normal, Norwegian slaughter as a civilized practice, as opposed to the brutal, barbaric “rituals” of othered Muslims and Jews, it – more importantly – allows those who identify with that normal, Norwegian slaughter not to think about what they are doing – since the attention is focused on the cruel practices of a set of villainized “others.” While we do not know how this particular piece was read, one effect of it could very well have been a relative disburdening of responsibility for animal killing onto other people, who demonstrably are killing more brutally than what “we” are. This too is a sort of denial mechanism, where we dispel any thought of the bad things that *we* do, by focusing on the even worse things that certain *others* are doing.

In Stubberud’s piece, this mechanism comes across very clearly, since he is building a front against not just Muslims and Jews, but against the EU as well, suggesting that there is a sort of – financial – conspiracy in operation, where the traditional ideals of Europe have been sold out even by Europe herself, which of late has been reduced to a banker’s version of her old self, namely the EU. Now, this writer suggests, Norway – not coincidentally, a non-EU-member – is more or less alone in holding the European moral flame alive. “The EU should follow Norway,” he says, while quoting the old saying that “It is not for hate, but for food,”¹²⁴ suggesting that there is in fact impressive continuity to the empathetic position he ascribes to the Norway of today. But as we have already seen, this saying, in its day, was deeply implicated in a wider set of practices that were not just ritual (in roughly the same way as the Muslim or Jewish religious slaughters are), but also quite cruel. In this, of course, this writer invented national traditions that were never really there – or at least not in the form the invention would have it.

Understanding Where Meat (Very Occasionally) Comes From

In 2007, just before Christmas, Willi Flatmo, a teacher at Losby City Farm, in Lørenskog, just outside Oslo, had made arrangements to have one of the farm's pigs, called Knerten ("Titch"), slaughtered on-site, just like they did in the old days, in front of a crowd of visitors. Since people today very rarely have any idea of how pigs are slaughtered, he conceived of the event as a potentially interesting and educational happening which could give his visitors a deeper understanding of where food comes from: The slaughter would remind people that you actually have to kill an animal to produce meat.

Coincidentally, the slaughterer they had contracted to do the job was too busy before Christmas, so the event was rescheduled to February. Whether it was because the slaughter now was going to take place in a less stressful and busy month than December or whether it was for some other reason is hard to say, but a group of animal welfare activists, *Nettverk for dyrs frihet* (The Animal Liberation Network) managed to put a spanner in the works of this particular pig slaughter. Ahead of the planned day of slaughter, Flatmo was bombarded with calls and e-mails claiming that slaughtering a pig in this way was no different from an execution.¹²⁵ At the same time, the activists voiced their opinion in the local paper, *Romerikes Blad*. Their representative, Erling Sem, told the paper that, "This is grotesque. Killing 'Knerten' in this manner is a deadly sort of entertainment, and we react very strongly to it."¹²⁶ To the nationwide paper, *Aftenposten*, he said that, "when something like this is done in exchange for an entrance fee during the best visiting hours, it's no longer culture we're talking about, but entertainment."¹²⁷ Flatmo maintained, to the contrary, that the public slaughter was conceived not as "entertainment, but [as] cultural history." He added that "only a couple of generations ago, this kind of slaughter was common in Romerike. Today very few understand the connection between keeping animals and the pork-chop in the cooling counter," and added that it would be a whole lot better for the pig to be slaughtered in the place it was born and bred rather than being transported "in a cramped truck to an industrial slaughterhouse."¹²⁸ Flatmo further explained that this particular slaughter was an excellent example of the city farm's mandate, which was to communicate animal husbandry and farming culture. Flatmo added that "the connection between birth, rearing, and slaughter is an important part of farming culture."¹²⁹

Apparently Flatmo was not too concerned about the animal activists, as he believed he could simply pick up the phone and call the police if they did not behave. He appeared to have underestimated his opponents, however, for on the day of slaughter, they came carrying large banners, megaphones, and vocal cords ready for action. "Does Knerten have to die for Losby farm's visitor numbers?," read one banner. "Killing isn't culture. Let Knerten live!," read another. The whole thing created such commotion that Flatmo and his employers decided to cancel the slaughter and send the

slaughterer home. Thorvald Salte, director for the company running Losby City Farm, said he was “pleased that the commotion had come to an end.” He added that, “This situation has been blown far out of proportion, and we had never imagined something like this could happen, so now we just want to get over it.” Salte said that, “We have received e-mails from almost all over the world now, calling us horrible people and so on,” and added that “with all of this attention, we don’t want to add to this spectacle.”¹³⁰

The end of this story was that the city farm offered the animal rights activists to buy the pig, which they did. Or in the words of *Aftenposten*’s journalist: “Knerten will live. Was supposed to have been shot and scalded on Sunday, was bought by animal activists.” Jenny Rolness, a representative from NOAH (another Norwegian organization for animal welfare that supported this particular case) gave a statement to *Romerikes Blad*, saying, “It was great to buy Knerten and to liberate him from slaughter. All pigs have been given a face through Knerten, who has become a symbol of the meat industry’s cynicism.” They also communicated that: “NOAH will start looking for a farm where the pig can live a good life from now on.”¹³¹

The story about Knerten was irresistible for the animal welfare activists, for the local and national media, and presumably also for everyone who saw the events unfold in the news. What we find more interesting than the two sides to this debate, however, is what this case says about our relationship to animal death. As a matter of fact, both parties in this conflict uttered things that contribute to hiding and thereby denying how most animals live and die in Norway today. The animal activists talked about Knerten having become a “symbol of the meat industry’s cynicism,” but this was arguably no more than a diversion, since no meat industry was involved, and since Flatmo’s motivations were educational rather than cynical. In fact, when the activists described the slaughter as “entertainment,” this was implicit acknowledgment that Losby City Farm was up to something completely different than the meat industry. There is much to say about how animals are kept and slaughtered in the contemporary meat industry, but one cannot say that it – in the least – resembles entertainment. Indeed, it has today become quite uncommon, not to say difficult, and in some cases quite impossible, for ordinary people to even gain access to the places where animals are killed. Furthermore, some of Flatmo’s own comments – like his point that it was better for the pig to die at the farm than to be transported far away in a cramped truck to an industrial slaughterhouse – could indeed be read as a more or less explicit critique of cynical industrial meat production. If the animal activists, in their plea for Knerten’s life, were concerned with industrial meat production, *they* might be seen to be the cynical ones, jumping on a case that really had nothing to do with the places and practices in which most animals are killed today. What they did manage to do, one might suggest, is to divert the public’s attention away from industrial meat production, and toward a – relatively speaking – innocent educational establishment.

For their part, Flatmo and his city farm engaged in a different sort of diversion: They defended the slaughter by saying this was how it was done only a couple of generations ago. But just like other city farms or petting farms whose mandate it is to give people, and children in particular, a window on farming,¹³² it can be argued that Losby is actively distorting history. Rather than be confronted with the sites where most animals actually die in contemporary meat production, visitors to Losby would be presented with a version of how pigs were kept and killed 100 years ago or more. If this event gave any kind of insight into how animals die today, it was a very cloudy picture that emerged. When Flatmo said that, “Today very few understand the connection between keeping animals and the pork-chop in the cooling counter,”¹³³ this is obviously true, but at the same time, it is a rather anachronistic stance for someone claiming to convey cultural history. To the extent Flatmo and his colleagues hoped to re-establish connection by this event, it would be the one between the pork chop in the modern cooling counter and animal husbandry and slaughter as they were carried out 100 years ago – a tenuous connection indeed. The event at Losby would give the impression of small-scale animal husbandry where humans and animals lived as companion species, up to the point where a single animal would be killed, on the farm, almost ritually, before Christmas. In today’s reality, most pigs are bred and raised in one facility, fattened in another, and killed in a third; there is very little intimacy left between the farmer or slaughterer and the animals, and the scale is industrial: While Flatmo’s pig had a cute, relatable name – *Knerten* – most pigs only have a complex number that means nothing at all to anyone except the insiders.

The *Knerten* case was not unique. In fact, there seems to be an attraction to cases like this, possibly because they, by making a “celebrity” out of an animal destined to become food, allow consumers to imagine that a sort of contract is still in place between us and the animals we eat – because it is comforting, after all, to know that the animals we eat are acknowledged somehow. The trouble, of course, is that what we see, in such cases, is only the rare exception, and a quite unreal one at that.

Cases like this divert the public’s attention away from the structural circumstances surrounding animal killing, most notably the fact that slaughter has become an industrial activity. It is not merely that animals are no longer killed on farms, but that a designation like “slaughterhouse” also has become outdated; the sites where animals are killed today are more properly thought of as killing factories. When city farms, animal activists, and the media turn our attention to single individuals, the function of this is arguably to offer a form of comfort, it is to let us focus on something that is easier to understand and accept than the realities of how animals are killed today. This is a sort of denial of the realities of animal killing: Because we cannot bear facing the big issue, we keep making a huge fuss over small ones; rather than spend emotional energy on the millions of animals killed every year, we focus on ... *Knerten*.

Another type of diversion exemplified by the Knerten case is that it became an unhelpful game of pointing fingers; it was all about finding out who is to blame for the alienated situation we now find ourselves in. As was shown in this chapter, however, the mechanisms that have taken slaughter from a small-scale activity coupled to annual cycles, and performed by a substantial number of people in a great number of sites across the country, to a modern industry carried out in a small number of huge killing factories, are much more complex than this. There have been economic forces at play, certainly, which, in turn, were closely tied to the use of space; when the Fatland company was able to grow so huge, for instance, that was because urbanization had made the smaller operators' access to markets more difficult, and also because the combination of urbanization and unregulated slaughter created a push for more laws and regulations – not to mention taxes, subsidies, and other ordinances – that small, local actors found more difficult to follow. But there were, at the same time, social and occupational factors involved, first by formalizing a set of skills around killing animals, and then, in a significant replacement of human skills by machines. Finally, as an ever greater number had neither access to where animals were killed, nor any experience or skills from this act themselves, established practices that frame the symbolic transformation of the animal to meat faded and disappeared, and were replaced instead by a legal framework from which most consumers were quite alienated.

There is, in other words, no single “culprit” behind how we kill animals today; it is rather the result of various, interlocking processes of which most of us are a part. This point was brought home, interestingly, by Svein Fatland, the down-to-earth meat-packing magnate, who not only pointed out how their development had taken place as a continuous call-and-response with consumers, but who also expressed a certain frustration about where this had taken us:

There's been an immense development in meat consumption and consumer patterns. For us who follow this, we see a lot of double standards, in terms of the environment and things, that there is a lot of focus on. What I mean is that we, in 1960, sold the whole animal. They would use all of the animal, skin and wool and blood and liver and offal and bones and stock and everything was used, while today, as much as 30 percent of the animal is simply thrown away. If only those who now talk about the environment had talked about using the whole animal...the most nutritious parts of the animal are thrown away today. Sent to be destroyed. Well, a bit of the fat is made into oil and some of this goes to bio-gas plants and things like that, but it isn't used for food. And it is, after all, *food* we produce. Incidentally, I came across this old, old cookbook, and I found there 42 recipes for brain! That was quite remarkable. But today everything is thrown away. We could have produced 30 percent fewer animals in Norway if we had simply used the whole animal.

Svein explained that they had several initiatives going to increase their use of unused parts of the animal, but at the same time he was fully aware that his power to change this situation was severely restricted. He ran his business, he indicated, more or less as he *had* to run it, given the incentives given by the supermarket chains and the demand created by consumer preferences – not to mention consumers’ lack of time and knowledge: “The food chains are experts on logistics and good at figuring out what people should buy and want to buy,” he said, explaining that most of the time, “we are simply adjusting” to retailers and to consumers. And when it came to consumers, they increasingly want “sausages and mince [...] as it’s so easy to use, while traditional country cooking is considered too time consuming.” He lamented the fact that this knowledge has disappeared, and claimed that with the 30 percent waste we also lose a lot of nourishment: “We produce far too much food that is thrown away. So, we are supposed to produce it, slaughter it, and butcher it, but then throw it away...? That is just meaningless!”

Notes

- 1 Farmer’s settlements are agreements that regulate agricultural production in Norway, and rest on the so-called “Main Agreement” for the agricultural sector. They are a version of what in other sectors is called tripartite agreements, though for agriculture, the organizations negotiate directly with the state.
- 2 “Omsetningsavgift,” Store norske leksikon. <https://snl.no/omsetningsavgift>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.
- 3 Paula Young Lee, “Introduction: Housing Slaughter,” in *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 2.
- 4 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*.
- 5 See, for example, Vialles, *Animal to Edible* or The Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006).
- 6 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1991), 775.
- 7 Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 1960 [1909]).
- 8 Nils Lid, *Norske slakteskikker med jamføringar frå nærskylde område* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1924), 147.
- 9 Johannes Skar, *Gamalt or Sætesdal, Vol. 4*. (Oslo: Norli 1909) 165. Lid, *Norske slakteskikker*, 157. Similar practices can be found in other Scandinavian countries as well, and also beyond Scandinavia – for example, in Wiesbunn, Germany, where all the villagers would touch the rope if a hanging took place; see Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer* (Göttingen: Dieterich’sche Buchhandlung, 1881), 885.
- 10 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1969]).
- 11 Jonathan Burt, “Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity,” in *Killing Animals*, The Animal Studies Group (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 126.
- 12 Audun Kjus, “Nils Lid (1890–1958),” in *Etnologi og folkloristikk: En fagkritisk biografi om norsk kulturhistorie*, edited by Bjarne Rogan and Anne Eriksen (Oslo: Novus, 2013), 143.
- 13 Between 1917 and 1920, Lid initiated a series of questionnaires which were distributed all over Norway. This resulted in a published doctoral thesis on Norwegian slaughter customs, see Lid, *Norske slakteskikker*, cited above. Additional

- series of questionnaires were distributed in 1930/31: Innsamling av tradisjon um slakt [Collecting traditions about slaughter], and in 1943: Ord og Sed, Avliving av slaktedyr, 89 [Killing animals for slaughter]. In 1946, a second archive was established, which focused on gathering sources for research. It was called Norsk etnologisk granskning [Norwegian Ethnological Research] – NEG for short – and its main focus was on material culture. Nils Lid's work on slaughter was supplemented in 1950 by questionnaire 19 Slaktedyr [Animals for slaughter]. Because the questions were directed to people – often older informants – who reported practices going as far back as they could remember, the sources point back in time. The questionnaires were in part distributed to save the memories of everyday life in the past. Some of the topics were researched due to a particular researcher's interest, but the main objective of the collection was to establish a comprehensive archive of fairytales, sagas, ballads, and ethnology before the living memory of this traditional material died along with the informants. Norsk Folkeminnesamling (NFS) was established in 1914 and is still added to. It is a unique source of understanding past and present thoughts, beliefs, memories and practices in Norway. The archive is part of Unesco's Memory of the World. For more information, see Line Esborg and Dirk Johannsen, eds, "*En vild endevending av al virkelighet*" – *Norsk Folkeminnesamling i hundre år* (Oslo: Novus, 2014).
- 14 Olga Ambjørnrud, *Slaktestell* (Oslo: Landslaget for husstell-lærere, 1962).
 - 15 Visted and Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur Vol 2*, 162.
 - 16 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 92.
 - 17 NEG 25: 20812.
 - 18 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 31.
 - 19 Incidentally, this was a good example of the anthropologist James Frazer's category "homeopathic magic" – which referred to a belief that like could cure like, that a desired result could be assured by mimicking it. Nils Lid was highly influenced by Frazer and his 12 volume seminal work, *The Golden Bough*, which was originally published between 1906 and 1915. For a section on homeopathic magic in an abbreviated version of Frazer's work, see *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1993), 11–48.
 - 20 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 50. See also NEG 25: 20835.
 - 21 According to Noëlie Vialles, even industrial slaughter in France may start as early as 4am, something she refers to as a relic of the past, when the cool night air was sought for want of refrigeration. See *Animal to Edible*, 11.
 - 22 NFS 5: 2. A similar taboo can be found in the British and French sources. See Bjarne Rogan, ed. *Det nære og det fremmede: Vindu mot fransk etnologi* (Oslo: Novus, 1993), 46; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 606.
 - 23 The anthropologists Willerslev and Lykkegård refer to a similar set of beliefs in their ethnography describing the death and funerary rites among the Chukchi in Siberia, where "no one is allowed to show sadness in front of the deceased as this may keep him hanging on to this life, or make him want to take the mourning relatives with him." Their theory is that the mortuary ritual is actually a sacrificial ritual, and argue that these mortuary rituals can be seen as a way of transforming any death into a blood sacrifice, and "as a way of protecting the sacrificial victim against violent forces and in doing so, securing the well-being of the community as a whole," see Jeanette Lykkegård and Rane Willerslev, "Regenerating Life in the Face of Predation: A Study of Mortuary Ritual as Sacrifice among the Siberian Chukchi," *Sibirica* 15, no. 2 (2016): 1–39.
 - 24 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 78.
 - 25 NEG 19.
 - 26 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 79.

- 27 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 123; and NFS 5:2, Correspondence Nils Lid's archive.
- 28 Lid, *Norske slakteskikkar*, 75.
- 29 Nils Lid, "Ullins Øyra," in *Heidersskrift til Marius Hægstad* (Oslo: Norli, 1925), 128–144.
- 30 NEG 19.
- 31 NFS 5:2. Our emphasis.
- 32 Visted and Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur Vol. 2*, 281.
- 33 See Karen Lykke Syse, "'Det er ikkje for hat, det er for mat'"; see also Alfred Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behaviour, and World View," in *Readings in Indigenous Religions*, edited by Graham Harvey (London: Continuum, 2002), 17–49; Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst & Co, 2005), xiv; Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin IV* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1944), 25; Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 78.
- 34 Dorothee Brantz, "Animal Bodies, Human Health, and the Reform of Slaughterhouses in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, edited by Paula Young Lee (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 71 and 85.
- 35 Andreas Sandvik, *Med kjøtt på beinet: Slakterhistorien for Kristiansund og Nordmøre, 1800–2017* (Kristiansund: Busken, 2017), 25.
- 36 Sandvik, *Med kjøtt på beinet*, 27.
- 37 Sandvik, *Med kjøtt på beinet*, 53.
- 38 See Jon Gunnar Arntzen and Stig-Audun Hansen, *OSLO/KRISTIANIA, 1900–1925* (Oslo: Kom forlag, 2010), 55.
- 39 Cited in Beate Muri, *Kristiania for 100 år siden* (Oslo: Schibsted, 2005), 121.
- 40 On this point, see Chris Otter, "Civilizing Slaughter: The Development of the British Public Abattoir, 1850–1910," in *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, edited by Paul Young Lee (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 89–106.
- 41 Jonathan Burt, "Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity."
- 42 Axel Blomqvist, *Dyrenes bok: Hjembygdenes dyr, deres vern og røgt* (Kristiania: Grøndahl & Søns forlag, 1917), 57. Italics in original.
- 43 Axel Blomqvist, *Dyrenes bok*, 58. Italics in original.
- 44 Axel Blomqvist, *Dyrenes bok*, 58.
- 45 Axel Blomqvist, *Dyrenes bok*, 59. Italics in original.
- 46 Vegard Bø Bahus, *Dyrevelferdsrett* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2019), 34.
- 47 See Bahus, *Dyrevelferdsrett*.
- 48 E. Laukvik, *Heimeslakting*. 2nd edition (Oslo: Ministry of Agriculture, 1938), 3.
- 49 Norway's Director of Agriculture, in Laukvik, *Heimeslakting*, 2.
- 50 Laukvik, *Heimeslakting*, 5, 3, and 3.
- 51 Otter, "Civilizing Slaughter," 90.
- 52 Home economics colleges were not just for rural women, but because the skills related to slaughter were more important for farmwives, she is arguably closer to the model reader of these texts.
- 53 In 1865, Minna Weltesen established the first domestic economy school in Norway, and in the decades thereafter, a number of both private and public schools and colleges would follow; see Ivar Bjørndal, *Østfold husmorskole, Risum, 75 år* (Halden: Østfold husmorskole, 1975), 7. In the United States, the freespoken educator Catharine Beecher, sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, had already championed the values of such ideas in 1842, claiming that women's role in society was underestimated; see Catharine Beecher, *A*

- Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1845).
- 54 Loe, Dagmar, and Ragna Robsahm Kjørven, *Landslaget for husstell-lærere 50 år, 1914–1964* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1964), 8.
- 55 Alma Nilssen and Alette Golden, *Slagtebok* (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1913), 15.
- 56 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 9.
- 57 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 10.
- 58 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 9.
- 59 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 9.
- 60 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 17.
- 61 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 17–18.
- 62 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 18.
- 63 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 19.
- 64 Nilssen and Golden, *Slagtebok*, 178.
- 65 The final two editions were from 1928 and 1942, respectively.
- 66 This book was published for the same readership, young women studying home economics, and had one of the big names within home economics, Olga Ambjørnrud, as head editor. She received her higher education at the only teacher's college for home economics in Norway, and had grown up on a farm outside Oslo. See Olga Ambjørnrud, ed., *Slaktestell* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1951).
- 67 Ambjørnrud, *Slaktestell*, 7–8.
- 68 Ambjørnrud, *Slaktestell*, 14.
- 69 Ambjørnrud, *Slaktestell*, 14.
- 70 Harald Stene Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen* (Oslo: Hellstrøm & Nordahls, 1960), 10.
- 71 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 12.
- 72 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 14–15.
- 73 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 93.
- 74 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 102.
- 75 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 117.
- 76 Sturla Ertzeid, *Krigens hverdag: Krigsminner 1940–1945* (Kristiansand: Mediagruppa/Søgne kulturstyre, 1994), 42.
- 77 Reidun Glømme, in *Krigen 1940–1945: Minner fra krigen fortalt av medlemmer i Lillestrøm Historielag* (Skedsmo: Skedsmo kommune, 1995), n.n., n.p.
- 78 Dehlin, *Femti år i kjøttbransjen*, 130.
- 79 Jon Schärer and Arne Ingar Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker: 50 år med slakterisamvirke i Nord-Østerdal og Røros* (Tynset: Hed-Opp, 2004), 10.
- 80 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 13.
- 81 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 19.
- 82 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 17.
- 83 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 19.
- 84 Cited in William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 208.
- 85 Cited in Sverre A. Christensen and Yngve Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier: Gilde Norsk Kjøtt 1931–2006* (Oslo: Dinamo, 2006), 20.
- 86 Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 211; see also 229.
- 87 Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 230.
- 88 Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 231–232. Cronon is discussing pork in this quote, but he later notes that the effect of ice was just as significant, indeed “revolutionary,” for beef as well.
- 89 Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 255 and 259.
- 90 From advertisement in Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 34.
- 91 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 14.

- 92 This point is elaborated by Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*.
- 93 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 28.
- 94 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 32–33.
- 95 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 42.
- 96 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 19.
- 97 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 10.
- 98 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 14.
- 99 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 19.
- 100 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 19.
- 101 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 31.
- 102 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 33.
- 103 We elaborate this point in the next section.
- 104 Gudbrand Loftsgård and Yngvar Wennevold, “Slakting,” in *Kjøtt: Handbok for kjøttbransjen* (Oslo: Teknologisk forlag, 1965), 75–76.
- 105 Loftsgård and Wennevold, “Slakting,” 76.
- 106 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*.
- 107 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 70.
- 108 Schärer and Bækken, *Kvasse kniver – raske replikker*, 95.
- 109 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, 5.
- 110 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, 6.
- 111 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, 20–22.
- 112 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, 45.
- 113 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, 28.
- 114 Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, all quotes since last footnote from page 31.
- 115 The largest chicken slaughterhouse in Norway currently slaughters 12,500 chickens per hour. Thomas Solberg, “Nytt Nortura-slakteri: Kan slakte 12.500 kyllinger per time,” *E24*, October 28, 2013.
- 116 Paula Young Lee, “Introduction: Housing Slaughter,” in *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, 6.
- 117 Burt, “Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity,” 126.
- 118 “Lov om dyrevelferd,” Lovdata. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-19-97>. Accessed: December 2, 2021.
- 119 Burt, “Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity,” 129–130.
- 120 Burt, “Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity,” 131.
- 121 “Produksjon av kjøtt og kjøttprodukt,” Mattilsynet. https://www.mattilsynet.no/mat_og_vann/produksjon_av_mat/kjott_og_kjottprodukter/produksjon_av_kjott_og_kjottprodukt.4625. Accessed: September 23, 2020.
- 122 Ran Hirschl, “The Judicialization of Politics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Politics*, edited by Keith E. Whittington, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Gregory A. Caldeira (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119.
- 123 The quotes are from Kristian Bjørkdahl, “Skal vi være dyrevenner?,” *Dagsavisen*, July 9, 2009. A more in-depth discussion can be found in Rune Ellefsen, *Med lov til å pine?: Om bruk og beskyttelse av dyr* (Oslo: Inspirator/Fritt forlag, 2013), and Vegard Bø Bahus, *Dyrevelferdsrett*.
- 124 All quotes in this section from Tore Stubberud, “Rituell slakting i fri flyt,” *Aftenposten*, July 25, 2009.
- 125 Gjermund Jappée, “Knerten skal knertes,” *Aftenposten*, Februar 8, 2008. <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/i/o6O3j/Knerten-skal-knertes>.
- 126 Jon Theodor Hauger, “-La Knerten leve!,” *Romerikes blad*, February 7, 2008. <https://www.rb.no/lokale-nyheter/la-knerten-leve/s/1-95-3333571>.
- 127 Gjermund Jappée, “Knerten skal knertes,” *Aftenposten*, February 8, 2008. <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/i/o6O3j/Knerten-skal-knertes>.
- 128 Hauger, “-La Knerten leve!”

129 Hauger, “-La Knerten leve!”

130 Espen Bolstad, “Knerten med sin nye eier,” *Romerikes blad*, February 10, 2008. <https://www.rb.no/lokale-nyheter/knerten-med-sin-nye-eier/s/1-95-3339619>.

131 Espen Bolstad, “Knerten med sin nye eier.”

132 See Kristian Bjørkdahl, “Insidious Ignorance or Burst of Biophilia: Cultural Uses of Educational Farms in Norway,” in *Ethical Futures: Bioscience and Food Horizons*, edited by Kate Millar, Pru Hobson West, and Birgitte Nerlich (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2009), 337–342.

133 Hauger, “-La Knerten leve!”

3 Buy

Between 1918 and 1926, an idyllic garden suburb materialized on the outskirts of Oslo. It was built in the style of British country vernacular, taking its ideological inspiration from Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City Movement, and its material model from Hampstead Garden Suburb in London. The entire neighborhood was made up of small plastered redbrick houses: No less than 119 buildings containing 652 apartments emerged in green surroundings centered on *Damplassen*, a market square with a pond at its center. The suburb, Ullevål Haveby, was designed for the laboring and lower middle classes, and would provide its inhabitants with everything they needed for a wholesome, modern life. Rather than cramped inner city housing, these homes were airy, planned, and in part detailed by an esteemed architect, with aesthetic detailing usually not spent on housing for this income group. Apartments as well as houses all had a garden, either a parceled allotment garden or one surrounding the house. These gardens would provide the suburban dwellers with a vegetable patch, fruit trees, and an herbaceous border which would keep people busy, preventing them from succumbing to drinking, gambling, or any of the other vices that city planners presumed were characteristic of the lower classes.

As for this suburb's market square, the basic idea was that it should meet all the other necessities of life. A post office and a police station were both considered such necessities, so was a cobbler. While the square was still in its planning stage, the board of directors made a principle decision on the number and kinds of shops that were required: The square should hold a dairy, a bakery, a grocery store (with a cellar suitable for storing potatoes), a butcher, and a charcuterie.¹

The history of this market square can be read as a microcosm of how ordinary people's meeting with food, and meat in particular, has changed over the last 100 years or so. Precisely because it was designed as a self-contained suburban universe, it can exemplify the development that Norway, and indeed many other parts of the world, has been through.

The fact that the square, from its inception, housed a butcher is a telling sign that this was indeed where most people bought their meat at the time. An historical photograph from the Damplassen butcher (see figure 3.2) depicts

the shop's interior: Alongside the short wall, a variety of different sausages are on display: large and small; thick and thin; linked, circled, and straight. At a higher level, alongside the long wall, large salami-like sausages are hanging in a neat row. They are draped along a line of more mixed produce, like joints of beef, whole hams, halved carcasses, even whole carcasses, as well as bellies of pork and ribs of beef. On the shelf under these dangling delicacies there are pork loins still on the bone, and next to them, two pig's heads with the ears still attached – with what might be mistaken for smiles under squinting eyes. Across from the glass covered counter facing the customer area of the butcher shop, other parts of the pig are on display. Opposite from the pig's heads is a plate of pig's trotters. This is the shelf for cooked meats: There are slices of bologna and salami sausage, lamb rolls, beef rolls, slices of ham, white pudding. The counter's lower level holds steaks and chops and also a huge mechanical mincer, accompanied by a container with minced meat.

At specialty stores like this one, which was where most urban Norwegians bought their meat at the time, butchers in full view of the consumer would dismember animal carcasses and divide them into pieces of meat, bone, and offal according to the customer's needs. Meat would be minced on the spot. The connection between animal and meat was apparent for all to see, and consumers were reminded of the work that went into making meat of animals every time they met the butcher – a skilled professional who had specialized in dismembering animal carcasses.

Across the square from the Damplassen butcher was the grocery store, the bakery, and a dairy and charcuterie. In the latter, consumers could go to buy sausages, patés, terrines, meat loaves, puddings, and other cured cold cuts of meat, which would be sliced up or divided in suitable pieces by the ladies behind the delicatessen counter. Here too, the presentation of meat was explicit, and again, tied to skill and professionalism: The division of labor between the butcher and the charcuterie was clear, however, as each required separate stores, a different – not to mention differently gendered – staff, and distinct skills.

Although this market square with its cluster of artisan shops might seem idyllic, its organization was contested almost from the start. One issue was whether the shops should be run as a cooperative or a private enterprise. In the end, they became the former. A burning issue, which appears to have been more of a nuisance on a day to day basis, was the fact that housewives wasted a vast amount of time waiting in line. First, they would get in line at the bakery, then followed another queue at the grocer's, and finally, they formed a row in front of the butcher's. Even if the shops were within practical distance from their homes, they spent far too much time *waiting*.² Consequently, in 1922, a suggestion was brought forward, in the garden city magazine, by one of the residents, the engineer Arne Baggerud. He had read about an American system that had been practiced "over there" for quite a while, and apparently with great success. The basic principle, he explained, was "help yourself." Baggerud described how, in modern American shops, the counter

was actually removed, and all the groceries were simply stacked in shelves alongside the walls, or even in open shelves in the middle of the floor.

When the housewife enters the shops, she simply walks over to these shelves, where the groceries are clearly labelled and marked with name and price, and she takes whatever she needs and then places it in her basket or bag. After she has helped herself, she walks over to the till, where the total is quickly summed up using a calculating machine, then pays and leaves. There are no queues, not even at the busiest time of day, and going to the shop is simply fun. [...] We live in a modern city and ought to use modern methods to ease our work.³

Baggerud's proposal was clearly more than a little premature for Norway, however, as nothing much would change at Ullevål Haveby's market square for several decades. In 1966, however, the charcuterie and the grocery store merged, which meant that cooked and processed meats from now on would be sold alongside all sorts of other groceries.⁴ This change reflected a general shift that had set in all across Norway, toward self-service stores that would come to be called "supermarkets." In Damplassen's new supermarket, goods were no longer distributed over the counter, but stacked on shelves in an open floor plan, just as Baggerud had suggested more than four decades previously. Here, customers would forage on their own, filling their shopping baskets at will.

Where the old butcher and charcuterie had highlighted the origin of meat, as well as the expertise that went into transforming animals into meat, the new supermarket made meat a grocery like any other, in a jungle of goods that the customer had to traverse on her own. While some supermarkets did retain a separate meat counter, these too would disappear with time. When that happened, any reminder of the work and the skills needed to transform big chunks of animal into consumable pieces of meat disappeared along with them.

The supermarket was such a success that the Damplassen butcher went out of business in the early 1980s, and the local residents were left with merely two food shops: a supermarket and a bakery. The inhabitants of this idyllic garden suburb were thus placed in the same – paradoxical – situation in which most of us find ourselves today: While we eat more meat than ever, we no longer encounter any reminder of the animal origin of meat, or of the work and skill that goes into making animals edible. Without these reminders, we have grown increasingly distanced from the animal origin of meat – and the result, we argue, is *denial*.

In this chapter, we focus on how the presentation of meat in the retail context has changed over time, in order to understand what role the provision, processing, and presentation of meat has had in enabling denial of the animal origin of meat. Our underlying question is how consumers' meeting with meat – at the point of purchase – has changed over time, and how this has changed those consumers' relation to meat.

Although it is a handy illustration of change, the tidy, enclosed square at Ullevål Hageby admittedly belies some of the complexity of the changes we will touch on in this chapter. As we will argue, the animal disappeared from the point of purchase not simply because butchers were outcompeted by supermarkets. Or, to put it with somewhat greater precision, when butchers like the one at Damplassen were outcompeted by the new supermarkets, this was a complex shift, which certainly had something to do with the dynamics of retail markets, but which relied just as heavily on a series of technological developments – partly those within farming and slaughter, which we have already described, but also, significantly, within packaging, labeling, store planning, and advertising.

Gradually, the sight of animal parts disappeared from the sites where consumers bought meat, and increasingly, the act of buying meat thus took place without any clear reminder of the animal. This process drove alienation not just spatially, in the sense that pigs' heads, ox-tails, pigs' trotters, and other animal parts were physically removed from where most people frequented, but also socially and professionally, because the knowledge and skill that was associated with transforming animal bodies into meat also disappeared. The supermarket customer would engage in far less conversation and discussion with a specialist in treating animal carcasses than had the old butcher shop customer, and because meat was increasingly being offered to customers as ready-to-cook, the knowledge and skill about meat called for in the consumer declined steadily. Instead, this new, modern consumer was tasked with becoming an adept reader of labels – which increasingly became the prime source of information about what exactly one was buying when one bought meat.

The label is a more distanced way of mediating the animal being bought, however, partly because it – unlike the butcher – does not talk back, and partly because labels are also the site of *brands*, and hence, of advertising. Previously, the relation between a seller of meat (the butcher) and a buyer of it (typically, the housewife) would sustain quotidian conversation and, thus, shared meaning-making about animals and meat. The butcher's shop was a site of cultural exchange about meat; it was, in part, where the dominant meat culture was made. Since then, however, the gap between sites of meat production and meat consumption has grown, and the butcher's shops – a mediating link between production and consumption – have all but disappeared. Today, consumers must instead rely on advertising or other ad-like informational material for their insight into what they eat when they eat meat. This is a precarious situation, since the explicit mandate of the main actors in this field – in Norway, the Meat Information Office – is to increase the meat consumption of the population.

At the Butcher's

A result of the early 20th-century regulation of slaughter was a greater specialization of tasks involved in the process of transforming animals to

meat. One consequence of this, in turn, was to provide an impetus for the growth of specialized butcher shops and charcuteries, most of which would no longer perform the actual slaughter, but instead buy carcasses to cut, process, and sell in the shop.

Between 1900 and 1930, these specialty butchers multiplied alongside the growing urban market for meat. In many cases, they were placed on the ground floor of the building, because a cool shop meant that the meat would keep. If a shop could be placed in the building's north facing corner, that was even better. Butcher shops most often had white tiled interiors, with checkered white and black tiled floors and marble countertops – designed for ease of cleaning. The counters were often glassed in to prevent customers from touching the meat on display. All along the walls and in the windows, rails were mounted so it was easy to hang carcasses.⁵

In the 1920s, many slaughterhouses began investing in cooling facilities, which provided them with far greater flexibility when it came to storage and further distribution. Some of the butchers would rent space in these cold storages, and would drive all their remaining meats back to the cold storage at the slaughterhouse in the evening. This was a cumbersome routine, and the larger butcher businesses would invest in their own cooling rooms, which enabled them to maintain the meat's freshness for longer. The benefits of cold storage were obvious, and most butcher shops would try to acquire them over the following two decades.⁶ Most butcher shops thus obtained a fairly uniform design and technological level which did not change much over time.

Many butchers were run as a family business, and were staffed by highly professional people. Reflecting on his own professional history, one retired butcher explains how and why it would take several years to become a master of the trade: First, he was an apprentice butcher's boy, from 1947 to 1949. Then, he worked for four years as a butcher. After that, he was allowed a two year master's apprenticeship to become master of the trade, and this was followed by an additional year of study to gain a certificate that allowed him to engage in commercial enterprise, the so-called *handelsbrev* (trade letter). In total, it took him seven years to become a master butcher. On top of this, he studied business administration in the evenings, for another three years, to be allowed to open a shop of his own. In order to satisfy the requirements for practical and theoretical knowledge, this combination of skills and theory was tested through exams. Perhaps the most important one was the butcher's apprentice exam, which was a testament to the high standards by which the butchers held themselves; their pride in their profession did not allow easy entry.

The apprentices' final exam was a solemn affair watched by a jury of men wearing black bowler hats overseeing the traditional course of affairs. They would remain silent, watching the candidate for instance butcher a pig after a particular set of rules. If the candidate made a

mistake, they would walk in to the butcher and tell him that his apprentice had failed.⁷

The butcher shop itself was also a site of continued learning, as the staff of a sizeable butcher shop would be made up of people with varying degrees of expertise: butcher boys, apprentice butchers, butchers, apprentice butcher-masters, and butcher-masters. Sizes would vary, however, and not all butcher shops were as richly staffed as this.

In big cities like Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim, there were quite a number of butcher shops, large and small, which served the steadily growing populations of those urban centers. The newly won affluence of the post-WWII years allowed more meat to be produced and slaughtered, and the increase in wealth also increased the number of customers who could afford to buy the meat. While the guild had started out as an urban phenomenon, butcher shops and other specialty shops for meat were, from the 1950s onwards, no longer exclusive to the big cities. Even in small market towns of just a couple of thousand people, it was common to have a variety of shops and even several butcher shops. For instance, in the market town of Bryne, two separate butcher shops were placed in two adjoining houses (as seen in Figure 3.1). Some customers were loyal to one butcher or the other, while others chose one butcher's sausages and the other butcher's hams. One



Figure 3.1 Bryne market place, 1963, with one butcher shop on either side of adjoining lower building.

Source: Time bibliotek.

of our interviewees explains the interesting smells and sounds within the butcher's shop, the smooth running mechanics of the various machines, and how he liked witnessing the clean-up at the end of the day, when the tile-covered walls and floor were hosed down and cleaned every afternoon.

Accounts such as this reflect both the specialization and the professionalism of the butchers, though the hygiene procedures that were part of the daily rhythm reflected only a fraction of the butchers' professional skills. The butcher's professionalism also included, not least, knowledge about the anatomy of the animal, its potential parasites, pathogens, bacteria, in addition to the hygienic measures necessary to curb them. Further, it was essential to have a skilled hand at dissecting it into pieces which were easy to buy and take home. So was the job of transforming the various cuts into sausages, hams, and mince, and, as a prerequisite, knowledge about and dexterity in handling the various tools and technologies of the trade.

In a butcher shop, both machines and less mechanical tools would be within both eyesight and hearing. The sound of chopping, sawing, and sharpening of knives would echo along the tiled walls. The knife was the butcher's most important tool; it came in many shapes and sizes, and had to be kept sharp using a steel. In the textbook for butcher apprentices, we can read the set of rules that butchers had to follow to use a knife:



Figure 3.2 Ullevål Haveby butcher shop, ca. 1926.

Photographer unknown.

Source: Oslo Havebyselskap.

Make sure the knives are always kept sharp and that they are sharpened as often as possible. If using a steel, one should always make sure to keep the knife's edge off the steel, rather sharpen the sides of the knife. Never let knives lie around so they can in part or in total be covered by other work items, as other people may accidentally get hurt. Never hold on to the knife when lifting trays or carcasses, or tuck the knife under the armpit. The knife should not be stuck into the shaft of one's boots either.⁸

Another important and very visible piece of equipment at the typical butcher shop was the butcher's block. The best ones were hardwood blocks pressed into shape with the wood's grain running vertically and kept in place with a tight iron band. The hardwood was oiled or waxed, so that meat juices, blood, fat, gristle, and bone dust could be wiped off easily. Along the walls, animals' carcasses were hanging to tenderize, waiting to be divided into smaller cuts for each individual customer. Butchers acquired these carcasses from the central slaughterhouse – where the fastidious butchers insisted on picking carcasses themselves, in order to assess the quality. There was more to a carcass than a particular veterinary stamp: If the animal had traveled far and been subject to stress, for instance, the meat would be less tender. Butchers appreciated a rounded carcass, showing that the animal had been fed well and been in good health while alive. To decide the age of the animal whose carcass a butcher dealt with, a textbook for butchers, from 1957, explains that:

To decide if a cow is old or young, we can inspect the bone substance of the knuckles. If it is a young animal, the joint is blueish. If it is an old animal, it is yellow, and the bones look brittle. [...] For pigs, age considerations are usually irrelevant, because they are usually slaughtered as soon as they are fattened. Here in Norway they are usually slaughtered when they are between 6 and 8 months old, depending on what their flesh is destined for. If they are to be sold in a shop, they are usually slaughtered when they weigh 55-70 kilos. For production purposes they should weigh 100-120 kilos and even more.⁹

Another way of assessing the quality was to consider the color – the younger the animal, the paler the meat. A piece of meat that had tenderized for a while had a dryer surface and darker color than a freshly cut one.

The butcher always had to be one step ahead of his most important customer – the housewife. She herself was proficient in assessing meat, and her choice of one particular butcher shop or the other was based on whether she liked or disliked the butcher and *his* professional skills. Henriette Schönberg Erken (Norway's Mrs Beaton) was a well-known home economics teacher and food writer, and her cookbook, called simply *Stor Kokebok* (Large Cookbook), provides a key to understanding the ideology of the

housewife in the early 1900s. It was published in no less than 19 editions between 1914 and 1951, and lists a set of rules for choosing and treating meat, the first of which is that, “Every housewife must understand how to choose the best, most favourable piece of meat.”¹⁰ The venue where this choice was made, of course, was the butcher shop. Although Erken’s advice said, more specifically, that one should poke and touch the meat to assess its quality (it should be taut and elastic and fairly dry to touch), this practice came to an end when the butcher shops modernized and mounted a protective glass wall in front of the marble countertop. The glass still allowed the customer to *see* the meats on display, however, and she would now make her choice based on the butcher’s performance of the tactile part of the quality assessment: He would press into the meat and let the housewife assess visually how taut it was. The color would also be tell-tale; the longer it was since it had been cut, the darker its color. The proof was in the pudding, though. If she came home and felt she had been tricked, there was ample opportunity to shop at a different butcher shop. The housewife placed her trust in the butcher, and the butcher’s word and expertise was her guarantee that price reflected quality. The meat would be wrapped in waxed paper, and the butcher could give advice as to how long it could be stored before consumption. There was no label on the paper-wrapped parcel which stated the meat’s weight or content, neither was there anything like a brand on the paper parcel. Rather than a labeled guarantee of weight, content, and freshness of the meat – as is the norm today – there was an implicit contract between the butcher and his customers. One part of the butcher’s craft was to assess, and hence to validate, the quality of the meat vis-à-vis the consumer.

The formation of a slaughterer’s guild, together with specialization at the point of retail, which we have sketched here, resulted in a significant professionalization of the butcher’s craft. As one author wrote, in the retail cooperative’s magazine, in 1952:

The craft of making sausages has changed fundamentally during the past few years. From being a small and insignificant craft without many ambitions within its field, it has now become a craft which earns great respect by both the public and among the craftsmen themselves.¹¹

Among the causes of this change, the author suggested, were the education of butchers about the quality of meat, the government’s stricter requirements for hygiene, modernization of the salting process, scientific analyses of the meat itself, and also, improved canning procedures. The growing use of technology had also assisted, he added, in keeping production high and prices low. But as meat prices were still regulated in the post-war years, the butchers’ possible mark-up was also low, and one needed a “rational” approach to the matter, which in this context was a euphemism for intensification and upscaling within the industry. One of the major obstacles for making a profit was the size of each enterprise: “The ideal charcuterie



Figure 3.3 Team of butchers processing a carcass at Brødrene Bothner.
Photographer unknown.
Source: Sør-Troms Museum.

employs 5-6 men,” the writer noted, adding that, “One and two-men enterprises are not to be recommended.” This was explained by the number of machines needed to run rationally and efficiently regardless of the size of the enterprise, as machines were very expensive. Even a one to two-man butcher shop would need a fast chopper, electric and hydraulic mincer and sausage maker, kneading machine, high pressure water hose, industrial sized boiler, smoker, and molds for various patés, meat loaves, and other such delicacies. The author stated:

I would like to see the man who can present a balance sheet showing a profit for a charcuterie employing only one butcher, and I think the best advice I can give is to ask them to close down for good. Why? Well because too much time is spent cleaning, fetching goods, pulling intestines, tidying etc., so one man will not be able to work productively more than half of the week.¹²

In short, the butcher had to scale up, employ more people. But the size of the operation was tightly connected to a number of other concerns, like new machinery and the customers’ changing expectations about what kind of food one could get in a butcher’s shop. The fact that the butchers were not allowed to charge as much as they wanted to or needed to because of price

regulation, added to the difficulties for a small butcher. The margins for profit were too small, and small artisans had to scale up to stay in business.

From Butchers to Brands

From around mid-century, the work done at the traditional butcher's, as well as the skills required to perform that work, would begin to disappear from the everyday life of most consumers – at the same time mirroring and boosting the processes we have seen take place with the farm and the slaughterhouse. Over time, the sight that previously had been a common one to the clientele in those shops – that is, easily identifiable parts of dead animals, which offered an everyday reminder of the animal origin of meat – would become increasingly rare. When that happened, the know-how required to be a successful customer in such shops would also gradually fade away – or, more correctly, it would be replaced by another form of expertise, which had less to do with assessing the origin or state of an animal and its meat, and more to do with the deciphering of labels and brands.

Two developments, in particular, were central to this shift. First were changes in how meat was prepared and presented to the consumer, second were changes made to the stores in which it was sold: While the presentation changed from open displays of large cuts of animal bodies to *packaged, labeled, and branded* meal-sized bits of meat, stores changed from having *over-the-counter* floorplans to *self-service* ones, where customers browsed freely. Importantly, these two developments were closely interrelated – practically two sides of the same coin.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that packaging was part of a cluster of technologies – along with containerization, refrigeration, and various forms of motorized transport – that radically altered, if not to say *made*, what it means to be a modern consumer. This was no less true for meat than for other commodities: From the 1950s onwards, development of packaging and labeling would radically transform the way meat was presented to consumers, and in the process, it changed both the sellers and the buyers of meat: Gone was the professionalism of the butcher, the transparency of the butcher shop, and the knowledge-imparting, meaning-making conversations between seller and buyer; now, consumers were asked to trust the brand rather than the butcher. Meanwhile, those who sold meat were reduced, over time, to little more than stockers of shelves and refrigerators.

In Norway, the shift to packaging goods began to take off in the 1960s, but, as is so often the case, the United States was several decades ahead. What historians Gary Cross and Robert Proctor dub the “packaged pleasure revolution” began there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as the process of “tubing” or “tubularization” was “taken to a new level with the Industrial Revolution.” The increasing use of packaging might seem like a marginal event, but as these authors demonstrate, it was actually a key factor in “allowing new economies of scale in manufacturing.”¹³

As disparate as [...] various forms of “tubing” might seem, what unites them are certain shared engineering and conceptual origins [...]. Tubing helped transform certain parts of nature into commodities, products that could be packaged and thus labeled, identifying and eventually advertising their contents. Suitably wrapped, tubing transformed the product by the color, image, and text of its external appearance, making the product something more than and different from its interior nature.¹⁴

When applied to meat, we begin to see how this way of “designing” the product was radically different than what the housewives had met at the butcher’s shop. One might say that, while the housewives at the butcher’s were buying a part of an animal slaughtered to be eaten, consumers from mid-century onwards would increasingly buy a product, a “packaged pleasure” which had made a commodity out of ephemeral nature. In this regard, meat was only one example of the packaged pleasure revolution, where various technologies – including bottling, canning, and boxing – “laid the foundations for a new kind of consumer culture in the form of a portable personal commodity, accessed cheaply and virtually anytime, anywhere.”¹⁵

Among the benefits of packaged goods, as suggested by the advertisements that accompanied them, was their ability to enhance the purity and protection of the product – in short, that they ensured that the product was safe to consume. Equally important was the fact that packaged goods enhanced “convenience and time saving,” and that this, in turn, contributed to improving access to the goods in question: “Equality and ubiquity of access were commonly stressed virtues of such foods.”¹⁶

Van Camp’s beans claimed to save consumers sixteen hours of toil, compared to the time required for home-preparations. No longer would the homemaker have to endure the misery of a hot August kitchen cooking beans. Instead, canned pork and beans could be served after a few minutes of heating in a sauce pan. Heinz offered to take over all of the family’s tasks of home preserving, assuring that skilled workers could seed the cherries and cook the choicest fruits to just the right temperature and for just the right length of time. And even a child could prepare the gelatinous dessert of Jell-O.¹⁷

While one key to the success of packaged foods was that packaging had “the prosaic but still astonishing ability to contain stuff that would otherwise decay, dissipate, or disappear,” another was that packaging allowed “advertising contents to consumers far and wide.”¹⁸ In short: *Packaging invited labeling, and labeling invited branding*. In contrast with foods stored in large containers, behind the counter, and sold by weight – which from a marketing point of view was largely “invisible,” and which could only be marketed by way of the reputation of the seller – packaged, labeled, and

branded goods bore the mark of the industrial actor responsible for producing and bringing the product to market. The label thus became a key mechanism in developing product brands. “[T]he label was about much more than convenience”; the label “signaled to its purchaser more than an identification of contents; an aura of authority or emotional attachment could also be conveyed, impacting buyer’s choice and transforming how consumers related to retailers and retailers to jobbers and manufacturers.”¹⁹ One might go so far as to say that labels created brands, and that brands, in turn, were instrumental in disposing of “the massive surpluses heaped up by the packaged pleasures revolution.”²⁰

Paradigmatic cases of how the label/brand nexus made commodities that are still famous – not to say ubiquitous – are Campbell’s Soup, Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, and, not least, Coca-Cola, which built its brand not just on its taste, or on its secret recipe, but on its “distinctive, trademark bottle,” combined with the highly recognizable logo on its label. In this case, “[a]dvertising worked with the package to make it ‘impossible for the consumer to escape Coca-Cola,’” as one of the company’s sales managers boasted in the 1920s.²¹

Although the preparation and presentation of meat in Norway would, in time, catch up with the “packaged pleasure revolution” in the United States, the Norwegian revolution was in fact more of a reform. It arrived later, and happened more slowly, than what appears to have been the case in the United States. Another major difference was that, while the American development was spearheaded by private companies, the cooperatives were central actors in all parts of the chain in Norway, including retail.

That said, the cooperatives were not necessarily backward. In the early 1960s, a key document within the slaughtering cooperative, the report from the so-called Eika committee – popularly called *Blåboka* (the Blue Book) – had established that, to stay abreast of the development, the cooperative should centralize its operations and establish a joint brand. Work on brand development was placed with a consultancy firm, Aukner & Neumann, who according to historians “had an important role when it came to establishing modern marketing anew in the slaughtering cooperative.”²² After considering several options, the cooperative decided to go for the brand name *Gilde*, which, as the historians note, “plays on national[ist] strings,” and which has a double, or in fact triple, meaning: It refers to a *festive meal*, but also to an *association* – as in the English (originally Norse) word “guild.” The brand name thus suggested that Gilde meats were festive meals with deep historical roots brought to the consumer by the unique association that was the Norway’s slaughtering cooperative. That the word in addition had the meaning of “good” or “grand” or “stately” did not hurt.

This choice of brand name arguably connects to our overall thesis, since while it was, in many ways, a product of a push to modernize the slaughtering business in Norway, the name itself, as well as the many advertisements that would follow in an effort to make the brand name a success, pointed

backwards in time. Paradoxically, just at the time when the modernization of meat production and sale was taking off, pushing the traditional butcher out of the market, the cooperative anchored its presence historically, choosing a name that literally meant *guild*. To say that this was an effort to enact denial of the direction meat production was taking, would be an exaggeration, but not more than a slight one. In fact, while the above-mentioned report advised that a new brand could be advertised along the lines of “easy food in a busy life,” the advertisements that actually followed after the brand consolidation emphasized instead that this was meat produced “in the farmers’ own slaughterhouses, using the farmers’ own traditional recipes.”²³ The advertisement in which that phrase was used, from 1964, was even illustrated by a three-headed troll, a clear reference to traditional Norwegian folk tales.

While one finds many different slogans and strategies throughout the history of how this – still powerful – brand has been advertised, the emphasis on tradition and the point about Gilde emanating from a “guild” of farmers have been mainstays in the cooperative’s commercial communication. For a long time, the brand logo was what appeared to be a flag, in Norway’s national colors (red, white, and blue), while the slogan was, “Gilde: The Farmer’s Own Brand.” Historians Christensen and Nilsen state, in their book about the cooperative, that, “In the 70s, it was important to convey to consumers that Norwegian farmers were behind the Gilde brand and that Gilde was made from Norwegian traditions,” but we believe this tendency extends far beyond the 1970s – in fact into the present, of which our case of the “Trojan Cow” is just one example.

The Beast Has Left the Building

If packaging technology meant that open displays of animal parts in butcher shops became a less common sight for most consumers, another important change to people’s everyday encounters with meat was the transformation of the sites where meat was sold. The old butcher shops, for one, were not made for packaged goods, and the packaged pleasure revolution would, with time, put them out of business. In contrast, packaging was deeply entwined with changes to corner shops and to the emerging “supermarkets,” which were based on an increased awareness of the dynamic relationship between products and stores.

The big change, which gained force in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was the shift from over-the-counter shopping to self-service shopping. At least in Norway, this shift was not a simple consequence of new packaging technology, though retailers realized soon enough that any large-scale shift to self-service could not happen unless most goods were offered in packaged and labeled form. This happened for many other goods before it happened for meat: Canned meat had admittedly been a popular commodity in Norway for some time already, but most grocery stores and supermarkets retained a separate meat counter – a little butcher shop within the grocery store – for

several decades. Only when the slaughtering cooperative began taking over a larger part of the cutting of carcasses, thus removing the need for butchers anywhere, did meat come predominantly in packaged form.

Before WWII, most Norwegian consumers had bought meat and other food items in specialized stores, as we saw in the case of Damplassen. General stores sold most other items behind a long counter that separated the customers from staff and goods. After the war, however, grocers began considering the prospect of self-service stores, which, in line with the packaging revolution, had become a growing trend abroad. In the United States, the first self-service store had opened in California, in 1912. The concept slowly spread to other US states in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the beginning of WWII, self-service stores could be found all over the United States. In the late 1930s, a few even opened in the United Kingdom and Sweden, and in the years immediately after the war, the increase of self-service stores in these countries was quite phenomenal.²⁴

According to a visiting British economist, Tony Boyd, Norway and Denmark were slower than Sweden to introduce self-service in stores due to certain legal and financial restrictions in the post-war years. One such legal restriction was a limitation on the number of stores the government allowed to open within a certain geographical area, while an example of financial restrictions was governmental price regulation.²⁵ Boyd explained that in the United States, privately owned companies had initiated the self-service revolution, but in Britain and the Nordics, the power and size of the cooperative movement had placed them in the lead. In Norway, the whole idea of self-service was attached closely to consumer cooperatives. Whether it was private effort or cooperative collaboration that structured the enterprise, self-service was perceived as rational, effective, and thus financially advantageous for the stores.²⁶ The advantage for the shoppers was that they could take their time browsing without causing delay to other customers, allowing everyone to spend time on what they wanted to do (shop) rather than what they did not want to do (stand in line). For the retailer, the benefits were even more evident: The stores could downscale their number of sales clerks, even if more time had to be spent price-tagging each item. An increase in the number of items for sale, including luxury articles like biscuits, soap, and beauty products, enticed the customers to spend more. Finally, the attractiveness of the stores themselves drew customers, and widened the catchment area for each self-service store. In fact, Boyd refers to a study from Manchester, England, which compared old-fashioned stores with self-service stores, and which showed that sales increased by nine percent while staff was reduced by 12.5 percent, amounting to an increase in sales of 27 percent per employee. Four people could now carry out the work of five.²⁷ How could these new ideas be introduced to Norway – and how could store owners be brought to embrace such a shift?

Local store keepers had ample reason not to embrace all the new ideas of self-service, and these reasons were also rational and financial: Most

existing stores had been designed as narrow rooms that ran along a long counter which separated customers from store attendants. Refitting them for self-service was bound to be both cumbersome and expensive. As if this was not enough, according to widespread advice at the time, a self-service store ought to be rather large, at least 100m²–150m². This size would allow for both a comfortable display of food and easy navigation and movement for the customers.²⁸ This need for more space increased rents, however, and thus required a higher turnover. Nevertheless, the benefits were obvious: Fewer employees could serve more customers, and customers would be free to browse and shop at their own leisure. Not least, in open-floor self-service stores, customers would be tempted to pick up things they did not really need, as they now had a variety of interesting goods within easy reach.

As one can see in advertisements from that time, the idea of self-service was motivated not just by economics or convenience, but by an idea of progress, by the sense that self-service was the future – that this was the more “rational” and “modern” way. One advertisement from the retail cooperative’s magazine – issued from the cooperative’s “store department” to its local retailers – carried a heading that said “*Self service,*” in large letters, and a sub-heading proclaiming that this was “the most important step towards a rational store.” The accompanying text left no doubt that self-service was



Figure 3.4 Ullevål Haveby delicatessen, ca. 1926.

Photographer: Ingimundur Eyolfson.

Source: Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek.

the future, and at the same time, it revealed that a greater number of occupational specialties had descended on the retail sphere. The lone grocer could no longer trust himself to know what was best for his store; now, he was advised to seek professional help.

Experience shows that [self-service] is a good investment – it gives higher yields for less toil, and it increases the store's net profits. But if you are to reap all the benefits of this system, your store must be appropriately planned. You will be well advised to contact us, where you will get professional help with your floor plan, without a single penny cost on your part. We will develop a proposal [for your store]. Furthermore, we will deliver modern fixtures and equipment to suit your needs.

Even though the potential for profit within self-service shopping was evident, this prospect relied on structural changes within the whole supply chain, which were needed to increase the yields. Inserting a few trolleys and baskets into the store and price tagging the merchandise was not enough. Not only did the stores have to change, the shelving, the technology, and even the groceries themselves had to be remade. In fact, it did not take long before grocers started realizing that, for the self-service idea to work, the goods on sale would have to change almost as much as the store itself. Packaging and self-service, retailers were realizing, were two sides of the same coin.

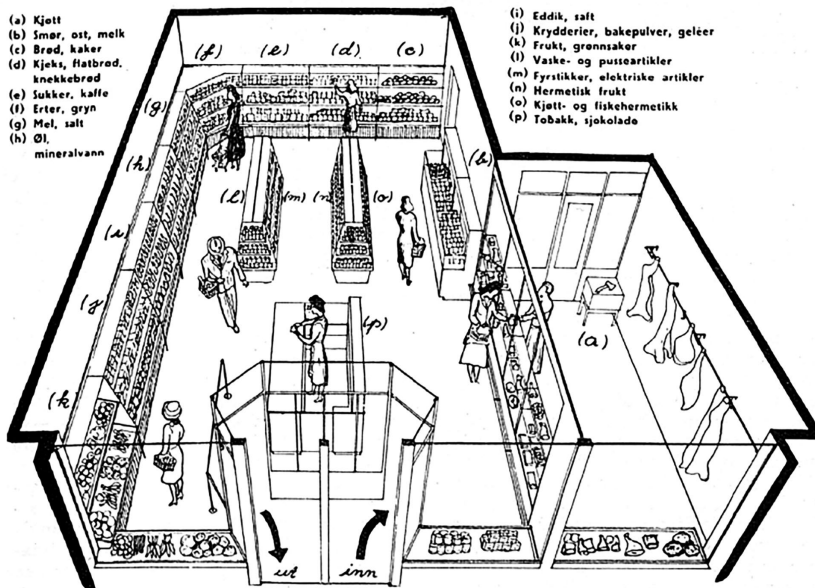


Figure 3.5 Model of self-service store interior, 1950.

Source: *Forbrukeren*.

For instance, a director of the cooperative stated at the time that, “I believe self-service stores for food will become popular [...] but the full benefits will only be harvested when foods come pre-packaged in standardized packages.”²⁹ This call was echoed the following year: “We need pre-packaged goods,” wrote another representative of the cooperative, while explaining the benefits of plastics, which would become a key technology in the display of goods in self-service stores. With the novel product *transofilm* – a see-through cellophane-like material that was suitable for pre-packaging and displaying meats and sausages – meat was made available for self-service: Now, customers could simply reach out a hand to grab a package of meat and also see clearly what they bought.³⁰ By the 1960s, packaging technology had progressed substantially, and among the innovations in how meat was packaged and displayed were so-called “foodtainers,” which the cooperative’s magazine declared, in 1961, was “the latest in the field.” This was an ideal technology for packaging meats, claimed the magazine, explaining that foodtainers were made of cardboard and had been saturated with wax to partly absorb and partly contain any meat juices, while protecting the meat on display.³¹

After the first discovery of products like “transofilm” and “foodtainers,” packaging innovation has of course continued, all the way up to the present day, and the quality of packaging is today far superior to what existed when these technologies were first developed. The two main factors that changed how meat was presented to the consumer – packaging and self-service stores – were, however, intertwined with a third technology, which we touched on in the previous chapter, namely *refrigeration*. Store owners were given strict advice to invest in a cooling counter, from which one could display foods like meats and sausages, dairy and vegetables. Though less technical solutions could be used for vegetables and dairy, they were told that a cooling unit was a requirement rather than an option for meat stuffs.³²

This requirement for coolers, in turn, went hand in hand with the spread of *electricity*. This technology allowed fundamental changes in meat consumption habits: While Norwegian meat traditionally had been eaten cured, dried, and sometimes smoked, now, thanks to electric coolers, fresh meat became readily available to both the rural and the growing urban market. By the 1950s, the electric fridge was an obtainable, if not quite yet a widespread, feature in Norwegian households. Its usefulness caused its popularity to grow rapidly, and by 1967, 74 percent of all Norwegian households had an electric fridge.³³

Electric refrigeration had repercussions not just for private households, however, but also for large-scale, commercial uses. Largely thanks to refrigeration, grocery store refittings like the ones contemplated in the late 1940s and early 1950s were now becoming economically viable, and many stores shifted to self-service interiors, where a key component was cooling counters displaying meat and other perishables. These counters meant that

a greater number of meat products could be moved out of the butcher shop and into the grocery store. In the 1960s, this development even engendered a new Norwegian word: *ferskware*. This word literally translates as “fresh goods,” but in Norwegian, the word had a more specific meaning: meat or fish sold fresh.³⁴ Although butchers and fish mongers were already using blocks of ice to sell fresh meat and fish, it was the increasingly ubiquitous presence, among all the other groceries, of *electrically chilled* meat and fish that engendered the new terminology.

The shift to self-service stores – what was now increasingly called “supermarkets” – was thus a complex process which rested on many different developments, including a maturation on the part of the retailers themselves. But of course, retailers were not the only ones who had to adjust their thinking about what shopping entailed – customers too had to go through a process of maturation. For instance, in a story from the food magazine *Alt om mat*, from the early 1970s, when such stores were becoming the norm, a writer for the magazine lamented the impersonal nature of the new stores. “Give customers a chair to sit on,” read the somewhat cryptic heading, as the writer asked: “Must the supermarket be so impersonal?” The writer complained that,

The retailer, in his unending effort to sell as much as he can in as little time as possible, forgets, perhaps, that one cannot rationalize all service provision. The human being, the sales person, used to provide this service – but now the personal service is gone, and nothing has taken its place.

There were, however, many ways to offer better service to the customer, even within the self-service supermarket, this writer added, and many of them “cost nothing or very little.” For instance, a retailer could make sure there was a magnifying glass available, so customers could more easily read the best-before label, a calendar, a chair for the elderly or for those queuing for the meat counter, as well as a message board for the local community: “When Mrs Moen needs a babysitter, she can post a note with her name, address, and telephone number. Maybe she needs some help around the house, to sell her mix master, or swap apartments, etc.”³⁵

The changes that took place within packaging, store planning, and refrigeration were all key factors in changing how meat was presented to Norwegian consumers. This shift only took off in a big way, however, when another factor was added to the equation, namely the vertical integration strategy of the meat cooperative. In 1972, the Norwegian people had voted to remain outside the EEC in a referendum, and while this result was welcomed by most agricultural interests in Norway, who feared what would happen if Norway’s strongly regulated agricultural sector had to compete with other European countries, central figures within the meat cooperative took the result to be no more than a temporary “reprieve,” and suggested



Figure 3.6 Ullevål Haveby supermarket, ca. 1964.

Photo: Atelier Rude.

Source: Byhistorisk samling, Oslo Museum.

that “a society in line with the ideals of the common market would emerge regardless.”³⁶ Consequently, they were eager to find ways to consolidate and grow. One avenue for doing just that, they were about to discover, was to take control of a larger part of the chain from farm to fork. In 1975, representatives of the cooperative had been on “study trips” to the United States, and had grown quite adamant that there should be a “rationalization of meat sales at the point of retail,” which in practice meant making sure that there should be no “integration from the retailers into production and packaging.”³⁷ Calculations had revealed that control of cutting and packaging of meat was a source of substantial profits, and the meat cooperative’s sustained effort to gain such control had several consequences.

The first was that the cooperative would increasingly cut its own meat, which had become a viable option not least because of the automation of slaughterhouse work, which could easily, and on a large scale, be combined with machines for meal-size cutting, packaging, and labeling. As we described in the previous chapter, the slaughterhouses, from around the mid-1970s, went through a period of intense growth and specialization, which enabled them to take on jobs that were previously performed in butcher shops and at the meat counters in grocery stores – only the slaughterhouses did them much more efficiently. Consequently, from cutting 42 percent of the meat in 1974, their share of this market grew steadily to 50 percent in 1985, and extended further, to 75 percent in 2004.³⁸ The incentive for meat producers to gain a large share of the market in cutting in effect boosted the transition that had been underway since the late 1960s from independent butchers to meat counters in the supermarket. “One of the [meat cooperative’s] most important aims throughout the 1970s,” write historians of the cooperative, “was to transfer as much of this activity as possible to their own slaughterhouses, and rather sell 20-30 kilo Gilde-branded multi-packages of ready-cut, standardized pieces to the stores.”³⁹

The meat coop’s increasing control over cutting was only a first step, however. Over time, this move led to another shift, this time within the grocery stores themselves, from the staffed meat counter, where meat was displayed and cut in a back room, to meat increasingly being displayed as boneless, ready-cut, and plastic-wrapped in refrigerators and freezers around the store.⁴⁰

The meat cooperative’s incentive to pursue vertical integration provided the final push needed to include meat in the “packaged pleasure revolution.” It boosted the cluster of technologies – packaging/labeling/branding, self-service, refrigeration – that had begun, already from early 1960s, to change how meat was sold. These technologies have a democratizing aspect, in that they provide access to a wide range of products to a far greater part of the population. At the same time, they “all make it possible – indeed enticingly easy – to ingest far more than we know is good for us,” and, we might add, more than what is good for either the animals or the environment.⁴¹ In fact, these technologies “have been engineered, manipulated, and marketed for the singular purpose of maximizing sales and profits with so little regard for social and bodily consequences.”⁴² As we saw above, even within the Norwegian cooperative, the changes that happened to how meat has been displayed and sold, were often motivated by increased profits. Even in Norway’s emerging social democracy, modernity was associated with the effort to get more for less.

If packaged goods allowed mass consumption to be calibrated to the rhythms of everyday life, it at the same time reconstructed people’s relationship with the seasons: Because packaging resisted natural forces of decay, it released consumption from the *natural* cycles of the year and reconstructed

the seasons as a largely *commercial* phenomenon: With packaging, labeling, and branding, “Old taboos disappeared, [and] so did seasonal, ritual, and festive foods and drinks.”⁴³

The result of the packaging-self-service-and-refrigeration revolution has been two-sided: On the one hand, these developments have greatly enhanced the availability and affordability of meat, but on the other, they have prompted us to buy ever larger amounts of it, while erasing our knowledge and awareness of what, exactly, we are buying. Packaging *contains*, but by so doing, it also *hides* and *obscures*. Self-service and refrigeration are convenient, and appear to open up for greater choice, but at the same time, they have had the effect of suppressing the animal origin of meat from the everyday life of the average grocery shopper. As long as consumers confront meat only as meal-sized packages, labeled and branded as any other commodity, an awareness of what this commodity is, where it comes from, how it has lived and died, requires an active effort on the part of consumers – an effort that neither they, nor producers, nor retailers, are incentivized to promote. What is at play here is what Cross and Proctor call “the blind spot in doctrines of consumer sovereignty,” by which they refer to manufacturers’ efforts to make sure, not least by means of advertising, that consumers do not think too hard about where the neatly packaged products come from. Instead, the “focus is always on the consumer as a free agent, and the manufactured good as something born on the retail shelf.” What is strategically suppressed in this situation is the “crucial fact that consumer choice is often constrained by how such products have been designed.”⁴⁴ Instead of informing the consumer of how a specific product came to be, packaged goods rely on branding and marketing, and on the associated idea that to be a consumer is to choose among brands. Consumer choice is thus made into a “fetish,” Cross and Proctor argue, as the life cycles of the products in question are pushed into the background.

The freedom that these interconnected retail revolutions gave to the consumer, relied on a transfer of responsibility from the home-cook (typically the housewife) to the big industrial companies. In effect, then, these revolutions were entwined with a *deskilling* of the home-cook. This process had notable consequences for the consumer’s knowledge and awareness of the animal origin of meat: When industrial companies took over more of the work involved in treating the meat, and began presenting the meat to the consumer as a packaged commodity like any other, familiarity with treating animal parts slowly began fading from the home-cook’s skill set. Combined with the drive toward developing ever more ready-to-cook, ready-to-heat, or even ready-to-eat, portions, this meant that what met the consumer looked increasingly less like an animal *part*, and ever more like a chunk of protein, with very little reminder of its origins. Perhaps the prime example of this is the now familiar packaging of minced meat, which – as an interesting manifestation of Cross and Proctor’s vocabulary – in fact often comes as a *tube*.



Figure 3.7 Tubularized minced meat, of the cooperative's *Gilde* brand.
Source: Nortura.

Meat Propaganda

Meat advertisements have had a visible and very important role in Norwegian culture. A rich assortment of ads displaying various dishes of meat could – and can still – be found in newspapers, in magazines, on the radio, on television, on billboards, and as posters and leaflets in the supermarket. Today, such content is spread through every conceivable media platform, even in podcasts and social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. A somewhat unusual feature of many meat ads in Norway is that they do not promote any particular brand. The simple reason for this is that the sender of many of them is the Meat Information Office, which is tasked with promoting the interests of the entire Norwegian meat industry.

All advertising created by the Meat Information Office is funded through an excise tax on meat which is distributed from the so-called *Omsetningsrådet* (The Agricultural Marketing Board), a public body created to regulate the Norwegian agricultural market, and chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture. It was established in the wake of the trade law of 1936, and one of its many tasks is to oversee the excise taxes on agricultural trade. The initial purpose of this tax was to increase and regulate the general consumption of pork, milk, cheese, and butter, and the income from the tax was earmarked for the purpose of marketing these particular goods. The funding's

earmarking has varied over time, and has been directed to different marketing boards or “information offices,” for dairy, for bread and grains, for meat, for egg and poultry, among others.⁴⁵ The excise tax is paid by the producers – the farmers themselves – and, beyond funding advertising, is used to finance price regulation, production, and further develop quality and competence within Norwegian agriculture.⁴⁶ One important aspect of these offices’ work has been to influence consumers to buy particular kinds of agricultural products at particular times of the year, to help balance overproduction and underproduction. Although these agencies might sound like government entities, they are financed by the agricultural sector itself, and not through the state budget. The wealthiest information office of them all, with the highest budget and the highest number of employees, is the one for meat, which, in 2009, merged with the information office for eggs and poultry, to become a real force of agricultural advertising in Norway.

As part of our study, we requested interviews with the Meat Information Office’s management and sought access to their archives – both of which were granted. The archives, to which we were escorted by a veteran employee at the Office, is located in the basement of an old military structure at Løren, also known as Oslo’s “Meat City,” due to its having hosted the capital’s meat industry for several decades. In the archives, we collected scrapbooks, annual reports, instruction manuals for employees, not to mention a substantial selection of the advertisements and PR material produced over the years – most of which was from the mid-1970s to about 2000. After sorting and systematizing this material, the Office’s mandate and strategies began to emerge.

As we described above, meat production increased dramatically in the decades following WWII, and there was an imperative that consumption developed roughly in parallel to the increase in production. Getting people to buy and eat all this meat, however, was quite the challenge. This challenge was at the core of the Meat Information Office’s mandate, and the tools they had to work with were price, availability, and marketing. While the price was regulated through the Agricultural Marketing Board, availability had generally gone up, and the period from the 1950s to the early 1970s was characterized by peaks of overproduction in Norwegian agriculture.⁴⁷ This meant that marketing to increase consumption – thus balancing demand to supply – was the main mechanism through which the Office worked.

The Office’s marketing used two notable techniques. The first was to put forth regional specialties as national foods, and the other was to loosen particular foods from their seasonal ties. The effect of both was the same: To remove the restrictions on meat consumption that convention had previously imposed on Norwegians. Pork provides an interesting example of both techniques.

Back in the days before refrigeration, the fatty parts of the pork, like the ribs or the belly, would be eaten fresh around Christmas, while the hams, which contained less fat that could potentially turn rancid, was perfect for

curing and drying. It was typically eaten cold, during summer, as a Norwegian version of *prosciutto*; traditional Norwegian summer cuisine rested heavily on cold foods, so saving the cured ham for summer made sense, while eating the fatty rib fresh in mid-winter before it went rancid was obviously also sensible. In the post-WWII decades, however, pork was becoming available throughout the year, and from a commercial perspective, it would be better if people simply ate more pork all year through. And by loosening the seasonal ties that Norwegian food habits had built around various cuts of pork, the Office could do just that.

It would achieve the same effect if it could get people who had traditionally eaten mutton at Christmas to add pork to their holiday cuisine. If people were encouraged to eat other parts of the pig at Christmas too, not just its ribs but dishes like roasted joints and baked hams, this would expand demand and increase general sales even further. Traditionally, pigs were more common in the wealthier agricultural districts of mid and eastern Norway, and people in these parts of the country ate more pork than did those in certain other parts, where fish and sheep were more common sources of protein. Along the coast, for instance, a freshly caught cod would be on the Christmas table, while dried stockfish reconstituted in lye – *lutefisk* – was the preferred Christmas fish further inland. In western Norway, a salted rib of mutton rather than the fatty rib of pork was the preference. There was a regional divide, in other words, which surfaced most clearly during family holidays like Christmas, when anchoring food culture to family history seemed “natural.” Introducing pork as a national rather than a local food could thus increase the consumption of pork.

In Meat Information Office ads, holiday traditions were given particular attention – both for the purpose of widening pork consumption geographically, and for releasing pork with its seasonality. For instance, if some people associated pork with Christmas, perhaps one could transfer the specific food traditions from one religious holiday to the next? Easter, for instance, was up for grabs: The days leading up to Easter were poor in food traditions, and Easter Eve and Easter Day were celebrated with whatever meat was available, affordable, or preferred.⁴⁸ So the Meat Information Office suggested pork. One example of how they tried to get Norwegians to associate Easter with pork is a full page ad, from 1972, with a color photo covering half the page and text covering the rest, published in the magazine *Hjemmet*. The heading read: “Pork roast with crispy crackling – that is the right Easter dinner!” But if one could convince consumers that something was right for Easter, one could easily project the same idea, the next step was to suggest that it was right for *any* family gathering, at *any* time of year. In one version of the ad, which used the same photo, and was published in the magazine *Allers*, the heading said: “Roast pork with crispy crackling – that is the right family autumn dinner!”

Then there was Christmas. To make the local tradition of eating pork ribs at Christmas into a general Norwegian tradition, the Office put out an ad

in the weekly family magazine *Norsk Ukeblad*, in 1972. In this full page ad, a color photo covers almost two-thirds of the page and shows pork rib covered in shiny golden crackling. The canned pineapple has been replaced by holly and sauerkraut and there are red Christmas candles in the photo too, to keep the reader in a seasonal mood.

Even among festive fare, the rib takes the prize. It is more than just a dish – it is a part of Christmas for so many of us. As we get seated by the Christmas table – even before that, when the fragrance starts spreading from the kitchen – things are as they should be. Crispy crackling, warm fat, sauerkraut, of course. And prunes. And apples and all the other things that go along with the holiday meal, for each and every family through the traditions of generations. *And if it hasn't been a tradition before, it is time to try it this year.*⁴⁹

The ad also provided the no-fail recipe for the rib, so the only thing the housewife needed to do was to ask her butcher for the right size, or to put a ready cut piece of pork rib into her trolley when she went shopping.

The Meat Information Office found ways of working with the idea of tradition even outside the holidays, and many of their ads were geared toward associating meat with established food traditions – for instance, in the ad that read, “Pancakes with bacon – a traditional dish with modern appeal.” Food traditions, as such, did not seem to matter much to the Office, but they were means to an end. So when they assumed that projecting a certain form of meat consumption as modern would have more appeal, that was precisely what they did – for instance in the ad that read, “Ham-steak – roast pork done easy and modern,” which incidentally suggested that consumers could fry a thick slice of a pork joint in a frying pan rather than roast it. According to the Office’s archival material, ads like these were published in what they called the “weekly press,” that is, the major family and women’s magazines. An interesting aspect about the layout of these ads is that they do not look like ads, but as the regular journalistic content of a magazine – an early form of “native advertising.” The only give-away is a small message at the end of the article, with the words “everybody likes meat.” And indeed, it seemed like everybody *did* like meat, as meat consumption in this period grew dramatically. The Meat Information Office took advantage of this by placing ads that normalized frequent meat consumption, for example, one in the weekly magazine *Norsk Ukeblad*, in 1979, which read: “If it’s true that you like meat, you probably eat some pork every day; as cold cuts, in sausages and mince, or as pure meat.”

While it was becoming ever more obvious, as the 1970s progressed, that “everybody likes meat,” what was becoming less obvious for many consumers was what one could *do* with the meat. The farmers and their Meat Information Office wanted to sell the whole hog, and not just its pork chops, but as women were increasingly quitting the home economics schools and joining the workforce, knowledge and skills related to meat processing

and cooking were in decline. This was a concern for the Meat Information Office. They believed that the dwindling of meat processing skills among consumers could be resisted if they filled the educational gap themselves. In addition to the ads, then, they assembled an army of so-called “meat hostesses” – dressed in brown checked pinafores and armed with a suitcase containing a portable gas stove, knives, and brochures – who were distributed across the country’s grocery stores.

Their main task was to show Norwegian housewives how to cook different meat cuts, and hand out tasty tidbits demonstrating what one could accomplish at one’s own kitchen, if one only took the hostesses’ advice. Leaflets, brochures, cooking thermometers, and inspiration of all kinds were distributed to whoever wanted to read or listen.⁵⁰ The Meat Hostess Instructions, from 1972 to 1974, explain the role of the meat hostess thus:

Being a meat hostess requires in-depth knowledge about meat, and the ability to transfer this knowledge to each and every customer, whether this concerns purchase, cooking or storing it. [...] The meat hostess should be placed by the store’s meat section, preferably before the customer arrives at the meat counter.⁵¹



Figure 3.8 Gilde “meat hostess,” posing for the camera, ca. 1964.

Photo: Foto Normann.

Source: Anno Dømkirkeodden.

A huge effort to increase meat sales by information and customer education was carried out, and this effort was especially directed toward the “difficult” joints – the tougher cuts of meat that required more time, skills, and attention from the cook. Norway’s only food magazine at the time, *Alt om mat*, which was published between 1973 and 1986, emphasized three factors for busy homemakers: price, time, and ease of preparation. The meat industry and its information office were very much aware of these factors, and while they, through their work with the meat hostesses, responded by trying to reprofessionalize the home cook, they began, at about the same time, to understand that they could increase meat consumption by transforming the undesirable or tough cuts into minced meat – which did not require much knowledge or skill for its preparation. Consequently, the Meat Information Office’s leaflets also contained new uses for minced meat, alongside the more traditional Norwegian mince recipes, which required time and cooking skills, like meatloaf and meat cakes. A bastardized international cuisine entered the scene; that of Spaghetti Bolognese, pre-prepped international freeze-dried bases like “Mexican Hot-Pot” or “Hunters Stew” (“just add mince”) – even pizza topped with minced meat. Minced meat was fairly inexpensive, fast and easy to cook, and filled all three requirements of price, time, and ease of preparation.

But although mince became an everyday go-to, the ever growing production of pork caused a persistent need for marketing this food. So, in 1981, the Meat Information Office began running ads for “English breakfast.” Traditionally, the Norwegian breakfast had consisted of either porridge, oats as cereal, or open faced sandwiches, but if they could manage to introduce the English breakfast as a weekend treat, this would increase Norwegians’ consumption of bacon. Another ad from around the same time states that “bacon tastes good with many other things too.” A list of alternatives to the egg was provided – had Norwegian consumers tried bacon for dinner, with their traditional fish dumplings, or with their beans, or alongside black pudding, or with fried potatoes? The rib of pork was popular at Christmas, but had people tried it on the barbecue? It could become the all-time summer favorite. In fact, “thousands of Santa Clauses recommend it! Just as easy and just as tasty as pork chops.” Closer to Christmas the same year, people were advised to buy a large rib of pork, more than they need for dinner, because it could be eaten cold after Christmas eve and it would provide you with food throughout the holiday season.⁵² In short, the Office carpet bombed Norwegian consumers so they would buy minced meat, sausages, bacon, belly of pork, and rib of pork. The promotion campaigns were directed to all major newspapers, and most of the weekly magazines with female readers. In addition, every single shop had information leaflets, and glossy brochures with tempting meat recipes. All the consumer had to do was buy and cook the meat.

The Meat Information Office’s annual reports shed further light on their marketing strategies, and it also gives a concrete (if condensed) description

of how a people were enticed to increase their meat consumption. In their report from the year 1990, the mandate of the Meat Information Office was “to contribute to increase the consumption of Norwegian meat by conveying food enjoyment and knowledge about meat.” The annual report also conveyed that the Office would focus less on meat, in general, in order to promote *Norwegian* meat specifically, as a brand.⁵³ The report stated that the Office sought to create a kind of “mental toll barrier,” and be one step ahead of the competition from foreign meat imports.⁵⁴ Though most of the meat sold in Norway was in fact Norwegian, it had not been *branded* as such, and the work to do so had now begun. One obvious channel for this work was the media. In addition to ads, the annual report from 1993 explained that:

1992 was the year when OFK [The Meat Information Office] really “took off” in terms of collaboration with the editorial press. 45 different food articles were made for the weekly press, and in addition to this an ongoing collaboration with [the daily national papers] VG, Aftenposten and Dagbladet. The collaboration with the press provides ample opportunities to reach a large audience with a lot of meat related content, and is an important supplement to ads and other PR.⁵⁵

According to the same report, the Meat Information Office had initiated “a new and exciting collaboration” with the commercial television channel, *TV Norge*, and produced a series of 17 shows with the celebrity, Jon Skolmen.⁵⁶ This scheme was a huge success, and the ratings were very good. Still, they had spent as much as 25 percent of their man hours on this collaboration, and were at this point unsure whether this was time and money well spent. After all, they had many other areas where they could be useful.

The Office collaborated, for instance, with a national board for educating chefs, teaching meat cooking. In the same forum, they instigated “The Norwegian Kitchen,” a campaign to focus on Norwegian food culture in Norwegian cafes, restaurants, and hotels. They supported the “Gastronomic Institute” to further educate catering staff. Finally, they collaborated with the Norwegian chefs’ national team, which became the face of Norwegian cuisine abroad, competing in international competitions like the Bocuse d’Or. But the Meat Information Office had an even wider range. They had a close collaboration, for instance, with the Norwegian College of Home Economics teachers, teaching courses in home economics for teachers’ colleges all over the country; they provided “meat education” to students of nutrition and to students of home care nursing; and they “established a good contact with the University [of Oslo] department of nutrition research,” having “established a yearly tradition of teaching the [University of Oslo nutrition] students.”⁵⁷ Their efforts were not, however, limited to college and university students: To make sure that all children in junior high school would learn to

like and buy meat, they started a project called “Meat for 20,” providing 20 kroner per pupil, earmarked for buying beef, pork, or lamb to be included in home economics classes. This amount was later increased to 50 kroner per pupil.⁵⁸

The annual report from 1992 explained how five years’ worth of systematic marketing and branding on TV, cinema, and weekly magazines had led to results: Now, Norwegian consumers had begun to think of pork as “the juicy lean meat.”⁵⁹ This had been an important strategic move on the part of the Meat Information Office. In the past, the Norwegian word for pork had been *flesk*, that is, “flesh,” and the word had connotations to fat. By relabeling as lean and healthy what had been associated with overindulgence and fatty festive holiday fare, consumers would be more willing to buy it all year around. The annual report from 1996 confirms the success of the relabeling campaigns in the first half of the decade: “After the campaign, three out of four consumers reported that they perceived pork as a lean meat. Reports from the meat industry and retailers were also very good.”⁶⁰

This effort of rhetorical relabeling did not only transform pork from fat to lean, it also, magically, placed pork in the same healthy category as poultry. Although pork is actually categorized as a red meat by nutritionists, its pink rather than red appearance made it possible for the marketing board to project it as “light and lean.” After all, it had almost the same color as chicken. The annual report read that,

The main goal for this campaign was to profile pork as a lean and nutritious kind of meat that can compete fully with chicken in terms of nutritional arguments. The generic labelling of pork as “The light meat” was introduced to emphasise its nutritious qualities.⁶¹

But the marketing did not stop at this. In fact, because farmers, in 1992, had produced more beef than the market could absorb, a substantial effort was laid down to market the largest singular meat product of them all: minced beef. The report explains how campaigns explaining the ease and variety of meals that could be made with this food took care of the overproduction.

In 1995, one sees signs that the Office is growing more aware of its own role. In the annual report for that year, they had changed the wording of their agenda: It was no longer to increase the consumption of meat, but rather to “spread the joy of food and knowledge about meat by 1) *stimulating* meat consumption and 2) safeguarding the market for Norwegian meat.”⁶²

At this point, morning television had become the Meat Information Office’s main venue of influence, though most TV viewers were probably oblivious of this fact. The Office sponsored and collaborated with *TV2*’s breakfast show, *God Morgen Norge* (Good Morning Norway) by placing one of their former employees, Wenche Andersen, on the show, as its regular TV chef. No less than 200 five minute programs were created and aired daily; in the first year, 120 of them were about meat. The Meat Information Office shared

the sponsorship with the equivalent offices for fish and vegetables, who initially had footed 40 percent of the bill. After five months, however, the Meat Information Office picked up as much as 80 percent of the tab, and also claimed 80 percent of the content. They were, after all, the wealthiest information office of the lot. The annual report states that, "This strengthened the Meat Information Office's ability to influence the market."⁶³

The 1995 report also noted another novelty – a new attitude among consumers labeled "meat reluctance." The Meat Information Office was planning an information project to address apprehensions about Mad Cow Disease and Scrapies, as well as concerns about ethics, environmental issues, and food security. Since they did not feel particularly knowledgeable about these concerns, they began by mapping them out, after which they assembled a campaign designed to put consumers' minds at ease. 1995 was also the year in which booklets on child nutrition were distributed to all the public health centers, so that young mothers would be informed by nurses – whom, as we noted, had already heard lectures on meat while they were students – about the benefits of meat in the diet. The Meat Information Office was indeed ready to inform people about the benefits of meat from cradle to grave: In 1997, they published a book about the pig, which was used to educate six-year-olds.⁶⁴ Along with the book itself, there were teacher resources consisting of a booklet and a film. The booklet provided pedagogic advice on how to educate children about the benefits of the pig, and included songs, games, and a list of topics for discussion. The teachers' booklet describes the film's content – it shows pigs roaming freely both outdoors and indoors, and even the funeral of a piglet. Teachers are given advice on how to conclude the children's education about the pig: "To finalize the project about the pigs [...] it might be fitting to 'pig-taste' a hotdog or a ham pizza?"⁶⁵ If this was not enough, the school textbook on home economics was in part sponsored by the Meat Information Office.⁶⁶ In their annual report from 1998 they explain that "they were one of the partners that made it possible to hand out the book for free," and that "the book's share of meat recipes has been taken well care of."⁶⁷ At this point, neither the public nor the equivalent office for vegetables protested when pupils were advised to "add sausage, meatballs, or diced meat" to the recipe for vegetable soup.⁶⁸ The task of educating children – and the general public – about food, had now been largely appropriated by the meat industry. It had not always been so, but as the housewife and the home economics colleges had disappeared, the social and cultural void they left was up for grabs – and Norway's equivalent of "big meat" was not slow to respond.

Death of the Housewife – and Birth of the "Critical Consumer"

From the 1970s onwards, the slaughterhouses were increasingly taking on work that previously had been done either by butchers or by housewives.

This development went hand in hand with the emergence of self-service stores, which sold meat in more or less the same way as they sold any other commodity. As we have seen, this had dramatic repercussions for independent butchers and their butcher shops, who before long would become a thing of the past. But it also introduced a whole other situation for that other group of professionals, the housewives, who up to this point had done a significant part of the preparation of meat for consumption. While a butcher's knife and a meat mincer would still be found in any respectable housewife's kitchen, these tools were now increasingly left unused. "Even the most talented housewife can find it difficult to follow the accelerating changes within housework. But the cooperative will make this easy for you," read one message to the housewife trying to find her footing, in 1963.⁶⁹ The Norwegian Cooperatives' Committee for Meat Processing explain that, "Our charcuteries are mainly small, and their structure is inadequate. Apparently, artisan charcuteries are about to lose their role. The larger, industrial companies are taking over."⁷⁰ That is precisely what they did, and their goods were widely distributed. With a greater selection of ready minced and pre-prepared pieces of meat, the housewife could let both the meat mincer and the butcher's knife rust away in the kitchen's bottom drawer. Many domestic tasks that used to be carried out by the housewife, were now largely taken over by other actors, most notably the meat industry, which increasingly began to heed the call for "pre-packaged [meat] in standardized packages."⁷¹ And as their skills grew increasingly less useful or even necessary, housewives became consumers rather than producers of food.⁷²

As the role of the housewife gradually faded away, consumers slowly grew less knowledgeable about meat, not to mention less skilled in treating it. One lament over this development came in 1979, from the editor of Norway's only food magazine, *Alt om mat*. "The 'ready for the pan' meat is all over the stores' cooling units, lying pretty packed in neat rows," she complained, with palpable nostalgia for the good old days, when the housewife sought qualified advice by a specialist, the butcher.⁷³ The butcher, she noted, would ask the housewife, "What do you plan to cook?," and then procure a piece of meat perfect for this particular use, but now, the supermarkets were full of ready-spiced bits of meat labeled with silly names like "Mexican Steak" or "Stewing Meat" – names that told the consumer virtually nothing about the meat it contained. This editor was clearly in possession of the skills and knowledge required to transform animal parts into food, and argued – perhaps somewhat self-servingly – that the vital thing to know about a piece of meat is what cut it is. Covering a random piece of meat with spices and labeling it "Mexican" is a form of seduction, she claimed, which lures the customer to buy, but offers no knowledge of *what* exactly is being sold. Hence, one of the most important tasks for her magazine, she wrote, was to provide consumers with knowledge, as only this would allow consumers to eat both economically and well.⁷⁴

The heyday of this magazine did in fact overlap with the emergence of “the critical consumer.” As the historians of the slaughter cooperative write, the visions for the future of food, in the early 1960s, later turned out to have been somewhat blue-eyed. The so-called *Blue Book* had envisioned that, “Quality and food safety would be guaranteed by experts in white coats in sterile laboratories,” but as these authors note: “That is not quite what happened.”

Large-scale production in itself became an object of criticism, and questions of sufficiency and nutrition were high on the political agenda in the early 1970s. It turned out that consumers responded to the development in the food sector by becoming more critical; they expected more in the line of information about the content of food, about its nutritional value, and so on. Questions were also raised about advertising in itself.⁷⁵

If the incentives of labeling and branding were the most important preconditions for change in how meat was presented, a parallel factor was that consumers were, in one sense, growing increasingly *demanding* – precisely because of their dwindling knowledge of meat. One response to this situation, of course, were the meat hostesses that we described in the previous section: As consumers grew less knowledgeable about how to buy and prepare meat, it was quite natural to offer more in the line of “instruction” – even *outside* the home economics schools. Another form of response was consumer magazines, like the retail coop’s *F-rapporten*, and later, designated food magazines, like *Alt om mat*, which took upon themselves to provide consumers with the skills needed to maneuver a fast changing world of retail.

In these magazines, the addressee was no longer a housewife of the old school as much as it was a “modern consumer,” who not only had less time to prepare food, but also less knowledge about how to carry out this task. She also found herself confronted by meat in entirely new forms – about which the traditional knowledge did not have much to say. Hence, it would no longer do to transmit a traditional skill set.

Perhaps the most important skill that consumers now needed to learn, in their new role as self-serving supermarket grazers, was to *read labels*. As there was no longer a butcher or other professional available to respond to any questions the buyer might have – say, about the origin and age of the animal, about the tenderness of the meat, or about how it could be prepared – the label grew increasingly significant. Indeed, the label was becoming the consumer’s prime source of information. Consumers did not develop immediate trust in this new way of buying meat, however, and at least for a couple of decades, from the 1960s onwards, consumer and food magazines would routinely take up issues concerning labels and contents – not to mention whether labels were at all to be trusted.

We find an amusing, but in many ways typical, example of this in a story from the retail cooperative's magazine, in which a reader recounts an experience with a can of meatballs:

I was going to have a dinner party and had planned soup with meatballs, and found a can suitable for this purpose, or so I thought, since the label said, "The can contains approx. 50 meatballs." But when I opened the can, and emptied its contents, I counted no more than 22 meatballs.⁷⁶

The magazine explained that the letter had been addressed to the Consumer Council, of which the disappointed party planner asked:

I therefore take the liberty to ask the Consumer Council whether companies can really print false information on their labels? Is this information controlled by the Consumer Council or some other entity, before the company is allowed to use it?

The magazine, taking on the role of consumer instructor, followed up their summary of the letter by explaining that the Consumer Council, precisely in order to make sure that "the consumers are provided with information they can trust *about the products* – *on the products* – has taken the initiative to establish a General Committee for Declarations of Contents and Quality Labeling," the main ambition of which was to push the use of the Norwegian declaration system, *Varefakta* (Product Facts). If the declaration contents was rendered as specified by the *Varefakta* system, the article went on, consumers could trust they would get "facts about the product, reliable information concerning composition, size, and weight, as well as about use of the product and how it will respond to use." Readers were then told that most canned foods – also meatballs – were already using the *Varefakta* system of declarations, and that, where this was the case, the consumer could trust the can to contain the number of meatballs advertised on the label, and that one would also be informed of the ingredients and additives used, and of the product's net weight.

The trouble, the article implied, was that, while this particular party planning consumer had indeed read the label, she appeared to have no good sense of how to quality check the labeling, to determine whether it was trustworthy. We were never told, in this case, whether the can was labeled with *Varefakta* or in some other way, but more generally, the episode reveals that consumer trust in labels was still in a formative phase. Labels in general were, at this point, *not* necessarily to be trusted, since they could in principle be used for marketing purposes – as tiny propaganda posters. If, however, the label was of a certain type – that is, if it bore the official mark of the General Committee for Declarations of Contents and Quality Labeling – it certainly *was* a suitable object of the consumer's trust.

This example is quite instructive. It reminds us, first of all, that beginning in the 1960s, consumers would increasingly meet meat as a packaged

product, and not as an animal part. It also hints at the fact that the consumer's knowledge about the meat she was buying had by this point declined. More directly, it tells us that, when meat came to be presented to the consumer as a packaged product, that changed not just the meat itself, but also the act of buying it. As the relation to a butcher or other professional was no longer in play, the act of buying meat eliminated any elaborate conversation, discussion, or negotiation. Consumer information about meat had migrated, so to speak, from a conversation between a professional and his customer to product labels. This shift might seem banal, but as the case above illustrates, it meant that the role of the consumer had to change quite dramatically. The foremost skill now required to be a good consumer was the ability to be a discerning reader of labels, to deduce from the little information the labels provided what kind of product this was, where it had come from, what it contained, and whether it was a sensible purchase. However, as the example again illustrates, systems for labeling that consumers were inclined to trust developed but slowly, and this meant that this new consumer needed not just a discerning, but also a critical – even a rather skeptical – attitude.

That this new situation represented a conundrum for consumers is underlined by another, longer article from the following year, which delved even more deeply into the consumer's concerns about canned and labeled foods. "How much meat is in the meat can?" read the heading, as the article went on to inform readers that regulations concerning the quality of canned food had been established in 1955. "To use the *defined* product designations – such as meat dumplings, meatballs, etc. – the composition of the product must align with the requirements of the regulations," the article noted, but added that the situation was different for what it called "fantasy designations," that is, for foods that did not fall into an officially established product category. There were, in other words, ways to avoid the regulations in place. Still, the article underlined the scope of inspections and quality control already in place:

The Canned Food Industry's Control Institute has regular controls of canned meat. All in all, approximately 3,700 tests were controlled in the years 1957/1960, of which 600 were analyzed chemically, while the remaining ones were controlled for quality, net weight, number, shelf life, etc.

It is also interesting to note the magazine's explanation of the need for such quality control. Canned meat was the first product category to have an official system for content declaration and labeling – the above-mentioned *Varefakta* – and although this fact did not necessarily signal any position about what kind of foods needed it the most,

canned foods are appropriate for content declaration system, and besides, who has not wanted, from time to time, to have X-ray vision when

buying canned meat. We see the can with its nice label, but the product itself is entirely hidden from us.

Luckily, the article explained, “*Varefakta* is an answer to this problem,” emphasizing the point further with one of the article’s sub-headings: “*VAREFAKTA* is the X-ray vision we are in want of.”⁷⁷

The shift from a “live” relation between seller and buyer of meat to one relying more on packaging and labels entailed the removal, from the retail setting, of professional competence in cutting, treating, and preparing meat – both in store staff and in the consumer herself. Consequently, quality control and its associated acts shifted ground, and it took some time before this new system earned the trust of the consumer. Until that happened, the consumer took on the role of a skeptic and a critic, and again, the magazine *Alt om mat* played an important role. On the one hand, it validated the consumer’s skepticism of the way that foods now were made and sold, and on the other, it offered advice on how to identify substandard foods. For instance, in 1974, the magazine’s journalist had been sent on a hunt for “old food in the coolers” – a hunt that proved somewhat more successful than one would wish. The general advice offered in the story was that one should always “check the use-by date,” but the reportage added that, “this is what our magazine has done, in part with disturbing results.”

We have visited about 20 stores and from half of them we brought home food that was past the use-by date. And can one really talk about fresh goods when the use-by date passed by two weeks ago? Who wants to buy ham at 48 kroner per kilo, when the use-by date, according to the stamp, was 10 days prior to our purchase? Or wiener sausages that are many days too old? [...] A pack of sliced cured mutton sausage had no information at all, except the price, and it was a special price at that. This is enough to make anyone suspicious. We tasted it, and it was not at all fresh. [...] So keep your eyes open, and check the use-by date – for, clearly, we cannot trust the grocers to make sure that old foods are removed from the shelves.⁷⁸

This trend toward a more critical and demanding consumer was noted by the meat cooperative’s sales division in 1973. The so-called “consumerism” which had begun to emerge, they noted, “entails that certain consumers or representatives of consumers, like the Consumer Council, self-professed ‘consumer apostles’ evaluate each product with a critical eye.”

With better education, increased distance between consumer and producer, and less materialistic attitudes, we can expect consumers to grow ever more critical to what he eats, what influence he is put under by advertising, how the products are presented, etc.⁷⁹

The cooperative's response to this perceived development would turn out to work together with the economic incentives already mentioned. In short, the coop shifted from the traditional meat classification scheme, which was regulated by law, toward increasing use of branding: Consumers would no longer buy pieces of meat with a technical name and number, they would buy brand name products like *Gilde Salami*, or *Gilde Pork Chops*, and so on. This was also the time when the coop began using declaration of contents. The plastic packaging that was becoming the standard way of presenting meat to consumers aided even this shift, since the plastic wrapping made branding far easier; all they had to do was print stickers with the coop's logo, and a list of contents, and stick it onto the plastic. The name *Gilde* was taken from a line of traditional local products, but would increasingly be used as a national brand, and over time began to fill the role that the classification scheme had in the past. The brand, which the cooperative advertised heavily by attaching it, on the one hand, to national tradition, and on the other, to the farmers themselves (since the cooperative was owned by farmers), now became what consumers used to satisfy any doubts they might have about the safety or quality or nutritional soundness of the product. As historians of this cooperative note, "Traditional products [...] could be standardized and be redefined as brands."⁸⁰

The fact that "the critical consumer" emerged in the 1960s and, especially, 1970s is in itself a sign that this was a time of transition, where the new way of making and selling – labeling and branding – meat was still not firmly established. We can illustrate this with another story from *Alt om mat*: "Do like the little boys – ask questions at the store," the title of one 1974 article advises. Starting from an anecdote about a group of small boys who had posed the man behind the meat counter all sorts of questions, the writer says that,

There are many adult consumers who never dare ask, for fear of revealing their lack of knowledge. But I think we have much to learn from the boys in the store. The more questions we ask, the better our meat stew will be.⁸¹

There were still those, in other words, who felt that "asking questions" was a superior way, but increasingly, this mode of communicating about meat would disappear, and the death knell of this type of communication, of course, was the disappearance of the meat counter and the (more or less trained) professionals who occupied them. When this happened, there was no longer any point in asking questions, since there was no longer anyone there to offer a response.

With time, however, the industry would increasingly gain the trust of the consumer, while the consumers grew more comfortable with using labels and brands as their main source of information about the meat they bought. When that happened, from the 1980s and onwards, the next phase

of alienation set in, where consumers were not only removed from the animal and the professional in charge of killing and processing it, but where they had grown largely oblivious to the fact that this was the situation they were in.

Chain Reaction

While the technological, economic, and advertising innovations of the 1960s and 1970s set in motion changes that would completely rework how meat was presented to Norwegian consumers, the pace of change, as we have noted, was that of reform rather than of revolution. Toward the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, something happened which has indeed been described as a revolution: “the supermarket revolution.”⁸² The coming of the supermarket chains to Norway affected the retail market in Norway more heavily than in almost any other country, and today, almost all food retail in Norway is controlled by a small number of big chains. The concentration in this area has been so great, in fact, that the authorities at several junctures have enacted counter-cartel measures to resist further consolidation.⁸³

Here, as so often in Norwegian food value chains, things did not happen in a big way until the cooperative got on board. That happened in 1989, when the board of the consumer cooperative, Norges Kooperative Landsforening (NKL) – known to Norwegians today under its brand name, *Coop* – decided to take steps to integrate their stores into a unified concept of supermarket chains.⁸⁴ Only a few years later, almost all of Norway’s food retail would sort under one of the four large groups. While the cooperative’s decision created an impetus for consolidation across the food retail sector, the decision itself was spurred on by the challenge presented by recently emerged low-price chains, most notably *Rimi* and *Rema 1000*, which, not least thanks to their low prices, had won a notable share of the market in the course of the 1980s. By consolidating their operation, making four chains out of a large network of local cooperative stores and supermarkets, Coop managed, in contrast to many of its sister organizations in Europe, not just to stay afloat but even to boost its profits and strengthen its position. It did so, however, by learning from the newcomer low-price chains, who had ideas about how things could be done differently. More specifically, the early success of these challengers rested on “integrated, standardized, and centralized chains,” where the central organization was indeed central.⁸⁵

According to historians of the Norwegian retail cooperative, the idea of organizing food retail into chains, which first spread in Europe and the United States in the mid-19th century, “was part of a series of new operation schemes and methods which gradually revolutionized retail all over the world.”⁸⁶ The main benefit of chain consolidation, they suggest, was, first, that a chain (as well as each “link,” that is, store, in the chain) would benefit from *standardizing* operations, profiling, and marketing, which outside the chains were tasks that each individual retailer had to do on their own;

second, that a chain, by *integrating* the role of wholesaler and retailer, would gain “substantial power as a buyer,” which, in turn, would benefit each store as well as the consumer in the form of lower prices; and third, that a chain, by *centralizing* its management decisions, would achieve a more efficient mode of operation.⁸⁷

These insights took some time to take hold, however, and for a long time, the food retail industry resisted the idea of chain consolidation. Throughout the 1960s, the retail cooperative’s magazine featured articles that represented the formation of chains abroad, not least in neighboring Sweden, as a threat. One article, entitled “The Threat of Chain Invasion,” described how a chain already well established in Sweden, TEMPO, had recently set its sights on neighboring Denmark. The article cited its Danish sister magazine that, “*Swedish invasion threatens Danish retail*,” and it added that, “we can expect that even here, in this country, the *foreign campaign* will be felt.” The Swedish corporation’s imperialistic plans were quite overwhelming; “from the size of the stores, it is clear that one expects a *very high* turnover,” the article noted, and added that, “in the areas where the chain has so far declared as its battlegrounds, it does not appear to be a particularly agreeable acquaintance.” There was, however, one factor that mitigated the Swedish corporation’s imperialistic campaign, namely the fact that it was driven by the same fear of being overrun as was everyone else.

There is no attempt to cover up the fact that – from the TEMPO corporation’s perspective – the campaign in Denmark is motivated by the fear of even bigger and stronger competitors. – This [expansion] gives us a better starting position, said the director of TEMPO, Gösta Åhlen, in the intensified competition that we expect to meet in a common European market.⁸⁸

This logic made a certain amount of sense also to the writers of the cooperative magazine, who added that, “if the cooperative stores are to meet the test of strength we have ahead of us, we will have to combine a feeling of community with the power to act,” as this represented a “be or not to be.” They believed, however, that one could avoid being swallowed up by the big international corporations, “but not if the cooperatives sit passively by and watch.” Instead, they had to “take the initiative – and they have to do it very soon.”⁸⁹

With time, a sentiment spread that if one did *not* form chains, there would always be someone ready to do just that – and when that happened, the power of numbers commanded by a chain would always outcompete that of single operators. In one piece from the cooperative’s magazine, from 1960, written by an economist at the Federated Wholesalers’ Rationalization Office, the author heralded “a new era in retail.” He wrote that chains had been slow to form in Norway, as compared to in many other countries, but that certain initiatives were now afoot. This was not a second too soon, he

felt, as retail worldwide had now entered a transition as significant as the one from craft to industry.⁹⁰

Today, retailing has become a big business and its international mobility extends far beyond the reach of small retail or wholesale companies. If we do not develop efficient modes of operation, we must assume, given that we operate in a sphere of free trade, that foreign companies are ready to do so. And experience tells us that, with foreign business come foreign goods. The relation therefore includes not just Norwegian business in trade, but is equally significant for a wide range of our domestic industries.⁹¹

When the cooperative decided to consolidate into central chains in 1989, the idea had thus been ripening for a couple of decades already, and was enhanced by a fear of competition. The strong position the retail cooperative had, and which it in fact has managed to retain over time, was established in a constant dynamic with the private actors – where the issue was often which model (private or cooperative) could best protect Norwegian consumers from the prospective wave of foreign goods. In one article, from 1959, the cooperative magazine brought its readers a compendium of quotations from the magazines and journals of various *private* retailers, who feared that “the cooperative can become the only Norwegian large-scale alternative to foreign chain companies.”⁹² While the cooperative writers mocked this view as something the private sector “must have picked up from our Business School or some other institution of higher learning,” they did acknowledge that “the cooperative is already in possession of the organizational apparatus that the private sector has to fight among themselves to build, before they can begin reaping the benefits of large-scale.” And although it would take some time before this scaling up materialized, in the form of the cooperative corporation that was established in the late 1980s, the cooperative did in fact manage to make use of this apparatus to retain its central position. When that happened, however, the push came at least in part from the private sector, who, from the late 1970s onwards, were more successful in building an organizational apparatus of its own than what the cooperative writers had assumed two decades prior.

To better understand this “chainification” of Norway, and the incentives out of which it grew, we decided to get in touch with one of these private actors, who at one point feared the total dominance of the cooperative, but who have since then grown beyond what they could possibly have dreamt of. We contacted Christian Lykke, the owner of the family company, I.K. Lykke Ltd, which owns the supermarket chain, *Bunnpris*.⁹³ When we asked him why almost all food retail in Norway was taken over by chains in the 1990s and 2000s, he had a quick come-back: “A better question than *why* it happened, is *why* it didn’t happen *sooner*! And the reason is that, up until then, each retailer could only have one store in each municipality, so there

were structural, statutory limits to expansion.” The Lykke company’s history goes back all the way to 1830, and for a long time, they were both wholesalers and retailers; but in the 1960s they sold the wholesale unit, since there was more money to be made in retail. There were other restrictions too, however, that limited retailers’ opportunities, including price regulations which had largely prevented competition on price. When those measures were repealed, retail became a place to make serious money. There were several restrictions still in place, but some of them could be surpassed. For instance,

There were major restrictions on the size of the stores – which came into place because there was a shortage of building materials after the war. You were only allowed to build 200m², and you needed a building permit to expand a little each year. It was fairly easy to acquire permission for small expansions, though.

In retail, as in farming and slaughtering, the central role of the cooperatives was a constant nuisance for the private actors. Lykke recounted that the size restriction limited their capacity to compete, so to get around the regulations, their strategy was to develop in a piecemeal style, a few square meters at a time. In this way, some of their outlets could grow quite substantially: Their shop in Munkegata in Trondheim for instance, was big for its time – 600m² in 1973.

But when the cooperative built a new warehouse in 1967, they were allowed to build a shop that covered the entire ground floor, which was 3–4000m². This allowed them to purchase huge quantities, which gave them insane discounts, and if the private retailers were to respond to that, they had to get organized and shop together. Because the more you bought, the better price you got.

Although Lykke got out of wholesale, they soon discovered that partnering with a consortium of wholesalers was beneficial, if not even essential. “We tried out being retailers without being part of a wholesale chain, but we got no discounts to talk of because we were too small,” Lykke said, and explained that even the local suppliers in Trondheim would not give them a discount. “They could practically have rolled the goods over the street to our store, but at the end of the day it was the total purchasing volume that was decisive.” The only way to survive, then, was to enter into larger consortia, which would have greater purchasing power, and hence would be given bigger discounts, since, “The size of the discount was the most important thing.”

But while retailers had to be *big* purchasers, they discovered it was beneficial to have *small* product ranges. As Lykke explains this dynamic, “The fewer items we had for sale, the cheaper the store could be.” This was no embarrassment to them. To the contrary, the emerging chains made their

limited assortment a part of their branding, oftentimes even part of their brand name, hence the Lykke company in 1981 called their chain Bunnpris 600 (Baceprice 600), “because it only had the 600 most bought items, and then stores from other chains had similar names – like Spar 800, Rema 1000, and so on.”

The history of the cooperative provides additional context for Lykke’s narrative: When the two big low-price chains, Rimi and Rema 1000, were formed, in 1977 and 1979, their almost immediate success was due not just to a reduction in product range, but also a general push to lower costs. Because of the structure of subsidies in Norway, which had benefited fresh goods such as eggs, milk, and meat, at the expense of dry goods, most retailers had been forced to ramp up the prices on dry goods in order to make a profit. Consequently, the initial strategy of these low-price chains was to focus especially on reducing prices on dry goods, as this was the only obvious place price reductions could be made. They combined this strategy with a set of other practices that set them apart from other food retailers. For instance, they “kept operating costs down, offered less service to their customers, simplified their interiors, reduced the assortment of products, removed fresh goods services [like designated meat counters], and stuck to fixed low prices.”⁹⁴

As we have seen, this dynamic would be an important factor in changing how meat was sold in Norway. “In the past,” said Lykke,

our customers were looking to buy whole and half carcasses, and we let people rent freezers in several of our stores. My dad was a trained in-store butcher, and we wanted to specialize in fresh produce. We had charcuterie facilities at Lykke Angelltrøa, and wanted to expand and have stores with fresh produce sections everywhere. But this was not the type of store that would remain in Norway or anywhere else.

To explain why this dream of specialist fresh produce did not come to pass, Lykke turns to an alleged law of retail economics:

When it comes to product selection and product presentation, having a large selection of perishables is expensive and requires many customers. Say you have three types of paté in the fresh food counter, then you have to sell all three types of liver paté you have before they expire. So a large selection requires many customers. This is especially true for the fresh food counter, since anything that has short shelf life requires a high turnover. The circulation of goods is important for frozen goods as well, however, since freezers and refrigeration systems are expensive to acquire, maintain, and operate. Now, the low-price concept was explicitly designed to bring the selection of goods down.

Lykke further explained that an emphasis on price had served both the consumers and the emerging chains. “The more important the price is for

a consumer, the poorer is the selection of goods in the average store,” he noted, but added that the chains had been a key factor in sustaining this dynamic:

The chains’ prices are important because you want an item that you can make profit from quickly. The best profit is on food like frozen pizza. It turns over fast. You sell maybe a hundred thousand pizzas for every reindeer you sell. The consumer chooses *Grandiosa* [Norway’s favourite frozen pizza]. If we have a special offer on kid, it does not attract customers. Customers just want the cheapest, and we work to get the most out of the bottom line. How can we increase the price without people reacting? We solve this by lowering the price of some goods to attract the people who are preoccupied with price.

After the cooperative chose this path from 1989 onwards, and with the increasing liberalizations that took place in Norway in the 1980s and 1990s, the price-oriented mindset in food retailing would prove extremely successful. While the number of grocery stores went dramatically down from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, the supermarket chains’ share expanded to encompass more or less the entire market in groceries: While in the late 1980s, their share had been 42 percent, this had grown to as much as 80 percent in 1990. The truly amazing development came thereafter, however, as the chains’ command of the market grew to 99.6 percent in 2000.⁹⁵ A parallel change, which is perhaps just as significant, is that, after the first consolidation *into* chains, Norway would with time see a stupefying consolidation *of* chains. In 1983, the market share of the retail chains was 48 percent, but that percentage consisted of as many as 197 chains. In 1990, only seven years later, the number of chains was down to only 12.⁹⁶ Then, in 2000, chain consolidation in Norway had become more or less complete, as 99.3 percent of the market was controlled by only four huge retail groups.⁹⁷

While many factors were at play in effecting chain consolidation in Norway, one aspect of the amazing growth of the chains was the meat coop’s success with taking over the market for meat cutting. The new, low-price supermarkets were uninterested in keeping costly meat counters in their stores, but they obviously could not compete with more well-assorted grocers if they did not offer meat. So while the low-price chains focused, as we saw, primarily on the dry goods, they would not have been able to do what they did, had it not been for the fact that the meat cooperative was prepared to do more of the work involved in butchering, packaging, and preparing meat. In fact, the meat cooperative’s move to take over these tasks – which rested mainly on technological developments that were easier to incorporate into slaughter facilities than into supermarkets – fit hand-in-glove with the agenda of the new low-price chains. Removing meat counters from the stores, as well as the corresponding packaging and branding of meat, was

just what these chains needed to compete – indeed, outcompete – both specialists and well-assorted individual retailers.

Both of these developments had made the job of retailing meat easier and less knowledge-intensive: While an in-store meat counter required fairly skilled professionals, the task of stocking a refrigerator with plastic wrapped pieces of ready cut meat – which even paraded all relevant information about the product on a sticker attached – did not. Having left the job of quality control and consumer information to producers and processors, all that was left for the supermarkets to do was to keep its shelves full of merchandise. To put it crudely, their only job was to pass products through their stores; they were – and were initially also criticized for being – little more than temporary storage facilities for food.

Lykke explained to us that the new retail dynamics did not only change the context in which meat was sold, but also what *kind* of meat Norwegian consumers buy. One thing is that the growth of Norwegians' consumption of chicken has grown in almost perfect parallel with the supermarket chains, and is now the biggest unprocessed meat product at Lykke's stores. Chicken, at least as it would be offered to consumers from the late 1990s and 2000s – as clean-cut pieces of meat ready for the pan – is the perfect food for the supermarkets: It is cheap, easy to pack, store, and sell, and requires very little knowledge on the part of either seller or buyer. Another thing is that unprocessed meats are not, in general, the largest categories of meat sold in Lykke's stores. In fact, the biggest meat product is *minced meat* – that is, unless one counts sausages as one category, in which case, they are the biggest category by far.

At this stage, in the early 2000s, the distancing from the animal origin of meat had reached a temporary end point. Meat was now sold as any other ingredient, and only very seldom did it carry a reminder of the process that had made meat of a sentient creature. Knowledge of that process had also been excised from the point of retail, when the meat counters disappeared. The only means by which consumers could try to close the gap between production and consumption was the sticker on the plastic wrapping, informing the consumer about the “contents.” The sociologist Nick Fiddes sums up the process concisely when he writes that, “Nowadays, the consumer need never encounter animal flesh in its vulgar undressed state,” adding that we “prefer not to think too directly about where our meat has come from, [as] unwelcome reminders can be distinctly off-putting.”⁹⁸

Meat “Myths”

A few years ago, we were invited to give a talk at an ethics seminar for the meat industry. The event was co-organized by the Meat Information Office and Animalia, the Norwegian Meat and Poultry Research Centre, and the seminar would take up “questions related to social responsibility and ethics, including animal welfare, climate consequences and human health.” We

accepted the invitation, not just because we thought these issues were ripe for discussion, but because we were intrigued by the idea of presenting our ideas to the industry itself. Our message was more or less the same as in this book, that contemporary consumers have become alienated from the process by which animals are turned into meat, and that, in order to avoid giving this process too much thought, they turn to various mechanisms of denial.

We expected that this would be a bold statement to make in the company of meat industry representatives – that it might even be somewhat controversial. In this, we were naive. Instead of objections and protest, we found a room full of meat industry people who listened attentively, who appeared to understand very well what we were talking about, and who appeared to appreciate our “scientific” backing for what they had known for a long time. A lively, but friendly Q&A followed, and in follow-up emails from the event organizer, we were told that our talk had been very well received. The event even led to our forming a connection with the research center’s in-house sociologist, whose job it was to document and monitor consumers’ attitudes to meat.

While the experience itself was of the type an invited speaker dreams of, it nevertheless made us pause. What should we make of the fact that this audience was so open to, or even familiar with, our argument? The short answer is that the meat industry, over the last couple of decades, had become accustomed to a new set of consumers’ concerns, to which it has regularly had to respond. In fact, we should have expected as much, since the event program stated:

In the meat industry, we are constantly confronted with questions of food, ethics and morals, and it is likely that we have to adjust to this new situation, where discussions of the ethical dilemmas concerning meat production and consumption are a part of daily life. The industry must have a conscious and active relation to these changes in the expectations of society, both so that we are able to justify what is ethically defensible and why, and to make changes where those are called for.

The meat industry seemed very aware that alienation and denial from the animal origin of meat are not absolute. Indeed there is an active animal protection (and animal rights) movement in Norway, and even outside this activist sphere, various types of concerns about meat do exist. If the meat industry aims to develop a “conscious and active relation” to these concerns, that is not necessarily a great relief, however, since the industry’s main objective – obviously – is to increase Norwegians’ consumption of meat. Efforts on the part of the industry to “handle” consumer concerns and objections could turn out to be a case of strategic production of ignorance – and even if that should turn out to be an exaggeration, industry efforts to counter consumer objections should be subject to close scrutiny.

One can get a fair sense of how the industry's awareness of "changes in the expectations of society" has grown by looking at the meat industry's central publication, *Kjøttets tilstand* (The State of Meat), an annual magazine-like report first published in 2000. In particular, the often programmatic editorial articles in this magazine reveal much about the industry's concerns and priorities. Tracing articles over the last two decades, we have found that the report reflects the industry's growing concerns about consumer doubts and objections. Specifically, the industry has grown increasingly aware of the need to respond to emerging concerns about animal welfare and the environmental consequences of meat, which add to already existing concerns about food safety. The editorials' main response to these pressures is to urge the industry on the offensive; they encourage the industry to develop a sort of rhetorical preparedness which allows it to still doubts and ward off criticisms. Where real controversy arises, the main tactic used in the editorials is to insist on the research-based truth of meat's great value, while denigrating the industry's opponents as "emotional."

The basic insight at the base of all of the editorials in question is the centrality of *consumer trust*, and this mantra appears already in the second iteration of the report, from 2001:

In a situation where meat consumption has dropped dramatically in many European countries, Norway is in a unique situation. Meat consumption has been stable or increased somewhat. The trust in Norwegian agriculture and Norwegian meat production that this is an expression of, is the most important resource for the industry and the sector. But trust is not a static thing and is easily lost. For this reason, a systematic effort to deserve the trust, also in the future, must always be our top priority.⁹⁹

Similar pronouncements were made across the whole 20 year period. One example, from 2010, notes that the level of trust in the Norwegian meat industry is indeed very high, but adds that, "This kind of stability in production and in reputation cannot be taken for granted."¹⁰⁰ The industry thus needs to be constantly on its guard for changes and threats, and must work continuously to be ahead of the curve. As one reads on, however, it becomes clear that this ambition, of retaining consumer trust by staying ahead of the curve, is sought by a peculiar route: The editorials tend not to go in detail about how meat ought to be produced, but they are very concerned about monitoring and responding – on a rhetorical level – to consumer concerns. Trust will be retained, in other words, mainly by way of PR. To succeed with this program, the industry needs to keep tabs on what is said about it, and to constantly respond to anything that might detract from the public's trust in the industry.

From the very start, the editorials framed the issue as one of countering untruths and disinformation. "Norwegians' attitudes to food are changing,"

noted one article, “and consumer opinions build on a combination of fact and feeling.”¹⁰¹ Against such unreliable, only halfway fact-based, notions, the industry professed it would be a source of “transparency” and “credibility.”¹⁰² One early editorial, which was still focused mainly on food safety and health, formulated the industry’s agenda in programmatic fashion:

In its relation to the outside world, the Norwegian meat industry is plagued by a collection of myths – of which the quality of Norwegian meat and meat as unhealthy food are the two most fundamental. Having now worked on *Kjøttets tilstand* for a while, we have grown aware that this report can also take on a role of culling such myths, both by increasing knowledge within the industry and by direct communication outside it. Openness and knowledge is the greatest foe of myth.¹⁰³

An interesting example of how these editorials sought to cull myths came in 2016, incidentally just as the NFSA was planning its infamous round of inspections among Norway’s pork farmers. That year’s editorial complained that, “People’s opinions about modern animal production is impacted by dramatic media stories from the [European] continent about animal transport on a large scale in unworthy circumstances.” The myth-culling editor pushed back, noting that, “This kind of practice is far from Norwegian reality.” The industry could be successful in meeting skeptical trends, he added, but only if it “responds appropriately to these signals.” As for what that response would consist in, it was mainly about “correcting” misperceptions, pitting nuance, and knowledge against bias and myth:

It is still the case that the public discourse often is not very characterized by facts. Food and feelings belong together, but if consumers’ image of reality is constantly bombarded by simple rhetoric and one-sided statements, views and attitudes to meat and eggs will much too easily be formed by myths and half-truths.¹⁰⁴

Another example is from 2015, when concerns about meat’s contribution to climate change had begun to circulate. “Meat is debated in many forums and from many perspectives,” stated the editorial, adding that, “Most have an opinion about Norwegian animal production as well as meat and eggs produced by the Norwegian farmer.” In this context, it concluded, “a fact-based foundation comes in handy.”¹⁰⁵ What the facts said, the editor boasted, was that, “Norway is actually doing many things right in relation to what UN’s climate panel believes to be best practice to reduce climate gas emissions from agriculture.” Anyone who claimed differently was then rejected as a myth-maker: “[W]e experience too often that the debate lacks a professional foundation, that it is based on dated knowledge or is quite simply based in myth.”¹⁰⁶

Occasionally, however, the agenda of dispelling myths would take a rather different form, one which arguably sought to obfuscate more than to clarify. In 2010, for instance, the authorities had recently issued new official dietary advice, where excessive meat consumption was presented as problematic. In response, the editor again took on the role of “knowledge disseminator,” the objective voice of reason in a world of half-truths, only now, the truth he peddled was that the truth was not at hand: “There is a great need for more knowledge,” the editor noted, “about everything from how much meat consumers in Norway eat, what the research results actually show about meat consumption and health, and what factors are most significant for nutrition and health.” Using words like *actually* could signal of course, that other sources of information, such as the national nutritionists, were wrong, and that what authorities outside the industry claimed to know was not necessarily correct. The suggestion that we need knowledge about “what factors are most significant” might also be taken as an invitation to focus on everything but meat. The text’s main effort was thus to sow doubts about what other authorities were now quite confident about, and to present the landscape of knowledge as a contested ground. Such doubts having been sown, the editorial went on to introduce that edition’s main article, which “approaches the question from another angle, namely how healthy meat is and how we can make it even more healthy.” The title of this article, incidentally, was: “Meat Is Important for Our Body.”¹⁰⁷

Another example of this tactic came in the following year, in 2011, when the editor’s responded to consumers’ concerns around barren cages for egg-laying hens. Here, the editor suggested, the myth was to believe that the issue could be decided with knowledge. This issue was so intricate, in fact, that it might be “impossible” to develop solid knowledge:

It can be complicated to determine what good animal welfare is. Many factors are involved. The available research, from various research projects, do not give uniform answers to what is “best.” Therefore, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to conclude 100 percent which system of egg production gives the best animal welfare.¹⁰⁸

In general, when the industry has been under pressure, it has responded by, in one way or another, undermining the knowledge base of those exerting the pressure. This has taken two different forms, depending on the situation: Either, the industry claims that “knowledge shows so-and-so,” contra the alleged myths or half-truths propagated by its opponents, or – when that route is not available – it claims that solid knowledge, despite what some might claim, *cannot* be had. In sum, then, the industry has framed current knowledge as real, reliable, and sufficient whenever it has been to their benefit, but as non-existent, unreliable, or insufficient when it has not.

In 2019, the report's 20th anniversary, the director reflected on the road this publication had traveled since its inception, incidentally providing a telling summary of how the meat industry sees the world:

The difference in attention around meat and egg production in 1999 and 2019 is substantial. While in 1999, society's concern and interest revolved around quality and food safety, today people are concerned about sustainability and climate, health, diet, and animal welfare. Many new stakeholders have become involved in the debate about meat, and they all need facts about consumption. [...] The meat and egg industry relies on a good reputation to sell its products. The most important ingredient in a good reputation is trust, and trust is built up over time. Responsiveness to a changing society, openness, and documentation of facts are important building blocks. [...] It is easy to simplify problems connected to major societal challenges. "We eat way too much meat," "Meat is bad for the climate," and "Industrial agriculture entails poor animal welfare." None of these statements could withstand a proper fact check. [...] We want to ensure that the debate around these problems becomes more nuanced and fact based.¹⁰⁹

On the surface, there is nothing very wrong with the expressed purpose of this excerpt, or indeed with the expressed mandate of *Kjøttets tilstand*, but given the diversion rhetoric and the obfuscating techniques that the report has in fact employed throughout these 20 years, we would say it is a document ripe for critique. What is indisputable is that certain Norwegian consumers have indeed begun to question how meat is produced in Norway today; they have become conscious of the fact that meat production and consumption can be problematic, and further, that they cannot necessarily trust that all the problems associated with meat will be sorted out by the industry itself, or by the agricultural iron triangle. The way the industry meets these consumers is, we would argue, quite disingenuous. True, most Norwegians are ignorant about the facts of modern meat production, or if they are not, they choose to deny it – in fact, that is the basic thesis of this book. Those who actually engage in debate with the industry, however, are quite knowledgeable, whether they represent animal welfare organizations, environmental agencies, smallholders' unions, or even researchers representing other disciplines or agendas. When the industry tags opposing views as false or lacking a factual basis, as being infested with emotion, or even as "myths," they are engaging in manipulative rhetorical techniques.

Welfare Washing

Because meat is presented to consumers today in a way that hardly suggests any reminder of its origins, consumers are allowed to marginalize – and conveniently "forget" – the fact that they are eating an animal. This way

of presenting meat is not enough in itself, however, to alleviate the latent concerns consumers might still have about what they eat, so the industry – which, as we have just seen, is keenly aware of these concerns – exerts a notable effort to induce consumer denial. The Meat Information Office is central, but various other actors also join in to avert consumers' gaze from how meat is actually produced today, and to tell them, in effect, that they can *keep calm and carry on consuming meat*.

Meat advertising, whether issued by industry organizations, brand producers, or retailers, often has some striking similarities to what is called “greenwashing,” which according to one definition refers to “disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.”¹¹⁰ The main function of greenwashing is to divert people's attention from the environmental consequences (or even malfeasance) of a company's business, by issuing a counter-offensive that presents the company as a frontrunner in environmental affairs. In rhetorical terms, greenwashing is a specific type of *euphemismos*, a euphemism which replaces a delicate or even blameworthy entity with something (more) acceptable. Euphemistic techniques akin to greenwashing, what we have called “welfare washing,” are widely used to sell meat, by beautifying meat production – and these techniques very likely enhance our culture's denial of the animal origin of meat. If consumers have no personal experience from the sites where animals are kept or killed, no specialized skills or knowledge about how that killing happens, and increasingly, a lack of cultural resources with which to justify meat-eating, the industry's welfare washing is often what passes for “information” about these things. Because these ads' welfare washing techniques beautify the situation so consistently, they aid and support consumers' inclination to avert their gaze from how animals are made edible.

Instances of this tendency are too numerous to list, but a particularly telling example emerged after the Norwegian Food Safety Authority inspection of pork producers which we described in “Live.” The inspectors had uncovered numerous violations of animal welfare regulations; in fact, they were so numerous that the inspectors could not even complete the inspection as planned. When the inspection generated a certain media scandal, the meat producers' coop, Nortura, via their brand *Gilde*, responded quickly. They began carpet bombing the media with a publicity campaign called *Griseløftet* (“Lift-a-Pig”), in which pig farmers' made a pledge to the consumer: to lift pigs to a more elevated state of welfare.¹¹¹ The campaign included a TV ad which announced a new category of pork products called *Edelgris* (“Noble Pig”). Quite obviously an attempt to erase the stain left on pork meat by the NFSA's inspection, the Lift-a-Pig campaign was a confident counter-offensive to rehabilitate the reputation of Norwegian pork.

The ad begins with a stalwart and handsome man walking into view, carrying a piglet in his arms, while he looks into the camera and tells the viewer: “We expect a lot when it comes to animal welfare.” He adds: “If you can't handle that, well, you have to find something else to do [than be a farmer].”

Then he introduces the novelty: “For our new Noble Pig, we’re raising the bar even further. We promise to *lift a pig*.” The viewer is asked to believe that Norwegian farmers are not just stalwart and handsome, but also *caring*. The piglet couched in the protagonist farmer’s arms resembles a human infant, and the farmer reminds us, perhaps, of a kindergarten teacher. Just as with experts on the care of toddlers, this farmer has a keen sense for the needs and interests of his pigs:

Pigs are social animals, so this new pig of ours will get more attention and care. It likes to play and snuffle, so now, it will have more stuff to snuffle about in. And it also needs enough room in which to play, so now it will have more room.

Approaching the end of his on-camera stroll across the idyllic farmyard, the farmer tells the viewer that, while Gilde for the time being plans to lift *some* pigs, the ultimate objective is to lift them *all* – and this is a cue for the camera to zoom out, to reveal a whole team of farmers, each one holding a piglet in their arms. This visual not only underlines the ambition to “lift” all Norwegian pigs, it at the same time suggests that the caring qualities of the protagonist farmer are not unique to him: All around this country, the ad suggests, you will find farmers who care for their cute, little pigs as though they were human babies. Finally, to explain to the consumer what the “lift” actually entails, the final image displays on screen a graded scale of animal welfare categories, which takes us from “EU” to “Norwegian” to “Noble Pig” to “Free range.”

This ad asks the consumer to forget all about the 73 percent of farms that, in the NFSA’s inspection, did not actually live up to the official animal welfare regulations in Norway. The protagonist’s affirmation that, “We expect a lot when it comes to animal welfare,” is disingenuous, to say the least: Given the NFSA’s report, almost three out of four pig farmers from this particular area demonstrably did *not* expect a lot. Furthermore, less than 1 percent of Norwegian pig farms are free range. The ad addresses none of this, however, but sweeps violations of animal welfare regulations emphatically under the rug. Instead, it puts forth an image of Norwegian pig farmers as a distinctly caring collection of professionals. Not only do these farmers possess expert knowledge about what pigs really need, it says, they are also uniquely motivated to give it to them.

The implied reader of this ad is someone who might have heard something about animals being mistreated in industrial agriculture, and now wants to have her concerns dispelled. She wants to be told that things are OK, to have her trust in the agricultural sector confirmed. This is precisely what this ad seeks to do: It tells the viewer that the Norwegian farmer, indeed the whole agricultural sector, is always on the lookout for ways to improve animal welfare. In Norwegian agriculture, the ad assures its reader, everyone is constantly at work to make life better for animals. Hence, the consumer has no reason for alarm, and can keep on consuming with a good conscience.

If this “keep calm and carry on consuming meat” message is what many consumers take home from the ad, there are several ways to demask the Lift-a-Pig campaign as a case of welfare washing. First, it uses humor to subtly suggest that conventional Norwegian meat production is actually good enough. In reality, pig farmers do not carry their piglets around like little babies. When the ad represents the pig more like a companion animal than one destined for the dinner table, the effect is slightly absurd, and can be taken to suggest that such a high level of welfare is excessive. In fact, many similar ads use the humor of absurd situations to elucidate the process of improving animal welfare, displaying dancing chickens, cows with silver spoons in their mouths, or – as here – piglets being carried around like babies. This suggests a systemic failure to understand the need for improvement as necessary or obligatory. Rather, animal welfare is presented as voluntary and, one might say, just for fun.

Further, statements to the effect that “we expect a lot” arguably border on untruth, given scandals like the one recounted above. Obviously, not every Norwegian pig farmer sets particularly high expectations to themselves, and some appear simply to disregard any expectations. Also, if it were true that Norwegian pig farmers are constantly at work to improve the lives of their animals, why did the Lift-a-Pig initiative arrive only *after* the above-mentioned scandal? The proposal that pig farmers are constantly looking for ways to improve the lives of their animals is more accurately seen as a reaction to bad press.

Finally, the graded scale introduced toward the end of the ad – probably unintentionally – undermines the claim of the ad itself. It implicitly acknowledges that there is a scale of welfare, and that mainstream Norwegian ideals are lower than they could be. This is revealing, since what it actually says is that pigs have needs that will *now* be met, but which – by implication – are not met, or not as well, by the conventional form of production. Why have Norwegian farmers, who supposedly “know what pigs want,” up to now denied them this? Surely, someone who is working constantly to improve the lives of his animals, would no longer be a caring professional if he knowingly and willingly maintained his animals sub-optimal conditions, lifting them only to the level *below* the top notch of the welfare scale Gilde present?

In our estimation, it is a good thing that the meat industry takes concrete steps to improve animal welfare, and it is generally a good idea to communicate those steps to the consumer, not least because it can add to a much-needed information flow between producers and consumers of meat. Nevertheless, what we actually have, in this case, closely resembles propaganda; it is an attempt to manipulate opinion with little regard to fact. That is not to say that consumers are being duped by the meat industry’s propaganda, since most consumers, as we pointed out in “Live,” appear only too willing to be appeased by this unreal information. For consumers as well as for the industry, illusions are more comfortable than realities.

Even so, and as the previous section indicated, the critical preparedness of Norwegian consumers appears to have developed somewhat when it comes to meat: A greater number of people now start with a certain skepticism about animal welfare in modern meat production or about the sustainability of our present levels of meat consumption. The Lift-a-Pig campaign is in itself a sign of an industry that needs to work ever harder to enact denial of the animal origin of meat. Still, the fact that a scandal like the one in Western Norway – where a clear majority of pork farmers in a particular district were demonstrably not adhering to animal welfare regulations – does not engender more reactions on the part of Norwegian consumers, is both surprising and disturbing.

It would be good if Norwegian consumers, when confronted with cases of “welfare washing,” did more to question the claims of the agricultural industry – if consumers were more inclined to *call the industry’s bluff*. In contrast, what actually happens is that Norwegians extend to the agricultural sector the high trust they have in the state, and consequently, it hardly ever happens that someone portrays farmers or anyone associated with farming as worthy of criticism. The point here is not to single out any particular group of farmers as evildoers, since, as the inspection from Western Norway clearly shows, violations of animal welfare regulations are so widespread as to be systemic. For any change to happen, Norwegian consumers need to begin distrusting the message that they can keep calm and carry on eating meat. That is not the same, however, as to distrust individual farmers. Rather, the thing consumers should be more critical of is the system that produces not only meat, but also ignorance and denial about meat production. Unfortunately, the peddlers of propaganda (that is, industry) and the buyers of the same (that is, consumers) currently appear to converge on the *status quo*.

Sanitized Retro-Shopping

Whether or not consumers actually will grow more critical, and what, if anything, can be done to increase the chances of this happening, is the big question. As we have tried to show in this chapter, the consumer’s relation to meat today is the result of a historical development whereby reminders of the animal origin of meat have increasingly been removed from the purchasing experience. Whereas the housewife five decades ago would go to the butcher or the charcuterie and be confronted by easily identifiable parts of animals – and occasionally whole or halved animals – and have a chat with the butcher about what part of the animal should be prepared in what way, today’s shoppers are very rarely reminded of where their meat comes from. Not only are animal carcasses hardly ever on display, but the meat tends to come ready cut and prepared – increasingly even ready cooked. The result is that the consumer, in reality, is purchasing an ingredient rather than an animal.

This situation is the result of developments in technology and economics, amply helped by advertising and “information” efforts. As we have shown, cutting, packaging, and labeling technologies created incentives for the slaughter companies – in Norway, predominantly the cooperative, Nortura – to take control of more of the process. This process was greatly boosted by the coming of the supermarket chains, which built on a principle of effective store management and optimization of the flow of goods through their stores, and which consequently had no interest in dealing with large animal parts. This meant, however, that the sight of whole animals, or parts of animals easily identifiable as such, would become a much rarer one for consumers. From the consumer’s perspective, more of the process that made animals edible had now been “removed behind the scenes of social life,” as Norbert Elias put it.¹¹² This spatial alienation from the animals that become our meat was accompanied by a social alienation, since consumers now only rarely met with meat professionals like the old butchers. Combined with the historical “death of the housewife,” this left consumers in a new state of insecurity about meat, and gave rise to a new type of consumer concerns. As old skills of transforming animals to meat waned, a new set of skills had to be acquired, not least a knowledge of brands and a proficiency in reading labels and content declarations. One response to this was an elevated and professionalized effort on the part of the industry, who, through its Meat Information Office, stepped in to fill the gap left by disappearing knowledge and skills when it came to buying and preparing meat. This arguably shifted the weight of power toward the producers, since what was issued by the Meat Information Office or from industry or retail advertisements – which often took the form of what we have called welfare washing – was what passed for “information” about animals and meat.

In cultural studies, a basic assumption is that there is, almost always, a dynamic relationship between production and consumption, and hence that consumption is a form of “secondary production,” as Michel de Certeau has suggested: Something is first produced, but when it is consumed, it is produced again, by whoever consumes it. In this process, the commodity can gain another meaning, other uses, and a new set of circumstances than the one intended by the producer. As de Certeau wrote:

The presence and circulation of a representation [...] tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.¹¹³

While we sympathize greatly with this perspective, we would argue it does not work very well for the case of meat, where we rather find something like a collusion against the realities of meat production among almost all the relevant parties – farmers, meat producers, retailers, media, and consumers.

Of course, we are not trying to suggest that there is no resistance at all against the tendency to deny the animal origin of meat; when the industry exerts itself to dispel what they call “meat myths,” this is a clear sign that meat has become contested, that it has, in fact, become something of a cultural battle ground. Is our society one that can look away when a majority of farmers violate animal welfare legislation? Are we willing to overlook the environmental impact of our growing meat consumption? Such questions are now at least voiced from time to time, even in Norway, where – as Vittersø and Kjærnes argues – there is a widespread general tendency to trust that everything is taken care of. Nevertheless, most Norwegian consumers, if they care at all, are remarkably willing to take meat propaganda at face value, and also, to seek other ways of managing the anxieties of being a modern carnivore.

One interesting example of such anxiety management takes us back to where we started this chapter, at the Damplassen square, in the heart of Ullevål Haveby. Today, there is no longer a butcher at Damplassen, nor is there a charcuterie. For several years, the square’s main attraction in the line of retail has been a popular bakery and coffee shop, which attracts the neighborhood’s locals as well as professors from the adjacent Blindern area, the University of Oslo’s main campus. But then, a few years ago, a husband and wife pair, with backgrounds within law and real estate, respectively, decided they would open up an old-fashioned *kolonial*, using a largely antiquated Norwegian word for a grocery store, in the exact spot where the charcuterie used to be. Whether the name they decided on, *Kolibri Kolonial*, was deliberately chosen to set the store apart from the huge supermarket chains, we cannot say, but it is abundantly clear that distinction from the large chains is its *raison d’être*.

Even before one steps into the shop, it is clear that this establishment wants to offer something other than what one finds at Rimi, Kiwi, Rema 1000, Coop, or any of the other supermarket outlets. It is equally clear that the otherness it projects revolves around signs of honesty, authenticity, even nostalgia. The interiors feature white and red-tiled walls, combined with a delicate light green paint, and the shelves are a combination of black-painted steel and oak wood; at the counter stand clerks dressed in white chef’s shirts, some of them even in white hats – the whole aesthetic an obvious nod to the past. A feeling that one has walked into the past is underlined by the product range, most of which comes in charming retro packaging, as if it were made a 100 years ago. The product range itself hardly overlaps at all with what most Norwegian consumers are used to from the chain supermarkets: Here is no industrially produced brand beer, only hand-crafted beer from *micro-micro-breweries*, offered in flip top bottles and with quaint labels. Here is no cheap common lemonade, but rather French artisanal *citronnade*, with labels that seem to suggest the lemons were pressed by hand on a rural *mamie*’s kitchen counter. Here is no bland, Norwegian cheese, but real, Italian *mozzarella di bufala* at outright shocking prices. And if this is not exotic

enough, the customer can always opt for the even more expensive *Norwegian* mozzarella, brought to market by a single farm in the south of the country, which one can safely assume that only a tiny minority of Norwegians have ever heard of. The store is well stocked, and sells the same type of product as any other supermarket – only, they are not actually the *same* products.

The message one gets from this store is that it is different from the big supermarket chains, and that being different *costs*: The deal it offers its customers, in other words, is to pay extra for products that have been produced in very small numbers. This model ensures that the store makes a profit and, at the same time, that its customers distinguish themselves from the *hoi polloi*. In other words, it sells not only groceries, but also distinction. The message and meaning of this neighborhood *kolonial* is well summed up by a TV personality, who was asked by a newspaper to recommend sites around town to readers. He referred to Kolibri as “a good old-fashioned *kolonial*,” and emphasized that it represented “an alternative to the chains and the big supermarkets,” adding that “it’s fantastic!” As if he wanted to hammer in that Kolibri really was an old-fashioned place, he added, “I love these kinds of places, they awaken my nostalgic spirit!”¹¹⁴

But if Kolibri Kolonial has air of the old-fashioned, not much about it is like in the old days. For one thing, in addition to groceries (and distinction), it also sells ready-made take-home meals. This in itself would have been highly atypical of the time when Damplassen was built, and the meals themselves are also very much *unlike* what Norwegians ate 100 years ago. On a recent visit, the menu of the week included Yellow curry with pineapple, pumpkin, cilantro, and rice; Caesar salad with chicken, home-made croutons, bacon, parmesan, and dressing; Gyros with pork neck, tzatziki, baked potato, and tomato salad; as well as Pulled duck with wheat tortillas from Como, Mexico, kimchi, and Szechuan dressing. A menu like this reveals not only that contemporary Norwegians’ diet has become highly internationalized – not to mention, sensitive to trends – but that Norwegians increasingly opt for eating out. Shoppers at the original Damplassen would not have purchased ready to eat meals, for the simple reason that those did not exist at the time. In all likelihood, these shoppers had never heard of “pulled duck,” and if they might have heard about “curries,” most of them would not think to make one. The Caesar Salad had only just been invented, and had not yet traveled across the Atlantic. Another feature of this menu that is quite unlike the old days, is the fact that five out of six dinners in a week include meat. While this is not untypical of Norwegians’ contemporary diet, you would have been very wealthy indeed if, in 1920, you could eat meat five or six times a week.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the seemingly old-fashioned Kolibri Kolonial and the original stores at Damplassen is that the former offers no sight of the animal that becomes meat. Neither at Kolibri nor at Damplassen in general can one today find an animal carcass, whether whole or halved; one searches in vain for pig’s trotters or pig’s heads; no bellies or

ribs are in sight. Today, everything is neat, dry, and tidy – Damplassen is a bloodless zone. Kolibri does in fact sell meat, only in a form that is decidedly modern: From self-service coolers, wrapped neatly in plastic, and with an emphasis on popular and easy to handle foods like minced meat, chicken breast, beef steaks, and bacon. There is nothing special about how consumers meet meat in this store. Except, that is, for the unfamiliar brand label.

Notes

- 1 Einar Li, *Oslo havebyselskap gjennom 30 år* (Oslo: Arbeidernes Aktietrykkeri, 1947), 34; Anne Fogt, Siri Meyer, Anne Ullmann, *Ullevål Hageby gjennom 90 år: Fra bolignod til Kardemomme by* (Oslo: Unipax, 2007), 11.
- 2 Li, *Oslo havebyselskap gjennom 30 år*, 38.
- 3 Li, *Oslo havebyselskap gjennom 30 år*, 39.
- 4 Anne Hals, “Damplassen før og nå,” *Før og nå: Årsskrift for Sogn og Tåsen historielag* 12 (2015): 2–13.
- 5 Magnus Haugum, ed., *Kjøtt: Handbok for kjøttbransjen* (Oslo: Teknologisk forlag, 1965), 473.
- 6 Haugum, *Kjøtt*, 474.
- 7 Per-Erling Johnsen, *Butikken på hjørnet* (Oslo: Schibsted, 2009), 55.
- 8 Yngvar Tollefsen and Leif Tollefsen, *Yrkeslære for pølsemakere* (Oslo: Solberg and Heyerdahl, 1957), 75.
- 9 Tollefsen and Tollefsen, *Yrkeslære for pølsemakere*, 8.
- 10 Henriette Schönberg Erken, *Stor kokebok for større og mindre husholdninger* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1914).
- 11 Per M. Christensen, “Problemer og oppgaver i de kooperative pølsemakerier i dag,” *Forbrukeren* 9, no. 8–9 (1955): 214.
- 12 Christensen, “Problemer og oppgaver i de kooperative pølsemakerier i dag,” 214.
- 13 Gary S. Cross and Robert N. Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures: How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 32.
- 14 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 20.
- 15 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 59–60.
- 16 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 55 and 56.
- 17 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 55.
- 18 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 244.
- 19 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 44–45.
- 20 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 45.
- 21 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 51 and 53.
- 22 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 99.
- 23 Cited from Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 101, whose point we borrow.
- 24 Tony Boyd, “Selvbetjening – Hvem høster fordelene, medlemmet eller butikken?,” *Forbrukeren* 5, no. 9 (1950): 203.
- 25 The British economist Tony Boyd, of Liverpool University, visited Norway in 1950, to produce research which would be useful for the cooperative or labor movements. His outsider’s view of Nordic retail is quite informative.
- 26 Boyd, “Selvbetjening,” 203.
- 27 Boyd, “Selvbetjening,” 203–204.
- 28 P. Fremstad, “Selvbetjeningsbutikker: Forsøk og erfaring i Oslo,” *Forbrukeren* 4, no. 7 (1949): 146.
- 29 Fremstad, “Selvbetjeningsbutikker,” 147.

- 30 Ivar Stovner, "Vi må få ferdig pakkede varer," *Forbrukeren* 5, no. 4 (1950): 80.
- 31 Ivar Stovner, "Ferdigpakking av kjøttvarer: Foodtainere, det siste på området," *Forbrukeren* 16, no. 7 (1961): 142.
- 32 Ivar Stovner, "Vi må få ferdigpakkede varer," *Forbrukeren* 5, no. 4 (1950): 80.
- 33 "NOS Survey of Housing Conditions 1988," Statistics Norway. <http://www.ssb.no/a/histstat/tabeller/13-13-4t.txt>. Accessed February 11, 2020.
- 34 Annechen Bahr Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslorte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2019), 333.
- 35 N.N. "Gi kundene en stol å sitte på," *Alt om mat*, no. 1 (1974): 53.
- 36 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 123.
- 37 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 143.
- 38 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 180.
- 39 Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 141–142.
- 40 See Christensen and Nilsen, *Langs Gilde veier*, 144.
- 41 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 3–4.
- 42 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 272.
- 43 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 60.
- 44 Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, 274.
- 45 "I dag avgjøres opplysningskontorenes fremtid," *Matindustrien*. <https://matindustrien.no/nyheter/2020/i-dag-avgjores-opplysningskontorenes-fremtid>. Accessed April 4, 2021.
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- 47 Almås, *Norges Landbrukshistorie*, 158–207.
- 48 "Påsketradisjoner," Norsk tradisjonsmat. <https://norsktradisjonsmat.no/tradisjonsmatskolen/pasketradisjoner>. Accessed August 23, 2021.
- 49 Our emphasis.
- 50 Meat Information Office, archive.
- 51 Meat Information Office, archive.
- 52 These ads were in daily broadsheets rather than family weekly magazines, and were published in *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Adresseavisen*.
- 53 Meat Information Office, archive. Annual report 1990, 2.
- 54 Meat Information Office, archive. Annual report 1990, 2.
- 55 Meat Information Office, archive. Annual report 1992, 4.
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- 97 They were: ICA/Hakon-gruppen, Reitan-gruppen, Forbrukersamvirket, and Norgesgruppen. See Lange et al. *Organisert kjøpekraft*, 517. Since then, there has been a further consolidation, as ICA/Hakon-gruppen was bought by the cooperative, Forbrukersamvirket. In other words, only three large companies control almost the entire food retail market in Norway.
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- 110 Cited in Jacob Vos, "Actions Speak Louder than Words: Greenwashing in Corporate America," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* 23, no. 2 (2009): 673–674. When the term greenwashing was first coined, by environmentalist Jay Westerveld, critics within and outside academia awoke to the practice it denoted – as did, arguably, the industry. The *locus classicus* was a large-scale ad campaign for the oil company Chevron, called *People Do*, in which the company portrayed its own employees as wholehearted guardians of the environment. Though in almost every way untrue and – one would think – easily demasked, the campaign was a huge success, and even garnered marketing awards. Since then, greenwashing has become both a very widespread practice and a favorite target of environmentalist advocates, though several critical analyses argue that greenwashing is largely ineffective or even a liability for companies, as the technique, as well as the companies resorting to it, can easily be exposed as insincere. For more, see Kristian Bjørkdahl and Karen Lykke Syse, "Welfare Washing," on which this whole section rests.
- 111 The Norwegian word "*loftet*" means both "to lift" and "the pledge," so the campaign title suggested both the pledge and the elevation.
- 112 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 103.
- 113 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life, vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiii.
- 114 Anette Aasheim, "Jeg elsker faste stamsteder," *Aftenposten*, December 23, 2017, 21. The TV personality was a morning show host, Peter Bubresko.

4 Eat

Liv is a tall and upright 86-year-old woman with a sharp mind, a good memory, and the constitution of someone at least 20 years younger. Over time, she has regularly had to add younger people to her circle of friends, as her older friends have failed to keep up with her energy level. She has three children, eleven grandchildren, and six great grandchildren, and was widowed at 60. When we accompanied her on a walk along the beach, her gait was so vigorous that she kept kicking up pebbles; at one point we had to stop so she could empty them from her shoes. She did not sit down to unlace her trainers, but simply balanced elegantly on one leg, shaking sand and pebbles out of her shoe. We had approached Liv for an interview after learning that she, after a long life as her family's home chef, was still interested in food and meal times – and thus, that she was a sort a living repository of the changes in Norwegian food culture over almost nine decades.

Liv lives in a small coastal market town bordered by farmland and the ocean in south western Norway, but she was not born there: She used to be a city girl, and was born in Trondheim, in mid-Norway. Although she was only a little girl during the Nazi occupation, she has vivid memories of WWII. She explained how there was little food in Trondheim during the war years, but that she was among the fortunate ones: Her father worked in wholesale fishmongering, and he was inventive enough to navigate around the wartime rationing and restrictions. She told us a story about how she had to give up her bedroom to a piglet and a chicken, to keep them away from the view of the Nazis. Once the weather was warm enough for the animals to stay in less pampered accommodation, she got her room back. Her dad got hold of a truck and drove the animals to their little cabin in the country, about 20 kilometers from the city. The cabin had an outdoor shed suitable for pig keeping, and during summer holidays, they all stayed at the cabin with the pig. Once school restarted, and they returned to the city, her father would bike all the way up to the cabin to feed the pig daily. When it was time to slaughter the pig, a slaughterer helped her father kill it: “I remember sitting by the cabin, stirring a pot of blood so it wouldn't coagulate,” Liv told us.

Liv's entrepreneurial father had worked as a lumberjack in Canada, and had saved up enough money to build the house in Trondheim in 1939. In the

basement of the house, he built a freezing unit with lots of small boxes that he let out to neighbors. One box was kept for their own use, and the butchered pig moved from the cabin outside the city to the freezing compartment in the basement. Liv recalls that the Nazis at one point called to make a house inspection. Fortunately, a mole in the Nazi party had warned Liv's father, so the butchered pig was pulled out of the freezer and hidden in a heap of snow just outside the house. Once the Nazis disappeared, the frozen bits of pig were retrieved and returned to the freezer.

Understandably, the incident with the frozen pig stands out in Liv's memory, but for the most part, the meals she ate as young were meatless. Breakfast would consist of porridge oats or some bread with cheese. To school, and later to work, she brought a packed sandwich lunch, again with cheese. When asked about weekday dinners, she listed fish patties, fish pudding, herring, salted cod, and fried haddock. Meat for supper was mainly reserved for Sundays, or used as a condiment. For instance, they made a certain kind of fish dumpling of roughly minced fish, with a nugget of bacon in the middle. Or they cooked a shank of gammon to create a broth, which served to flavor a mashy pottage of potatoes, carrots, and swede. After the broth had been cooked, the meat would be picked off the gammon bone and added to the stew. She listed this as a typical meat meal. On a Sunday, they might have meatballs.

When Liv was 21, she met her husband, who was a student in Trondheim. They married, and moved south. The first couple of months they lived with her husband's parents, and a major difference between these two households, Liv recalled, was the meat. She put this down to her dad having worked in fishmongering, while she had now moved to the agricultural heartland of Norway. Liv's mother-in-law was a very good cook, and Liv learned many a cooking skill from her, both when she lived under her roof, but also after the young couple had found a place of their own. "I followed my mother-in-law's recipes," she said, "because my husband was used to them and enjoyed them."

In 1958, Liv gave birth to a boy. Another followed in 1960. When the boys had a nap, she would hop on her bike and spin down to the fishmonger or butcher. She continued having fish quite often, and the visit to the fishmonger often determined what she would cook. Fried herring, fish pie, or salted cod were served frequently, and she would make her own fish dumplings, fish cakes, and fish puddings. Alongside these everyday staple dishes, she would serve lamb and other meats. Salted lamb would be served with potato dumplings, or made to flavor a stew consisting mainly of vegetables, called *lapskaus*. She recalled gammon being used in the same manner in Trondheim. She also made lamb casserole, with meat and root vegetables in a béchamel sauce, which had become a fairly common dish in Norway in the early 1900s. She fried pork chops and meat balls and beef patties. Veal liver in cream sauce was a favorite enjoyed by both her husband and the boys.

They ate their warm meal early: At noon, her husband would come home from work and have a meal with her and the boys, and even when the boys

started school, they would return home to eat a warm lunch together. There was quite a bit of local industry where they lived, and at noon, they could hear the factory horn signaling meal time, in response to which the factory workers would hurry home to eat. This was a very different daily rhythm than what she had been used to, and it impacted her housework and cooking. Her own childhood lunches in Trondheim had always been simple fare eaten cold: open-faced sandwiches, bread with cheese. Here, in the rural south-west, she would only have time to tidy after breakfast before shopping and cooking started again. But a quick and easy hot lunch could be procured with left over potatoes and offal sausage – one of her boys' favorite meals. "Our butcher made the best offal sausages," Liv said. "They were so fat, and contained so much offal and other things, that when you pulled the casing off a sausage and placed it in the frying pan, the whole sausage almost melted."

They almost never had beef steak – maybe once a year, if even that. Although beef was a rare treat, procuring smaller animals for meat was less expensive. She explained how it was possible to buy animals straight from the local farmers in the area, and that it was very common to buy half a pig or half a lamb. Her husband was very interested in food and he would stand by the kitchen table and cut and carve and pack and make sausages and meat rolls and all sorts of things.

In the 1970s, when the boys were in their teens and Liv's third child, a girl, was approaching school age, things changed quite dramatically for Liv and her family. The first change was that Liv began working outside the home. In 1973, she started a part-time job at a clothing store, where she worked until 1977, when she started a full-time position at a local industrial business – an employment she retained until retirement. This more complex set of demands naturally made quite a difference for her efforts as a home cook, so now, she would require the help of her eldest son, who would pick up his sibling from kindergarten and do errands of various sorts. Also, as Liv was now engaged on several fronts at once, her husband had to contribute more with the cooking. There was still no doubt about who was the cook of the household, but the change was nevertheless significant. Another change was that more of the family's cooking would be done in a serial fashion, leaning heavily on the help of the freezer. Whenever she had extra time on her hands, notably on the weekends, Liv would make up most of a week's worth of dinners, which could fairly easily be heated and finished in an increasingly busy everyday life. When we asked her what exactly was serially made, she responded that it was typically meat stews, sauces, fricassees, meat cakes. They never froze fish, she added. With the help of the freezer, the number of meat-based dinners could go up, because those meals were so freezer-friendly.

Another change was that Liv started adding an international inspiration to the meals she had been cooking, some of which came from reading about food. The magazine *Alt om mat*, which appeared in the early 1970s, was a

new thing in their family, and it helped advance Liv's culinary curiosity and competence further. It also, incidentally, provided her with plenty of tips for how a home cook who was also occupied outside the home could manage both roles.

Liv now introduced a new staple to the family's catalog of meals: *Spaghetti Bolognese*. Liv's son, who joined her for parts of our interview, remembered how this dish became somewhat of a fad in the neighborhood, and how eating these new international foods felt almost like a revolution. He explained how exciting it was to visit his friends and explore all the different versions of the Bolognese sauce: Some mothers added vegetables to the mince, while others used cream to make a blander, more child-friendly version. Liv's version of the sauce was made mainly with minced meat, onions, and tinned tomatoes. Pizza was another new dish, which was often served in front of the TV on a Saturday night. Perhaps this version of pizza would not be recognized as such by an Italian; it had a thick crust and was made to cover an entire square baking tray. It was topped with a mince-rich Bolognese sauce and a mild Norwegian version of gouda cheese, called *Norvegia*.

Liv's son reminded his mother of another exotic innovation which appeared on the family's dinner table. In the 1970s, gravy powder bags appeared in the supermarkets, containing spices and freeze-dried bits of vegetables, with names like "Hunters stew" or "Italian stew" or "Oriental stew." Liv had forgotten about those, but once reminded, explained that the kids liked it and so she cooked it. You would simply pour the contents of the powder-filled bag into a casserole, and add cold water – and a thickened gravy was born. You would then fry up some mince, and add it to the gravy. The hunter's stew was great, Liv explained, if you just added a big dollop of sour cream to it rather than just milk or water. In the oriental stew, you could also add a can of pineapple chunks.

Not only did international recipes and dehydrated convenience foods begin to appear, the selection of ingredients changed too, including new meats entering the scene. The foremost novelty was chicken. Obviously, chickens were not an unknown food but they had been rare fare.

We never used to eat chicken. That is, it did occasionally happen, but it was something very special, and I can't remember eating it at all when the kids were little. You had to buy a whole chicken, it was such a palaver. My husband somehow knew when the farmers were slaughtering chickens and would sometimes appear with a bird, but this was a rare thing, and I didn't much like it either. I had no repertoire of chicken recipes. But then suddenly you could simply buy chicken breasts, and now there's chicken everywhere! This is a recent thing, it was quite amazing when it happened!! And totally new.

Liv has retained her interest in cooking new and exciting dishes, but her orientation toward the "just add mince" bags with dehydrated gravy wore

off after the children moved out. She has kept up with the trends within international cuisine, and adds both sweet tropical flavors and hot spices to her many dishes. Today, she often gets her inspiration from television, particularly from TV chef, Wenche Andersen, who has a daily food segment on morning television. She will often try a dish once to see if she likes it; if she really enjoys it, she will enter it in longhand in her own book of recipes, and invite her friends over for dinner. TV is not, however, her only source of culinary inspiration. She has also discovered what a wealth of information the internet is, and she is particularly fond of a food blog called *Trines matblogg*. She likes Trine's recipes for breads and buns, but is often inspired also by her dinner suggestions. Liv mentioned a creamy chicken dish spiced with mango and chili as one that had wandered from the internet and into her own handwritten cookbook.

As our conversation came to an end, we discussed what Liv felt had been the major changes to cooking and eating habits during the last decades. She had to think for a while before she turned to the issue of technology. With the arrival of the washing machine, the dishwasher, and a variety of kitchen appliances cooking was made easier than before. The freezer also made a big difference, and Liv incorporated it into her meal planning scheme early on. The context around cooking and eating changed dramatically, she described to us: "Life became easy, so easy, and housework wasn't really housework at all." She also emphasized the increase in wealth, not just her own but that of everyone around her, and pointed out how everything had become so affordable. When she moved, in 1970, from the little flat where she had made her first home and into a modern house, she had been so happy, she told us, that she felt blessed. She had healthy children and even a garden, and she felt like "the absolute richest person in the world." When she was widowed, in 1994, she had to let go of the house, and moved into a smaller apartment. Still, she says, life feels very easy. She lives within walking distance of a shopping mall, and although the butcher and the fishmonger have disappeared, one of the nearby supermarkets still has a counter with fresh fish and fresh meats. She prefers the meat counter; it became her go-to place after the local butcher disappeared. She disliked how the supermarket advertised its meat, though – as the focus seemed always to be on its *cheapness*: "There's always been talk about food prices, but not like today. Buy cheap – it's cheap, it's cheap, it's cheap! Everything is just ready made and cheap."

As Liv's culinary life story reveals, one finds, even in a relatively small country like Norway, plenty of variation – between regions, classes, and to some extent genders – when it comes to what one eats, how food is prepared, as well as how meals are organized. Her son's recollection of the many different Bologneses found within the same little neighborhood points to the fact that there is also variation at the household or individual level. That said, Liv's story is fairly typical of culinary change in Norway since around WWII, and this is because many large societal trends have cut straight

across the different sorts of variation. To put it simply: While each mom in the neighborhood had her own take on the Bolognese, it is perhaps more significant that they all began making Bolognese at around the same time.

It is not entirely coincidental that spaghetti Bolognese was one of the dishes that Liv and her son highlighted as indicative of the transformation in cooking and eating habits of the last decades, since this dish symbolizes many of the changes that have taken place. It is an international dish, and although Norwegians would “Norwegianize” this dish as they would also certain others, it thus points to an increasing opening up of Norwegian culinary culture to inspirations from abroad. One effect of this internationalization was to add to the Norwegian home cook’s repertoire of meat dishes, a development that coincided with a push toward simplifying everyday cooking. Furthermore, the Bolognese signals change in that it is fairly quick and easy to make. Most everyone can make a Bolognese, and – again, we are talking about the Norwegianized version – it can be pulled off as a “20 minute dinner”: Unlike its Italian counterpart, the *ragù*, which is supposed to cook for hours, the Norwegian Bolognese is so quick and easy because it in almost all cases is based on ready-to-cook minced meat, and in some extent also on ready-made sauces or powdered sauce mixes. And this is another way that Bolognese signals culinary change, since minced meat has indeed become the most popular category of meat consumed by Norwegians.

In this chapter, we suggest that Norwegians’ growing appetite for minced meat and other easy-to-cook or ready-to-eat meat dishes introduces a culinary culture that dispels traces of the animal from which meat derives. On the one hand, minced meat is materially important, in the sense that this meat category has become the major one in Norway today. At the same time, it is symbolically significant, since it stands for a *decreasing need* and *increasing unwillingness* to prepare and eat food that reminds people of the animal origin of meat.

Admittedly, minced meat is somewhat tricky as a symbol of change, since it is not, in itself, a new food. Traditionally, however, in order to eat minced meat one had to actually mince it – which was not just hard work, but which brought the home cook into a close, tangible contact with various parts of the animal’s carcass. In the old days, minced meat did not involve distance from the animal origin, but actually the opposite: It called for the home cook to actively transform the animal body into mince. With the industrialization of slaughter, cutting, preparation, and packaging, minced meat could increasingly be had with almost no effort at all on the part of the home cook; all she had to do was stop by the supermarket’s freezer or refrigeration unit and pick up a package.

Through this change, Norwegians have not entirely shed the cultural ideal that food ought to be fresh and made from “proper” ingredients. Still, over the course of several decades – which roughly overlaps with Liv’s career as a home cook – Norwegians have incorporated a whole host of semi-finished and ready-made foods into their diet. The result has been a hybrid of old

and new, which was predicated on the imperative that food needed to be *fast, safe, and cheap* – a phrase that in fact was used as a slogan by a Norwegian supermarket chain. A central push for this development was the movement of women into the work force: When women began working outside the home, the option of spending hours each day in the kitchen preparing the family’s meals was no longer viable. The countless hours a traditional housewife had spent mincing meat, say, were simply no longer available to most women. So, when technological and economic development in the meat industry meant that foods like minced meat could be had almost without effort for the home cook, there was an almost perfect fit between demand and supply. Cutting down on the work required to put meat on the table relied in part on technical innovations within the home as well, notably on the freezer – which from the 1960s through the 1980s was a key tool in making meat fast, safe, and cheap for Norwegian families.

But while freezers from the end of that period and up to today have remained a standard element of most Norwegian kitchens, the contents of those freezers as well as the uses of their contents have changed. In contrast to the 1970s, when home freezers first became widespread, Norwegian freezers today only occasionally contain half or entire animal carcasses that the home cook has cut herself, as the supply of meat has become more or less continuous throughout the year. And since meat is increasingly offered to the consumer in portion-packed and ready-to-cook form, freezers contain much less meat than they used to. So while Norwegian consumers eat more meat than ever before, they eat it, increasingly, in a form that bears no reminder of where that meat came from.

From Oats and Gruel to “a Well Balanced Diet”

Norway is one of very few countries where the nation’s leading academics have engaged in hefty debates about *porridge* – in what has come to be known as “The Great Porridge Feud,” which raged in Norway in the years 1864–1866. In Norway, as elsewhere, the 1860s was an era of social reform, infused by a strong belief in science as a tool to improve society; and one of the parties to the porridge feud, the famous folklorist Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, was in every way a representative of this program. With a background in zoology, botany, and forestry, Asbjørnsen published a book, in 1864, called *Sensible Cooking*, written under the *nom de plume* Clemens Bonifacius. Having traveled widely abroad and experienced the domestic kitchens of other nations, he had come to think that Norwegian cuisine had vast potential for improvement, in terms of taste as well as nourishment. In the introduction to his book, he criticized the way Norwegian women made porridge. They would stir in uncooked flour or grains after it had bubbled for a while in the pot, but according to Asbjørnsen, science proved that adding flour without actually cooking it made it indigestible, and thus constituted a terrible waste of good flour. Since probably two-thirds of all

Norwegians ate porridge every day, even several times a day, he estimated the loss to be quite a fortune, and a matter worthy of national interest.¹

The other party to the feud was Eilert Sundt, a pioneer social scientist whose approach was far more attuned to the rural population, its situation, and its lifeways. He disputed Asbjørnsen's labeling of Norwegian peasants as ignorant. Naturally, Norwegian peasant women knew what they were doing, Sundt argued, as they had lived off porridge or gruel made of oats or barley for hundreds and hundreds of years. Tradition proved them right, he argued. The debate went on, and evolved into something of a battle between knowledge systems. Although chemical experiments proved that Sundt rather than Asbjørnsen was right, the fact that Sundt had even questioned science put an end to his state funding, as well as his career as a social scientist.²

That porridge or gruel was an important part of the Norwegian diet in the past is indisputable. Between 1835 and 1865, less than 20 percent of the food consumed in Norway was sourced from animals, while 80 percent was grains – which was either made into porridge or baked into bread.³ The potato was introduced around 1750, and became an important staple, which was integrated in gruels, porridges, and baking. Food historian Henry Notaker has studied sources from the 1800s and early 1900s, and finds that porridge was eaten every day, twice a day. It would usually be made of oats or barley. Depending on the economy, the time of the week and whether it was a religious holiday or a family feast, people would add butter or sour cream or milk to their porridge or gruel. People would eat what the natural environment they lived in made possible.⁴ In practice, this meant that the traditional Norwegian inland diet most weekdays was largely lacto-vegetarian, while the coastal population ate a lot of fish.⁵

As we have explained above, both sheep and dairy production would produce a surplus of male animals which could be slaughtered for meat after they had gained body mass by utilizing the bountiful and rich summer grazing. Surplus animals would either be sold to drovers or slaughtered for home consumption. Their meat would usually be salted, smoked, and dry-cured, and could also be sold fresh locally. Whether you had access to meat in your diet was a question of economy.⁶ Wealthy farmers could have larders filled with cured and dried meat – and a paper thin segment of a wealthy bourgeoisie would both eat, drink, and be inspired to cook international dishes conveyed by food writers such as Hanna Winsnes and Henriette Schønberg Erken.⁷ The rural-urban divide, the geographical divide between coastal areas and inland areas, and the class divide are important factors to take into account when we try to generalize and summarize such historical socio-economical processes that we have in the above. Yet industrialization and new possibilities within the global food trade changed the Norwegian food system thoroughly. This development was not unique to Norway; colonialism, new trade routes, and an expansion of markets had changed the world at large and the way foods traveled around the world.⁸

Between 1900 and 1950, private consumption trebled in Norway.⁹ In an open-ended ethnological questionnaire on meals, distributed in 1950, an

informant from Høland in Akershus notes initially that his answers stem from “an ordinary farm,” which in this context meant a much more privileged situation than the majority of people living in this rural area, since the majority of people were poor crofters, while he was a farmer.¹⁰ The informant goes on to explain that within crofting families, those that had many children were even poorer than the “average” crofter. “In a home with many children the economy could be so poor that nothing in particular can be said about meals and food customs – in short, they actually had very little food at all.”¹¹ And when people were struggling simply to get food at all, meat – which was always a luxury food – was literally not on the table. This particular informant reported (after having “discussed the matter with many others”) that in 1900, their dinners would be meat and pea soup on Sundays, leftovers from this meal on Mondays, pancakes and soup on Tuesdays, herring and gruel on Wednesdays, meat and pea soup on Thursdays, herring on Fridays, and barley porridge on Saturdays. The informant warns his readers again that this was exceptional, that they were a lot better off than most people. Other informants explain that the rural poor added to their diet with grouse, venison, and hare if they lived in the vicinity of a forest or a mountain.¹²

A general impression from the ethnological questionnaires is that people ate meals that had meat in a central or supporting role between once and three times a week – and that geography and economy decided the frequency in each particular case. We need to take into account, however, that the respondents to many of these questionnaires were not necessarily representative, as some of them belonged to elites like teachers and clergymen or people with a particular interest in social and cultural history.

While 60 percent of all income was spent on food in 1907, by 1958, this number had gone down significantly, to 40 percent.¹³ Sociologist Annechen Bahr Bugge has analyzed Norwegian food consumption practices over time, and has found that, although most consumers were a lot better off in 1950 than they had been in 1900, people spent their newly acquired wealth on consumer articles like furniture rather than on changing their diet. Technological development also accelerated. Wood burning stoves became common among the laboring classes, in both rural and urban areas, toward the end of the 1800s. Electrical cookers also entered the scene, and became common in the 1930s – contributing to quadrupling the expenditure on light and fuel between 1910 and 1950. In roughly the same period, specifically between 1912/1913 and 1927/1928, the laboring classes saw an increase in meat consumption – 23 percent – but the overall meat consumption of the Norwegian population in fact remained largely stable.¹⁴ During the 1930s, meat consumption hardly changed, and during the war and immediate post-war years, consumption was at a stable low because of shortages and rationing.

Technological changes like woodburning stoves (from the 1880s), mechanical mincers (from the 1890s), and electric stoves (from the 1930s) enabled Norwegians to vary their cooking and, also, to cook several dishes at the same time. There were also, in this period, some notable changes in what

Norwegians ate.¹⁵ Canning, for instance, made it possible to store otherwise perishable foods like vegetables, fruit, and meats – and new food products like canned meatballs and fishballs came on the market. The growth in wealth introduced the Sunday roast to many Norwegian families, and this took the place of stews and soups in which meat had played an important, albeit not the sole part.¹⁶ The mincer made it easier to prepare *meat cakes* (larger and flatter versions of the perhaps better known Swedish meatballs) to the Sunday dinner table – a dish that became so popular that it has been shortlisted several times as “Norway’s national dish.” Several other meat dishes based on mince were introduced to Norwegian families as a result of a whole generation of women who lived up to the post WWII ideal of housewifery. Many women had studied home economics and introduced dishes they had been taught to make at school rather than by their mothers.

Still, while there were quite a few changes to Norwegians’ diet in this period, most of the changes that made a difference for people’s awareness of the animal origin of meat came only after WWII, and most clearly from the 1950s onwards. The significant growth in meat consumption that took off from the late 1950s can be read as aspect of the “Great Acceleration,” that is, the tremendous growth in use of natural resources upon which the wealth of the last eight decades or so has been built.¹⁷ While meat consumption rose only marginally in the first 50 years of the 20th century, it almost trebled in the 65 years between 1959 and 2015. So rapid and dramatic have these changes been that, before we could properly work through and find appropriate cultural responses to them, meat had become, to most of us, something very different than what it used to be.

The Meaning of Mince

In the old Norwegian farming society, geography and economy determined how much meat one could eat – and since most Norwegians were generally

Table 4.1 Total production of meat for sale and home use, in million kilograms

	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999	2013	2014	2015
Cattle	41.1	52.1	69.6	74.0	94.1	81.3	76.5	77.8
Calf	7.5	6.6	1.9	1.4	1.5	2.4	2.3	2.0
Sheep and lamb	14.9	17.3	19.0	23.1	22.9	23.7	24.3	24.1
Goat and kid	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Horse	2.2	1.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.2
Poultry	2.9	5.2	9.8	20.0	36.5	104.1	106.1	93.7
Tame reindeer, rabbits	1.8	1.6	1.8	2.9	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.8
Pork	48.2	65.6	78.9	84.1	109.3	127.5	128.8	131.6
All meat	118.9	150.6	182.1	206.6	267.0	341.5	340.0	331.5
Eggs	31.7	38.0	44.9	51.9	47.7	63.8	64.8	64.3

Source: NILF.

quite poor and did not have easy access to meat, they ate very little of it. Another circumstance that radically sets the old farming culture apart from our own, is the amount of work involved in putting meat on the table. This was true of most all forms of meat, since farmers and farmwives, in addition to cooking the meat, also often slaughtered and processed the animal. But it was perhaps particularly true of an animal food which we, today, have come to think of as the most convenient of all, namely, *minced meat*.

The meat grinder was probably invented by Karl Dreis in the 1830s, but was not a common kitchen tool before the early 1900s in Norway.¹⁸ This meant that mincing meat was a laborious affair. If you wanted very finely cut meat, you either scraped it using a knife, or chopped it using meat choppers: It was hard work, and you could not do it at all without the proper tools. Meat choppers came in various lengths and sizes. Finer meats could be minced using the mezzaluna, an implement today more commonly used today for herbs. In contrast, sinewy bits of meat would be attacked using long handled meat choppers. These are common kitchen tools found in many European farmhouse museums, and the figure above shows a Norwegian version. These choppers were about two feet long, with a sharp iron shoe and a long handle which allowed the user to forcefully bang a tough piece of meat into a chewable and digestible morsel. The meat could then be forced into sausages, which could be salted or smoked or eaten immediately. By chopping up offal and tough sinewy bits, one could utilize more of the animal, which was imperative given the high cost of meat.¹⁹



Figure 4.1 Meat choppers.
Source: Mjøsmuseet.

Although the good housewife had tools to assist with the chore, the tools at use in the early 1800s were not as efficient as they would later become. This is evident if we look at the very first Norwegian cook book, Karen Elisabeth Bang's *Huusholdings-Bog* (Household Book), from 1831.²⁰ Interestingly, the word "mincing" is absent from the book. In the section on slaughter, there is a multitude of sausage recipes, yet Bang does not *mince* or *grind*. Bang's instructions are rather to start with a piece of meat from a particular animal, *scrape* it, and then *pound* it in a mortar.²¹ Following the food historian Henry Notaker's bibliography on Norwegian cookbooks, we can find plenty of dishes made thus; in fact, this seems to be the way in which meat was finely fragmented in the mid-1800s.²² For instance, the parson's wife Hanna Winsnes, who was also an acclaimed author of books on home economics, instructed her readers in 1845 to make "fine sausage meat" by cutting thin slices alongside the grain of the meat, as this makes it easier to scrape the meat into a fine dough, before finally pressing it through a sieve.²³ The tougher bits could then be made into something that sounds perhaps less tempting: sinew sausages. The word used for meat scraped finely in this manner was, importantly, not the Norwegian equivalent to minced meat. It was the French word *farce*.²⁴ The labor intensive qualities of this finer cuisine required a surplus of time and labor, which most Norwegian households at this point did not have.

From subsequent editions of Winsnes' book, we learn how mechanical grinders would change the work of mincing meat. In the 10th edition, published in 1876, the author's daughter writes in the introduction that she has kept most things included by her mother even if some of them are old-fashioned, as they might have cultural historical interest to her readers and inform them about the hard or cumbersome labor country ladies had to suffer in the past.²⁵ In a chapter on butchering, Winsnes provides her readers with the number of servants required, and gives a timeline and to-do list for the first three days of the work. But then she adds that, "For those using meat machines, this division of time will not fit, as everything is done more than twice as fast."²⁶ Under the heading, "Meat-machines," Winsnes tells her readers that,

I have learnt to know these only recently, but would recommend them to anyone who wishes to save time. The newest ones made of iron are the most practical and the cheapest; they can be screwed on to a table, and in this way, one person can grind alone.²⁷

By 1876, mechanical grinding of meat took place both in homes and in butcher shops. The first time we can trace the Norwegian word for "minced meat" – more literally translated, "meat-dough" – in writing, is in Dorothea Christensen's book, *Kogebog for folkeskolen og hjemmet* (Cookbook for School and Home), from 1891.²⁸ Here, one finds a recipe for "meat-dough" including meat, tallow, flour, salt, milk, and spice. The reader is told to chop

or grind the meat with the salt, and carefully add the other ingredients. Such a meat-dough was one step further from plain minced meat, and sure enough, the final instruction is to shape it into balls and either boil them or fry them. In the revised version, published eight years later, the words “minced meat” are used as a heading, and dishes like meatballs and meat loaf follow.²⁹ She still underlines that *farce* is that “proper” term for this concoction.

The ease with which the mechanical meat mincing device transformed a piece of meat into mince must have been astonishing for women used to slamming meat choppers up and down with full force. With the mechanical mincer, pieces of meat were simply fed in on one side, and a neat plate of mince would gather on the other – though a fine plate of mince required running the meat through the mincer about seven or eight times.³⁰ In the late 1800s, mechanical mincers were a kitchen appliance one could find mostly in urban upper class kitchens and in some of the large farms. But by 1910, the mincer had become a fairly common feature in Norwegian kitchens, as ironworks and mechanical workshops started manufacturing them. Although some considered it a vanity to serve dishes from minced meat, the allure of the mechanical mincer was too great, and its spread continued.³¹

Whether mincing was done by hand chopping or with the help of the mechanical mincer, it always required knowledge of the animal, most notably what parts of the animal were suitable for what uses. In the book *Husstel*



Figure 4.2 Meat grinder on wood plate.

Source: Mjøsmuseet.

(Housekeeping), from 1907, Dorothea Christensen and Helga Helgesen explained which parts of the animal were best suited for mincing meat. Alongside a figure of a bull, they explain the use of the beef shoulder: “The shoulder can be disjointed and used for roast, minced meat, soup meat, etc., and can [also] be brined.” Thereafter, they explained the uses for what British butchers would call the *thick flank* and US butchers (who generally divide the animal into fewer cuts) label *round*:

The most tender part of the thick flank can be used for beef steak. It is placed on the inner side of the thigh, and the other parts can be used for stewing and such similar things. The bottom part, which is the toughest, can be used for minced meat.³²

In another book, from 1916, Inga Høst’s *Matlære* (Food Knowledge), one finds another definition of minced meat: “Minced meat is usually made from ox, veal, horse, or pig meat. Meat that is too tough to be roasted whole, is suitable for mincing. Certain pieces of the leg and shoulder are best suited for minced meat.”³³ This instructional school book for girls not only gives instructions about which parts of the animal are suited for mincing, it also explains the food safety concerns with mincing, detailing the dangers of bacteria and parasites. Høst’s book was addressed to young girls between 10 and 15 years of age, and skills such as these were considered fundamental to how their future role as family cooks.

Many of these books expressed a clear preference for minced meat made by the housewife herself. It was not that minced meat could not be bought at the time – in fact, it was readily available – but many of these authors thought that one could really only trust the minced meat one had made oneself. According to Christensen and Helgesen,

One ought make one’s own minced meat, as the mince one can buy is often tampered with by adding horsemeat, adding water to increase its weight, or adding sulphuric acid and bicarbonate of soda to make a bright, red color and make it last longer. This is now forbidden, but the ban is often violated. Undyed minced meat is dark on the outside and easily turns grey on the inside. Dyed minced meat is rosy red on the outside and maintains its color for a couple of days.³⁴

Purchasing mince was obviously something one had to be very wary of doing, and it seems as if the author was very much aware of the many pitfalls a housewife might stumble into. One finds something of the same in many home economics books from this period, where skepticism of store bought minced meat was conveyed to a generation of school girls and young women. Christensen noted, specifically, that it was impossible to know what was in the minced meat. It could really be any animal – the meat was red and turned grey whether it was an old cow, a young bull, or indeed a horse.

The interwar years were a period of substantial structural changes in Norwegian society, including the widespread use of electricity and electrical refrigeration. As young women found work in towns and cities, electricity enabled them to cook at home even where “home” was a small bedsit. Unlike many other food cultures, Norway did not have a plethora of cafes and street food vendors where everyday meals could be purchased cheaply. If one wanted to eat well without spending a fortune going to a restaurant, this had to take place at home. An interesting illustration is a small cook book from 1935, called *Hybelkokebok* (Bedsit Cookbook). The author, Lolly Ræstad, provides a list of necessary utensils for someone in a bedsit; interestingly, the list includes a meat mincer, and the author informs her readers that the cost of this device is no more than 6.90 kroner – only twice the price of a kettle. Whereas mincers had previously been costly, and hence reserved for the well to do, they had now become relatively cheap and accessible for all. An industrial laborer in 1935 made 1.14 kroner per hour, so a meat mincer could be purchased for less than a day’s labor.³⁵ With a certain increase in wealth, dishes like meat loaf, meat cakes, meat balls, cabbage stuffed with minced meat, etc., had become more common.

At about the same time, however, the earlier preference for home-minced meat begins to lose its hold, and the advice was rather to take advantage of the increasingly professional butchers. The architect Georg Brochmann explained:

Housewives who wear themselves out cooking are out of date. The modern housewife’s knowledge is all about knowing what to buy to provide her family with the right diet; she should be able to assess its calorie and vitamin content, but she need not, like the old fashioned housewife, be a skilled slaughterer, butcher, tanner, and canner.³⁶

As WWII set in, however, Norwegian housewives were thrown back into the ways of the past rather than thrust into the future: Suddenly food was a scarce commodity, and meat was particularly difficult to procure. Those who were fortunate to obtain it somehow had to draw on the skills of the past, which had already been forgotten by some. After the fairly meager and meatless years following WWII, meat would become more available again from the late 1950s. Dishes made more available by the meat mincer remained popular – meat cakes or meat dumplings, in particular. But there were innovations too: For instance, the word *hamburger* entered the Norwegian vocabulary in the 1950s, as a new era of international cuisine began trickling – slowly – into the Norwegian diet.³⁷

One way to sum up the history of meat mincing in the course of the 20th century is to think of it as a trajectory that, at each step, increases the distance between the animal parts that are chopped up and the person eating the minced meat: Mincing begins in home kitchens, then moves to the butcher shops, thereafter to the grocery stores, and finally it moves all the way to the

place of slaughter, the meat packing factories. While the constant throughout this trajectory has been the minced meat itself, the shift from one site, to a second, and on to a third and a fourth, has put the minced meat eater out of touch with the process of mincing, and hence, with the animal being transformed. Not only did the home mincing housewife embody knowledge of various animal parts and their uses, she actually performed the job of transformation herself: She had to loosen the muscle fibers, scrape them free of sinew and tendons and bone before she chopped them into smaller pieces of meat and minced them into mush. It was a sensory process, the feeling of slippery sinews and slick meat, the smell of blood and body parts, and the sound of the mincer as the housewife cranked with one hand and fed the bits of meat into the grinder with the other. But as the job of mincing was moved ever farther away from the consumer, this toilsome reminder of the animal origin of mince disappeared.

All Those Body Parts in the Freezer

While grinders made meat into an easy to use ingredient, a more advanced technology – the freezer – would soon release the housewife from daily cooking. For Norwegians who acquired one early on, the home freezer had three main functions: It flattened the peaks for seasonal food and made them available throughout the year; it allowed the housewife release from the imperative of daily shopping; and it decreased the need for the intensive seasonal labor associated with slaughter. All these functions saved the housewife money, time, and labor.³⁸ Home freezing provided her with the technology needed to maintain the traditional way of preparing and cooking meals, bar the seasonal labor and price peaks of the past.³⁹ The home freezer did not release the housewife from cooking altogether; women who increasingly worked outside the home remained responsible for this domestic task in the early 1980s.⁴⁰ It did, however, give a new sense of flexibility as to when groceries were purchased, when cooking took place, and when the meal was served.

The home freezer was an American technology, but in post-WWII Norway, it was put to use in a typically Norwegian manner. As historian Terje Finstad shows, in a study of this technology's introduction, spread, and use in Norway, the home freezer was even marketed as “the modern *stabbur*” – the Norwegian word for a traditional farm storehouse. While Americans in the post-war years generally used the home freezer as temporary storage facility for ready-made meals, in Norway, the home freezer was used to increase self-sufficiency: The freezer, the advertisements suggested, were an ideal place to store foraged foods like game and wild berries, homegrown foods such as fruits and vegetables, and, last but not least, for the meat that one had bought at a discount.⁴¹

Finstad shows how the freezer was marketed as a time-saving and rational technological device across class and geographical scales. For instance, an



Figure 4.3 Housewife posing with child and freezer, advertisement from 1950s.

Photo: Atelier Rude.

Source Oslo Museum.

ad from the Norwegian freezer company, Aanonsen, from 1959, explains how a farmwife with the use of a home freezer could prepare her own ready meals in winter and early spring before the farm's annual cycle made life too busy for such activities. When it was time to make hay or harvest the grain, she could help out in the fields rather than spend her time indoors slaving over the pots. Furthermore, by planning her cooking ahead, she could save the cost of a maid.

According to the ads of the 1950s, the freezers were not just for farmwives. For the urban family, the freezer opened the prospect of buying various food items in bulk when they were in season, what the ads claimed held immense potential for saving money. Consumers could buy a whole sheep, for instance, and divide it into pieces suitable for no less than 20 meat suppers – of which 16 could even be prepared beforehand. With relatively little effort, a family could enjoy twelve mutton and cabbage meals, devour four mutton stews, dine on two legs of mutton, and tuck into two mutton chop dinners. Had these meals been prepared individually, the number of hours spent cooking and shopping would have to be multiplied by ten. Even well off families were advised to freeze specialty party foods, using fine ingredients that were difficult to source throughout the year.⁴² Whether you were

a professional woman or a housewife, whether you lived in the country or in a town, the freezer was there to rationalize your life, suggested these ads.

But if home freezing was new to people, there was plenty of advice about how to get right – not least in the cook books. The popular *Gyldendals store kokebok*, from 1955, contained a separate chapter on deep freezing, which boasted of what a boon the freezer was:

The drudgery of slaughter has become substantially easier for those who have the possibility to deep freeze the meat rather than salt and can it. This is significant for rural people who need a larger food larder, but it also means a lot to those who live in densely populated areas to have a back-up storage of fresh food. *Meat, offal, and blood* belong to the foods that can easily be prepared for deep freezing.⁴³

Thereafter followed minute instructions on how to economize space in the freezer. First of all, the book noted, one should make sure not to freeze things that will not be eaten anyways, such as bones, which one should rather boil down to a strong stock before freezing. Unused fat should be removed, since it tends to go rancid, while blood is particularly well suited for deep freezing. The best way to freeze blood, the book explained, is to pour it in a container divided into square blocks, after which the blood cubes should be taken out of the container, wrapped in aluminum foil, and returned to the freezer. The ingenuity of this procedure is that the blood cubes can easily be stacked, thus saving space in the freezer. Birds, while suitable for freezing, are vulnerable precisely because of their noted lack of squareness; just as other bony animals, like hare, they tend to escape their wrapping. Minced meat is, again, a better choice for freezing, the book informed. It can be pressed into tidy square shapes, just as with blood, and be stacked as blocks in the freezer.⁴⁴

Despite their apparent benefits, it was not until the late 1960 that fridges and freezers came into common use in Norway. As late as in 1967, only 34 percent of Norwegian houses had a freezer.⁴⁵ Home freezers did not come cheap, and were an investment that represented almost a year's wages for an average industrial laborer in the 1950s.⁴⁶ When Norwegians did begin to acquire freezers in a big way, it was helped by five large private actors within the food and food technology industry, who established a promotional office, *Dyppfrysingskontoret* (the Deep Freezing Office), to promote the technology and convey knowledge about the uses of deep freezing. They employed a radio celebrity as their director, since they reckoned solid communication skills and knowledge about the media were more important qualities than formal skills in technology or management.⁴⁷ The Deep Freezing Office in many ways operated along the same lines as the Meat Information Office, which is to say that they contributed to a long range of books and articles targeting the housewife – including the alluringly inclusive, *We Deep Freeze*, which was written by a staff member at said office.⁴⁸

During the 1960s and early 1970s, home freezers became increasingly common. In the latter decade, the magazine, *Alt om mat*, routinely published stories on deep freezing at home, offering economic, practical, and culinary advice. Alongside cook books, this magazine took on an educational task, helping Norwegian consumers see how the freezer could be incorporated into one's everyday culinary habits. One story, from a special issue on deep freezing, explained some of the benefits of this technology:

By utilizing the deep freezer in the right way, you can save money. Moreover it improves the food and makes it faster to cook. It is vital to get to know the freezer well. Only when we know how food ought to be packed and kept, storage times, and so on, can we make the most of this important domestic appliance. My freezer has really been so useful domestically. I cannot imagine being without one. The daily labor in the kitchen has been reduced, and there is more time for other chores. And I have more opportunities to dedicate myself to the cooking itself when I want to make something special.⁴⁹

The same author went on to make a list of the various meats she recommended to keep in the freezer:

Pork chops, enough for 4 people; a medium joint of beef; a couple of pieces of beef for stewing; beef steaks; 2–3 broilers; 1 hen; some hamburgers; 2 packs of meat dumplings bar the gravy; 2 packs of bacon; blackpuddings, sliced.

She then listed the kinds of meats that could be bought already frozen from the shops, like juicy sirloin steaks and various packs of minced meat. She also added broilers, a product that only recently had become available to Norwegian consumers: “Broilers can be kept in the freezer for a long time, so there is a great opportunity to fill the freezer when the price is good. A broiler is good, cheap, and nutritious food.”⁵⁰ But the list of what one could add to the freezer went on, mostly with different items of meat:

I often buy a few kilos of lamb as well when the meat is at its best in autumn. Sometimes, this too can be purchased ready frozen from the shop. Hamburgers, patties, and maybe black pudding is good to have at hand for hungry school children who need a proper meal after the end of a school day.⁵¹

The idea that the freezer could be used as a larder, where perishable food could be kept for a very long time, must have had great appeal. By far the most important rationale for acquiring and using one's freezer was economy. Another story from the same magazine illustrates how the boons of freezing

were communicated at the time. Under the heading “Plenty of Cheap Food from Half a Pig,” is a story that reveals quite a lot about the consumer’s relation to meat at the time. First of all, the clear emphasis is on *price*. The heading itself signals as much, and the imperative of price runs through the actual piece as well. In the left corner of the story is a text box, for instance, which says, “The deep freezer is economical: Pork meat is extra cheap at the moment. If you buy half a pig or maybe a quarter of one, and freeze it, you’ll save at least 70 kroner. We tell you how to do it.”⁵² This is in fact what the article does; it tells the consumer how one, in the most economical way possible, can buy, store, and use either a half or a quarter of a pig’s carcass.

The story is interesting not just because it documents a preoccupation with price, however, but because it shows how the 1970s, as we suggested in the previous chapter, represents a period of transition. On behalf of its reader, the story reflects on how much work one should put into preparing meat:

Are you buying a pig in a poke if you buy ½ pig for your freezer? Is it a sensible purchase, for someone who is up for the job? Or will the gains will be lost in the fat that one actually ought to throw out?

We can take these questions as an indication that consumers were now in flux about home cooking – how they could approach it, and what amount of effort they should put into it. No doubt, when the magazine repeatedly mediated such concerns back to its readers, this was a sign that many were now leaving the kitchen for the workplace. With two adults working outside the home, it was clear that something had to happen with the long list of tasks that the housewife of old had performed every day. Home cooking had to be made more efficient, adapted to the “busyness of everyday life,” as the magazine would repeatedly acknowledge. Meat was no little part of this, since the preparation of meat had traditionally been quite labor intensive and time consuming. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, many still spent a substantial number of hours on home cooking, and would a working woman really be up for the job of buying, categorizing, and deep freeze packaging half a pig? Given that the magazine had to ask, we can safely assume that not *all* of them were.

This is just to say that there was no immediate revolution in Norwegian meat culture, but that it was more like a transition throughout – and beyond – this decade. It was a movement from a situation where one had some everyday relation to the meat one was about to eat, about how various parts of the animal’s body could be used in cooking, and so on, to a situation where the need for such knowledge had been largely removed. The piece above is a telling illustration, since it prints information about all the cuts on a pig, with designations and images, and with rationales for the use of each one. The magazine must have presumed that at least some of its readers would find this information handy. At the same time, the story

is framed by an emerging need for efficiency, by a deliberation about what was a “sensible” level of effort, given the growing busyness of everyday life. Importantly, the sensible choice was not just a price conscious choice, but one that also accounted for the use of time.

The story noted that

an entire working day is lost if you decide to cook some of the meat before you deep freeze it. It is hard to measure this time in *kroner* and *orer* [dollars and cents], but you will benefit from having easy dinners for busy days.

It was, in other words, still considered sensible to set aside quite some time preparing and cooking meat at home, but now the argument was that to do this *occasionally* was what enabled a certain sort of life the rest of the time. The freezer was what, in turn, enabled this way of organizing one’s home cooking, since it enabled the home cook to set aside concentrated periods of cooking, leaving it to the freezer to “store” this effort in the meantime.

As a writer for the magazine noted in a related piece, there were debates about whether the freezer actually paid off. It was all about making the freezer work for you, he added:

The precondition [for success] is that one knows how to use the freezer. If you have the feeling that it is a giant baby, gaping for more food, and who requires constant care, then you are not on good terms with your freezer.

The same writer also underlined how success could not be reduced to savings alone.

The people over at the Price Council for Meat and Sausages have brought out their calculators and have estimated that one saves no more than 14 percent off the price when one buys a whole or half carcass for one’s freezer. If that is so, is it really worthwhile to take on the work of cutting and portioning, the price experts ask. With this line of thought, the Price Council for Meat and Sausages and all the other fans of freezing have fallen into a trap, and have misunderstood the whole point of keeping a freezer at home. They stare blindly at what can be saved in *kroner* and *ore*, while they forget the main point: That the freezer is supposed to help us toward less work – not more of it!⁵³

This piece is indicative of how the consumer’s changing relation to meat in the 1970s was incidental to another transformation process, namely, women’s liberation and the modernization of the work force. This development created a great need for ways of cooking – even, one could say, a food culture – that required less time, knowledge, and effort, so that it could be

done (still overwhelmingly by women) in combination with part time or, increasingly, full-time employment outside the home. The assumption, in much of the magazine's coverage in the 1970s, appears to be that the home cook would engage in *serial cooking* – that they would set aside time at certain intervals to “cook for the freezer,” as it were. The freezer – if one could only get on good terms with it – could be used to reduce the work needed to put meat on the table. Indeed, to help the home cook toward less work in the kitchen was now presented as the freezer's *raison d'être*.

In retrospect, this cooking for the freezer can be understood as something of a transition phase, for although the freezer certainly did contribute to saving time and work for the home cook, the development toward ever greater savings of time and work would not reach its high point until the large-scale arrival of semi-finished and ready-made products, in the 1980s, which required far less time, knowledge, and effort than was expected of the home cook of the 1970s. In the 1970s, a home cook would not only need a certain amount of knowledge and skill herself, but would also still rely on the professional knowledge of the butcher. “Most of us have neither the tools nor the knowledge to disjoint a carcass ourselves,” wrote the magazine in the previous story, “but the butcher will do it for you, at a small addition to the price.” This did not mean that the home cook did not need to know anything, for as the piece revealingly continued, “He will cut the carcass just as you please.” And in order for any cut to “please,” the consumer must presumably have some knowledge about what cuts were appropriate for what type of dishes.

Fast, Safe, and Cheap

If cooking for the freezer involved a certain amount of knowledge about the animal, as well as skill in cutting, preparing, and cooking its various parts, this situation would over time give way to one where such qualities were neither expected nor required of the home cook. At the consumer's end, the transition from meat-as-body-part to meat-as-ready-to-cook-ingredient took several decades, and is arguably still ongoing. A sensible place to start, when trying to grasp this change, is the 1960s, when it was still imperative, at least for most consumers and home cooks, to have intimate knowledge about the animal that was to be prepared.

In a telling ad from 1960, consumers are encouraged to buy “the right meat,” and at this point, this phrase still referred to meat from an animal in season, which was bought with a specific purpose, or even recipe, in mind. “The availability of cow's meat and the heavy carcasses of oxen is always greatest in the fall, in the months of September, October, and November, when the animals are taken off pasture,” the ad noted, and “This is also when the prices are the lowest, often as much as 10 percent below the annual average.” The ad reveals that, to be a sensible consumer of meat, one had to have substantial knowledge about the relevant animal, for, as it said, “The

quality of the meat depends, most importantly, on the animal's age." The ad then went to certain lengths to elaborate this point:

OLD ANIMALS: Coarse structured meat. Oily, yellow lumpy fat. Hard, calcareous bones. Dry, yellow joints.

YOUNG ANIMALS: Fine structured meat. Light fat in even layers. Soft, cartilaginous bones. Bluish joints.

Meat from old animals is tougher and coarser than young bulls and heifers, but the meat generally has a stronger taste and is for that reason the preferred choice for stewing. This type of meat requires a longer cooking time and should be hung well.

Firm, light, almost milky fat in even layers is a sure sign of young meat. In meat from older animals, the fat will often be lumpy and uneven, there might simply be no fat or there might also be too much of it. The fat from this kind of meat is also often discolored, typically with a strong yellow color. Young animals that have grazed on fresh grass and other feed rich in carotene can also get yellow fat. This often happens in autumn. But in young animals, yellow fat does not influence the taste. In young meat, the bones are soft and cartilaginous. The joints, in particular, indicate the age of the animal. In young animals the joints are supple, cartilaginous, and blueish, while in old animals they are dry, hard, and a pale yellow. On cow carcasses, the shape of the scapula (pelvis), where the thighs are split, is also an indication of age. In heifers and young cows, the anterior part of the scapula is almost circular. After each calving, however, this thickening will contract, so that, in old animals, it is no thicker than the rest of the scapula.⁵⁴

The example lays out in rather magnificent detail what one, in the 1960s, could assume the consumer knew – or desired to know – about the animal. Not only does it give a very fine-grained explanation of how to spot age differences in the animal (“soft, cartilaginous bones,” “bluish joints”), and what these various ages allow in terms of cooking (“requires a longer cooking time”), it is also quite explicit about the processes that take place in the animal body over time (“after each calving, however, this thickening will contract”), and which give rise to the difference. What is more, it even connects the knowledge about the animal body to the landscape; it connects the practices of the home cook to the practices of agriculture, so as to underline that what the home cook does in her kitchen depends on how the animal has lived (“young animals who have grazed on fresh grass and other feed rich in carotene”). In that way, it also connects home cooking to something like a natural cycle (“this often happens in autumn”).

The assumption that all this knowledge is either necessary or interesting to a home cook will probably strike many as odd today, but that is precisely because knowledge about the animal has gone from being both necessary and interesting to being neither of those things. Today's home cooks do not,

and need not, know anything about much the animal they prepare and eat. The distinction between young and old animals, for instance, is completely irrelevant to today's consumers: Although most consumers are probably oblivious to it, contemporary meat production has been standardized to such a degree that the age of the animal to be consumed covers a much smaller span than what it used to. In short, the young and the old have been taken off the market, so that what we typically eat are the "middle-aged" animals. Norwegians hardly eat kid, calf, or piglet, and while we do eat (young) chickens, we have stopped eating (old) hens. Cattle now only live until they are between four and six years old and when they are taken out of milk production and slaughtered, they are increasingly consumed not as an old or even middle-aged animal, but simply as *mince* – where age, along with any other characteristic of the animal, has literally been chopped into irrelevance. The need for knowledge about the animal has been reduced in other ways too, so that the consumers' need for knowledge ends at the appropriate heating temperature. As we suggested, in "Live," in the summary of our pilot study, consumers are quite often confused about how the animals they eat have lived, and they have only very vague ideas about the route from farm to fork. They are certainly often quite confused when it comes to whether the animal has been on pasture, and eaten "fresh grass and other feed rich in carotene."

This shift is an indication, we believe, of a culinary culture that has come to prize meat that is "fast, safe, and cheap." This phrase has indeed been used as a slogan by the Norwegian supermarket chain, Kiwi, but we believe it can be read as more than slogan: With these three words, this chain appears to have defined with utmost precision the basic consumer values of the average Norwegian. We saw in the two preceding sections how "price" and "food safety" become components of the emerging consumer's set of concerns, well aided by magazines like *Alt om mat*, which promised to aid their readers in becoming smart consumers. The shift we have begun to identify here – away from the need to know anything about the animal you prepare and eat – completes the axiological triad. As a growing number of households would have two adults in professional work outside the home, the imperative that meat should be not only cheap and safe, but also fast, would begin to spread.

This shift too can be gleaned from the pages of *Alt om mat*. For quite a while, the editors, writers, and experts interviewed in the magazine allowed themselves to vent a certain frustration about the state of consumers' knowledge about meat – which in itself is interesting, since it indicates that this type of knowledge was disappearing fast. In 1974, for instance, a consultant at the Meat Information Office, Sigmund Kaarstad, whose contributions were a regular occurrence in the magazine, told the journalist that "home cooks in general have an obvious need for thorough information about how [meat] should be stored and prepared." According to the magazine, the consultant was "not merciful in his judgment over our knowledge of meat."

Kaarstad believes that too many basic mistakes are made in the kitchen, and this often leads to deterioration of quality as well as taste – dry and colorless steaks at a high price is what some people serve their family and guests, he says. *Does the ignorance begin at the meat counter?* – That is often the case. Not everyone knows what kind of dishes can be prepared by the various parts of the animal. Those who desire more insight into this ingredient, whether it is beef, pork or sheep, ought to learn how to use the various parts of the animal. Otherwise, it can be hard to know what to ask for at the meat counter when you go shopping for dinner. If you, for instance, are making beef stew, you should use bottom round, shoulder, or brisket. If you are looking to spend on a proper roast beef, a better choice would be the sirloin or top sirloin. The more you learn, the more you expand your imagination when cooking. I am not at all convinced that everybody knows that you can make delicious ragus from pork – shoulder butt, shoulder, and sirloin – and that lamb’s meat – shoulder, breast, or round – is well suited for stews.⁵⁵

But over time this kind of sentiment would give way to a more accommodating attitude on the part of the magazine, one which would acknowledge and accept that consumers and home cooks were not what they had been in the age of the traditional housewife. Thus, the magazine would increasingly focus not just on how one might ensure that the food was safe and cheap, but also on how it could be made *quickly*. Headlines such as “FAST DINNER with ham, sausage, and herring,”⁵⁶ “FAST DINNER with ground beef, chops, and fish balls,”⁵⁷ or “EASY TO MAKE food with chicken, fish, and sausages,”⁵⁸ would become increasingly common, as would recipes and other coverage focusing on “quick” or “easy” meat. “Sausages are an easy and decent food,” advertised one recipe for a 25-minute dinner,⁵⁹ while another promised that if you, “Start with a can of meatballs [...] you’ll have dinner ready in twenty minutes.”⁶⁰

The imperative of speed was hammered in also by advertisements, for kitchen equipment as well as for semi-finished or ready-made foods. “What old-fashioned kitchen machines would take forever to get done, the new Moulinette can do in seconds,” read one ad for a kitchen aid, which promised to “chop and blend minced meat in 5 seconds” – “at a speed,” it added, “that is almost unbelievable.”⁶¹ Another product advertised in the same issue appeared somewhat slower, though it did promise to grind “1 kilo [meat] in two minutes.”⁶² While speed was becoming an imperative, it was still the case, as these ads show, that speed was utilized for doing many of the same tasks (say, grinding meat) as before.

The magazine also increasingly made room for new ready-made products on the market, which were certainly fast, but also increasingly cheap, notably broiler chickens. In one story, from 1974, the magazine writes that, “You need no magic tricks to give ready-made food a more personal taste. Here we provide some examples of how one, with simple means, can give the

practical, shop-routinized chicken a home-made taste.”⁶³ The emphasis of the article is revealing, since it tells us not only that the chicken’s rise begins around this point, but also something about its selling points vis-à-vis the consumer. The ready-cooked chicken was *practical*, it could be transformed with *simple means*, and it required no *magic tricks*. The addressee of this kind of language, quite obviously, was the “double working” mother of a household, or some other increasingly busy home cook, who put a premium on foods that could be combined with a professional life outside the home. Along with sausages, which were a routine occurrence in the magazine’s “fast dinners” column, chicken was perfectly suited for this new and busy everyday life. “Rotisserie chicken can now be bought almost everywhere,” one slightly later story stated,

in general stores, at the butcher’s, the fish mongers, and at fast food vendors. It is an easy and convenient food, something one can resort to when pressed for time, for quotidian or festive purposes, when out driving or boating, or on a picnic.⁶⁴

At the same time, the above piece reveals that this is still a transition phase, since the point of it is to give the industrially made and store cooked – practical – food a *personal* and *home made* taste. So while new everyday circumstances necessitated practicality and efficiency, many had still not shed entirely the belief that home-made was best – that one *ought*, perhaps, to have made the food oneself. While the everyday circumstances of cooking were changing, food norms lagged behind.⁶⁵

This sort of tension is well illustrated also in another issue of the magazine, in which one piece explains to the reader “How to make liver paté,” offering a detailed procedure for the home cook. On the opposite page, however, is an ad for the food brand Stabburets ready-made liver paté, with the text: “Mum has placed Stabburet’s liver paté on the table. This awakens the appetite. And she knows it. Not so odd, by the way: It tastes like good liver paté should.” Whether accidental or not, the juxtaposition reveals that the magazine could no longer assume that any great number of its readers would actually try the recipe. Not even the benefits of serial cooking were obvious to the magazine’s readership, for, as some readers must have thought, why cook at all when you can simply buy?⁶⁶

As we get to the end of the 1970s, home cooking loses its tight hold on Norwegian consumers. That does not mean that one suddenly finds many examples of explicit appreciation of industrial food or a food culture based on industrial systems; the nostalgic, romanticizing images remain, by far, the more common. Some examples can be found in the magazine, however, in the latter part of the 1970s. In one story, in the magazine’s Christmas edition of 1977, an article advised its readers to buy a whole basket’s worth of Christmas food, since this, as the title suggested, could become, “The Basket that Gives You Peace for Christmas.”

A whole basket of Christmas food straight from the store. A break with tradition? Yes and no. One can safely let the industry help – though it will not taste quite like home made. Personal characteristics, or that extra “touch,” can be added by use of spices or other flavorings in sauces, for example, as well as in the presentation. And if one, in this way, is left with spare time, that time can be spent on creating a proper Christmas atmosphere around the house – and that is just as important as the food itself.⁶⁷

The story also suggested that the home cook in this way could make sure to “leave only the most agreeable work to yourself” and “leave the ‘heavy duty’ tasks to the industry” and went on to showcase “some of the great variety in ready made Christmas dishes on the market – and give tips about how everyone can add the decisive personal taste.”

In another ad, from Stabburet, from 1975, we see a big close-up photo of a conveyor belt, tightly packed with hamburger patties, apparently on their way to being fried, with a startlingly technical description of how this food is made:

Stabburet’s new contact frier consists of two thin teflon belts that pass through six different electrically heated zones. The heat and the tempo of the belts can be adjusted according to the thickness of the product and the degree of frying desired. This room for variety means that taste of the product is not all “fried out.” The finished product thus retains more of its natural tastes. [...] All frying takes place on the belts and there is no need for any further treatment. Last, but not least, from the point of view of health, the contact frier is beneficial in that it yields products with lower fat content, as they are fried without fat.

Brands like Stabburet must have realized over time that to advertise meat by focusing on the inventiveness of industry and technology did not necessarily have great appeal to consumers, and in fact, they appear to have suspected as much even in 1975. For as an addendum to this technical description, the advertisement adds that, “We believe one cannot get closer to ‘home made’ in the industry today. [...] That is why we believe we can safely use the designation ‘home made semi-finished product’.”⁶⁸

Kitchen Bible

A pertinent way to illustrate the change we have sketched in the two preceding sections, where Norwegians came to crave – and even need – quicker and easier ways of preparing meat, is to juxtapose different editions of the same cookbook, and compare how the animals that become meat have been represented to the home cook at various times. This can tell us much about what, at different historical times, has been assumed to be general

knowledge – about what a home cook at different times could be expected to know.

In a Norwegian context, an obvious text to seek out for this kind of investigation is *Gyldendals store kokebok* (Gyldendal’s Comprehensive Cookbook) – a popular cookbook which, since it first appeared, has been re-published in many reprints and editions. Contrasting the first edition, from 1955, with the last one, from 2004, the result is an illustration of John Berger’s original thesis about how animals have “vanished” from our culture – since this is, in short, what has happened: The animal that becomes our meat has largely disappeared from the cookbooks, and the home cook is left with meat as just another ingredient, not much different from vegetables or pasta. At the end of this cookbook’s long 50-year run, meat is still considered edible – in fact, very much so – but the animal origin of that meat appears to have become increasingly distasteful.

What probably first strikes a contemporary reader in the 1955 edition is its visually explicit character: Images of dead animals and animal parts constantly remind the reader of the animal source of the meat used in the recipes. Colored photographic charts that display dead animals abound, and are in many cases intermingled with all the other recipes. For instance, facing the recipes “Beef and Onion Casserole” and “Beef Stew” are three color plates that display butchered halves of calf, pig and lamb, as well as quarter parts of cattle. The animals hang from hooks to tenderize. The pig still has its head intact, while the cow, the calf, and the lamb do not. Black lines drawn onto the photo indicate how the animal is awaiting further division into smaller parts, like head, shoulder, belly, and leg for the pig and neck, shin, sirloin rump for the cow.

Finally, there are two plates that show the offal of these animals: liver, heart, tongue, lungs, paunch, and intestines. At the facing page there is a black-and-white photograph of a plate of lamb chops served with peas. The

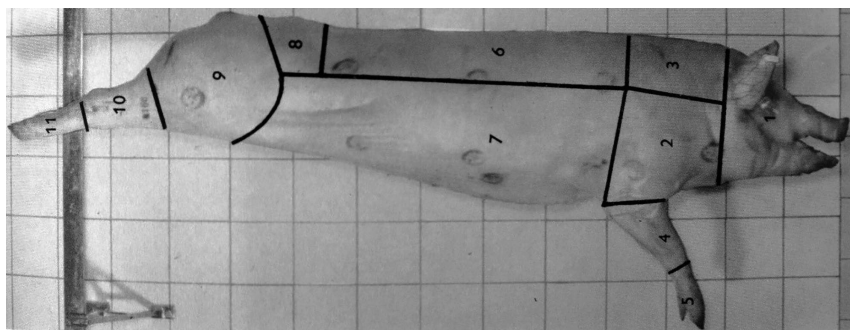


Figure 4.4 Image of pig, divided into cuts.
Source: *Gyldendals store kokebok* (1955).

publisher was apparently not worried that color plates depicting raw animal innards would seem unappetizing when juxtaposed with lamb chops on a plate, ready to serve. The connection between the animal, the processing of the animal, and the dish made from it was obvious.

Another explicit display of the animal can be drawn from the chapter on birds: The images that accompany this chapter convey the practical instructions needed to deal with the dead bird rather than appetizing images of bird recipes. A series of five photos demonstrate to the reader how to pluck a hen and burn the remaining hairs from the animal's skin. On the next page, no less than nine photos explain to the reader how to remove the bird's collar bone, chop off its feet, cut off its wings and legs, and pull out its intestines.

The 1955 edition is no less explicit in its textual presentation. The chapter on meat opens like this, in an introduction written by a butcher:

The term meat includes actual meat, blood, and edible offal. These parts of the slaughtered animal have very different nutritional qualities. A normal piece of meat consists of muscles that contain muscle fibers and a greater or lesser degree of fat, ligament and sinews, and possibly also cartilage and bone.⁶⁹

A number of points are made in this short definition. First, it is established that the meat to be used in the subsequent recipes comes from an animal that has been killed to become food – “the slaughtered animal.” This is highlighted when the text points to the fact that an animal's body consists of “the actual meat” as well as blood and offal. Lastly, the reader is reminded of the fact that the concrete constituent of meat is the type of thing that one finds even on human bodies; meat is in essence muscles, which consist of fibers, fat, tissues, sinews, cartilage, and bones.

The book emphasizes not only detailed descriptions of meat, but of the entire process that makes meat from animals. The nutritional values of the main categories of meat and other animal products are described in detail, and the book explains what the various stamps of the “government's meat inspection agency” stand for. A number of circumstances prior to the presentation of pieces of meat in the store are emphasized as significant for the cooking process:

The quality of meat depends on the animal's breed, age, and feed, how it has been treated during and after slaughter, as well as a number of other factors – some of which are beyond the control of the consumer.⁷⁰

In order for the home cook to be successful with the recipes, the text accentuates that the consumer needs to be familiar with the transformation of animal to meat, in addition to having a quite elaborate insight into the features of the animal itself. The age and sex of the animal, for instance, makes quite a difference. The taste of an ox is considered fuller than, and therefore

preferable to, that of a cow or heifer, while a boar must not be allowed to reach sexual maturity, or the meat will become rancid due to the hormones involved in the rut.

About birds, one reads that,

Young cocks and hens that are no more than 1 ½ years old, can be prepared as chicken. Cocks and hens between 1 ½ and 2 ½ years old are only suitable for boiling. When they grow beyond 2 ½ and 3 ½ years old, their meat is tough, and they are only suitable for making broth.⁷¹

And in the section describing the preparation of hare, one reads:

Young animals are preferable; the older ones have tough and sinuous meat. A characteristic of young hares is that their ears can easily be torn off lengthways, and that it is easy to lift up the skin between the ears. Older animals' skin is attached tighter to the skull.⁷²

In this instance, the home cook herself must learn how to judge the age and quality of the animal, in order to prepare it accordingly. If she concludes, after having torn the hare's ears and stretched the skin on its forehead, that this is an animal suitable to be made into a roast, she proceeds with the recipe for roast hare. The whole process, from a fur-clad animal to meat, is included in the recipe.

The recipe is illustrated by two images; first a photo of how to skin a hare, by hanging it up on a hook, cutting its skin loose from the neck and feet, and then stripping it, followed by a photo that shows the undressed hare's back being stuffed with streaky bacon. The presence of the animal is in no way concealed; almost all of the animal's body parts are mentioned:

Cut open the hare's paunch and remove its insides. Fill the paunch with juniper twigs and let it hang in cold storage until preparation. The hare usually comes without guts when it is bought, but it is not always skinned. In the latter case, it must be skinned, see the image. [The caption says: "When skinning the hare, cut the skin loose at the neck and the feet as shown here."] Chop off the feet and rinse the hare well in cold water. Be careful to remove all silverskin and sinew, particularly the strong sinew running alongside the back. Chop off thighs and legs. ... To make sure the back does not bend during cooking, a long trussing needle or knitting needle can be inserted through the spinal canal, or the back can be broken at a few points.⁷³

The 1955 edition throughout makes the whole animal present, and places great emphasis on how the different part of the animal can be used as food. The book contains no less than nine recipes for sausage, and the recipes instructs the home cook in how to use offal, blood, meat, and fat to make



Figure 4.5 Image of hare being flayed, accompanying a recipe for hare.
Source: *Gyldendals store kokebok* (1955).

sausage meat of different kinds – and how to stuff this sausage meat in an animal’s intestines. The home cook must know not just what parts of the animal to put into a sausage, but which way to arrange the insides of an animal to achieve the best result:

If the intestines are not cleaned at a factory, they must be scraped. Place the intestines on a board and scrape the skin clean using a dull knife. If they smell offensive, they should be soaked in water with salt or vinegar. Rinse the intestines well once more. For fresh sausage, the smooth side of the intestines should face outwards; for smoked sausage, the smooth side should face inwards.⁷⁴

In conclusion, the 1955 edition of *Gyldendals* leads the consumer’s attention constantly toward the prehistory of meat, to the steak’s previous life as a

living creature, as it were. Simply put, in the 1955 edition, the processing of the food does not start with a ready piece of meat, but with an animal.

Contrasting this edition with the 2004 edition, one cannot but notice that many of the reminders of the connection between animal and meat have been toned down or have disappeared altogether. In the 2004 edition the color plates of whole animals and offal have been replaced by modestly sketched silhouettes in black and white.

Beneath these drawings is a schematically organized text that describes the uses of the various pieces of meat. Offal is not included in this schema, and there is no mention of the fact that the quality of meat varies with the age or sex of the animal. With the exception of an ox' tongue, the most recent edition contains no color photos of whole animals or of raw animal insides, as the older edition does. The chapter on meat begins:

Meat is an important source of proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Pure meat is lean food. One can choose among tasty stews and quick dishes made from mince, party dishes made of tenderloin, and marinated roasts of many kinds.⁷⁵

In contrast to the 1955 edition, the fact that the meat was previously a living animal is not explicitly mentioned. Nor does the text call forth the same associations to human bodies, since references to words like muscles, tissue, sinew, cartilage, and bone are left out. Unlike in the 1955 edition, blood and

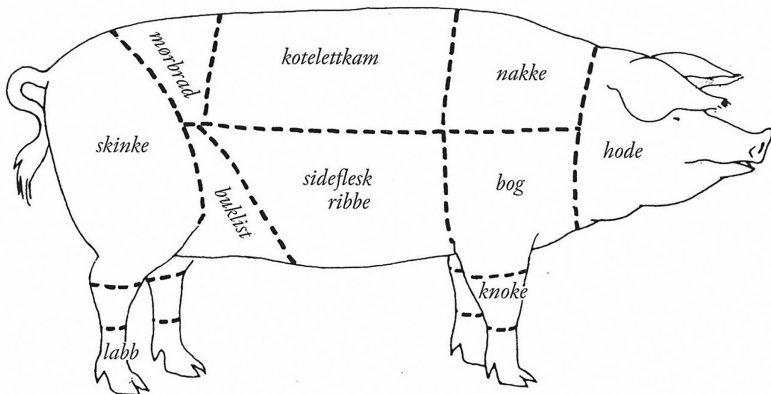


Figure 4.6 Line drawing of pig, divided into cuts.

Source: *Gyldendals store kokebok* (2004).

intestines are here not classified as meat, but as offal, which is seen as a separate category altogether. Furthermore, the introduction to the meat chapter is written not by a butcher but by the book's editor, the famous Norwegian TV chef, Ingrid Espelid Hovig. In essence, meat is described as an appealing ingredient with a useful nutritional content.

The 2004 edition contains many of the same recipes as the one from 1955, but in the former case, the recipes all start with the meat, and not the animal, as raw material. Recipes for hare are included even in the 2004 edition, and a hare is depicted, but the detailed recipe for roast hare, described in the previous section, has disappeared. There are still photos of a hare cut into small parts, and a suggestion to use these bits to make a stew. Compared to many other cookbooks on the market, even this chopped up hare may appear explicit, but in the current context of comparison of the 1955 and 2004 editions, it is obvious that focus has shifted from seeing the animal as the primary raw material, to seeing meat as an ingredient.

A shift toward extended use of ready processed meat is, as would be expected, evident. Some of the changes that can be traced between editions may appear minor; for instance, certain recipes have disappeared or have been changed. These minor changes might have something to do with technological and material changes, like the appearance of home freezers and ready-made meals. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there has been a clear shift from representations that explicitly display the connection between animal and meat to representations that only very vaguely uphold this connection, if they do so at all.

Sausages are, again, a good example. In the 2004 edition there are six different recipes for sausage stews, where ready-made sausage is among the ingredients.⁷⁶ The content of these sausages is not made clear to the consumer, nor is there any apparent need for such knowledge. Another example of a nebulous meat product is minced meat, which appears in multifarious ways in the 2004 edition. A novel introduction in the 2004 edition is a large color photo of six different types of minced meat: high fat minced pork, low fat minced pork, minced lamb, minced veal, low fat minced beef, and higher fat minced beef. One might wonder why so much space and color is spent on illustrating six almost identical foodstuffs: The minced lamb meat is slightly darker and the minced pork somewhat lighter, but the difference is hardly evident to the eye. Regardless of which animal it originates from, minced meat consists of muscles and fat that have completely lost their original shape and appearance after going through the mincer. The meat might come from any part of the animal, and whether the animal was old or young, tough or tender, has no impact on the quality.

In short, the 2004 edition of *Gyldendals* is still a comprehensive cookbook that aims to inform a modern home cook of all one needs to know to make appetizing and nutritious meals for an entire family. Significantly, however, the animal is no longer part of this "comprehensive" whole.

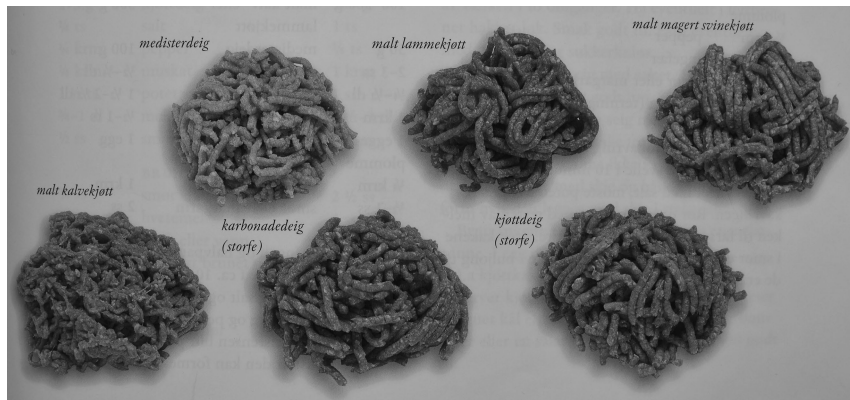


Figure 4.7 Varieties of minced meat.
Source: *Gyl dendals store kokebok* (2004).

The Lifestyfication of Food

“If time had stood still, you would have managed with your own cookbook,” read a subscription advertisement for the food magazine, *Alt om mat*, in 1980. It went on to note that time did in fact *not* stand still, and that, for this reason, “you need a current magazine like *Alt om mat*, in addition to your cookbook, to fully understand the field of cooking.”⁷⁷ Most cookbooks used various bare ingredients as its starting point, the ad noted, and added that, “In *Alt om mat*, we do this too, but our recipes just as often use many of the pre-prepped products that constantly appear, and that make life easier for the housewife.” The ad goes on to explain how the magazine reviews everything from frozen pizzas to store bought pastry, and that they try and test all sorts of new electrical and mechanical devices. The magazine also promised to educate its readers on new ways of conserving food stuffs. “We would be surprised if your cookbook had more than a five or six page entry on deep freezing. *Alt om mat* publishes special issues on deep freezing, pertinent to the season.” In other words, while the old cookbooks advised on how to cook seasonal produce, this magazine taught you how to deep freeze the produce, so that you could use your freezer as a larder for food from all seasons. They took their job seriously: “We have published a deep freezing school, and also an informative encyclopedia of deep freezing.”⁷⁸

The magazine’s promotions must have been a success, since between 1980 and 1982, its readership rose from 204,000 to 250,000 – a significant increase in a population of only about 4.1 million. Even so, the magazine’s success might also have been its downfall, as it had traditionally been geared primarily toward housewives. For large parts of the 1970s, the magazine had encouraged housewives to plan ahead, for instance, by buying whole animal carcasses, which they should then debone and dejoint and grind up to fill

their freezers. As such, *Alt om mat* had been extremely valuable not least to the Meat Information Office, which incidentally had at times paid for, and sometimes even written, parts of the magazine's content. But by the early 1980s, it was clear that *Alt om mat*'s readers had changed, and that the magazine was trying to change with them: Its pages were now scattered with ads for ready-made meals – freeze dried gravy powder and parboiled pasta, for instance. The cover of the January issue of 1983, which features a store bought sausage wrapped in pastry, tells us something about the trend.⁷⁹ First, the focus was clearly on making food fast, safe, and cheap, and the rather demanding kitchen work of the age of the housewife had largely been left behind. Second, there were signs of an internationalization, and also what we might call a “lifestylification,” of Norwegians' diets: As an increasing number of people abandoned much of the work associated with traditional home cooking, food increasingly became a site for cultural experience, exploration, and distinction. This particular front page told readers how to vamp up the everyday sausages so that they would reappear as a party food, but there were other varieties, as well: Sweet and sour sausages was another exotification of the humble banger which was recommended to the magazine's readers.

This left the magazine in a somewhat odd position. While, traditionally, its *raison d'être* had been to offer advice about how to cook, it now increasingly advertised frozen, canned, freeze-dried, or even pre-prepared foods. Paradoxically, while the content itself taught the reader how and what to cook (even if using a sausage from the shop), the ads told them that they did not really have to cook at all. They could simply open a package, add water and mince – and *voilà!* We can observe this transition not least in the magazine's “market pages,” which was where new kitchen implements or food stuffs were presented.⁸⁰ In the 1970s, it had been a forum for critical commentaries and consumer advice, but now, for instance in a 1983 issue, the eight columns over two pages were distributed as follows: Three columns on the first page gave a presentation of a ready-made Greek moussaka, a ready-made pizza pie, a ready-made English pie, and a so-called Rhodos bake. All of them included instructions to add minced meat. While the commentary explained that the cook might not save so much actual cooking time, the advantage was that “all the ingredients are ready mixed in bags,” bar the minced meat. The fourth column on this page was taken up by a comment on the benefits of meat in the diet. The next page presented another pair of ready meals: an Italian minestrone soup and a Dutch vegetable soup. For the vegetable soup, the reader is advised that one can add meat or sausage leftovers and serve it with bread. The final two columns are filled with a review of ready-made chocolate pudding and a quality test of a novel invention – an electrical pancake iron.

These elements – technology, ease of preparation, and a growing interest in foreign cuisines – indicate how Norwegian food cultures changed in the early 1980s. The driver of this trend toward ready-made meals is not hard

to fathom; in 1970, 38 percent of all women had a job of more than 30 hours outside the home, while in 1981, this number had increased to as much as 57 percent. Many women juggled two jobs, working both in and outside the home, and were accordingly looking for ways to get everything done.⁸¹ Technologies like the dishwasher, the freezer, the microwave, and the ready-made meal eased some of this burden – and for many, the freeze-dried gravy powder bags were what made the week manageable.⁸²

But all of this meant that *Alt om mat*'s traditional readership was shrinking fast. While the magazine still featured recipes that pulled the reader toward basic cooking, it had become less of a specialty magazine than it had been in the past. Although it tried to accommodate to social changes, the result was somewhat confused: On the one hand, it addressed the increasing number of readers who were happy to just add mince and water, but on the other, it was not quite successful in shedding its traditional orientation toward meal planning and cooking from scratch. In 1986, *Alt om mat* came to an end.

One of its founders and regular contributors, Aase Strømstad, was not ready to retire, however. In 1989, a new Norwegian food magazine saw the light of day: *Mat og Drikke* (Food and Drink). If there were certain hints already in the early 1980s toward lifestylification of Norwegians' diets, this new magazine took several additional steps in that direction. It was arguably as much a lifestyle magazine as it was a food magazine. Unlike its predecessor, *Mat og Drikke* was printed on glossy paper, and the imagery of tempting dishes was styled by professionals like the well-known Norwegian food photographer, Bengt Wilson. The glossy paper allowed foods to shine too; it could be well garnished with glycerin and other food make-ups to make the dishes even more tempting. As a general rule, all the issues had a tempting dish shining on its cover, typically with a set of wine glasses and poshly labeled wine bottles in the background.

From the very first issue of the magazine, the Meat Information Office was an important collaborator. For one thing, the Office provided a lot of content for the magazine, and it also, from time to time, footed the bill to take food journalists both from the daily broadsheets and from the weekly and monthly specialty magazines on trips here and there.⁸³ The first edition of *Mat og Drikke* had an article with the heading, "Meat for Supper," written by the former Meat Information Office employee Wenche Andersen, the very same who would later become morning show chef on TV.⁸⁴ Two issues later, a step-by-step guide to making a crown roast of lamb was presented by another of the Office's employees, Karsten Ytterdal.

While meat articles paid by the financial muscle of the Meat Information Office were a general feature from the early days of *Alt om mat* throughout the life of the magazine *Mat og Drikke*, the latter had a changed emphasis. Along with the general rise of income in the late 1980s, it had gone up-market. Rather than providing consumer tests and advice on how to economize by purchasing whole animal carcasses and committing to serial

cooking for the deep freezer, *Mat og Drikke*'s content had become international in scope.

Many of the magazine's issues focused on dishes and wines from a particular region or country. For instance, in an issue from its second year, the focus was on Italy. "Si, Si Pasta" was the title of the first article, followed by "Italy's Food Metropolis," which described a visit to Parma. "Amazing Tuscany" and "Wine From Italy" also emphasized the regional focus.⁸⁵ Despite focusing on food regions abroad, the emphasis on meat did not dwindle, and the trip to Tuscany, for instance, included a visit to the local butcher on the piazza in Greve. The Meat Information Office delivered content in this issue too; readers were taught how to make proper gravy using ox tails as a starting point.⁸⁶

In the following issue, there was a five page long article on how to cook a whole lamb asado-style, in which the Argentine way of cooking is spiced up with side dishes such as a Greek salad and tsatsiki, and a Spanish aioli – along with a suggestion that everything could be washed down with sangria.⁸⁷ Incidentally, the Meat Information Office's archives reveal that articles like this one probably resulted from the meat industry's desire to sell whole lamb carcasses. The Office had leaflets printed that explained how to cook asado style, and encouraged butchers to display these leaflets and to let customers borrow or rent asado frames to make roasting a whole lamb carcass less daunting. Asado never took off in Norway – presumably because it was not fast, safe, or cheap enough for the Norwegian consumer – but the episode nevertheless demonstrates that Norwegians had become quite used to exotic foreign foods, and a great deal of this interest was due to active information and publicity work initiated by the Meat Information Office.

According to the sociologist Annechen Bahr Bugge, Norwegians were particularly interested in foreign foods throughout the 1990s: From 1993 to 2001, the percentage of customers who considered cooking or eating food from the Italian cuisine increased from 55 percent to 64 percent. The draw of Chinese cuisine was also significant; it went from 43 percent to 58 percent in the same period. Similar numbers for other regions and ethnic foods testify to a rising acceptance and not least interest in international foodways. Interestingly, the percentage of Norwegians interested in cooking or eating traditional Norwegian dishes remained stable throughout this period, at 60 percent.⁸⁸ While these numbers illustrate a curiosity and interest in foreign places and foreign foods, they also illustrate that food – for a large number of people – became a lifestyle project as much as a source of nourishment.

The general growth in income during the 1990s meant that, to a greater extent, and to many more than before, food became an important factor of distinction for *nouveau riche* Norwegians.⁸⁹ Brillat-Savarin's famous 18th-century quote, *Tell me what you eat; I will tell what you are*, was arguably never more apt than when applied to Norwegians of the 1990s and 2000s. Norway had won its first Michelin star in 1986, and during the 1990s, the Norwegian contribution to the new Nordic cuisine evolved.⁹⁰ Several Norwegian chefs followed suit and harvested more Michelin stars, as chefs

became celebrities with substantial impact on Norwegian foodways. Norwegian chefs' participation in the world cooking championship, *Bocuse d'Or*, and their involvement in various TV programs, was sponsored by the Meat Information Office.⁹¹

To make sure that meat was not seen as something that required a world class chef to prepare, the Office also carpet bombed Norwegian consumers with encouragements to adopt the American barbecue culture: American burgers, hotdogs, and anything suitable for the barbecue ensured that internationalization of Norwegian food would remain socially inclusive – international cooking did not have to be difficult or very expensive, as the introduction of cheap hot dogs, hamburgers, and “just add mince” freeze-dried gravy showed.

At the turn of the millennium, Norwegian consumers had become adept eaters of food from all over the world, as a growing array of “ethnic” cuisines began dotting the culinary landscape of Norway's big cities. The ubiquity of international food set off a debate about whether Norwegians had now become better at watching food being cooked on TV than actually cooking it themselves.⁹² Annechen Bahr Bugge's research showed that most Norwegians in fact cook their everyday meals using a mixture of fresh produce and ready-made gravies to which they add mince or other meats. So how can one conclude about Norwegians' cooking skills – and their relation to processing and cooking meat, in particular? The results of a survey published in 2017 gives no definite answers to this question.⁹³ On the one hand, as many as 67 percent of Norwegian consumers said they were comfortable cooking with fresh produce as a starting point, while 70 percent were comfortable cooking meat. On the other hand, the survey did not mention any concrete dishes, and did not specify what kind of meat was assumed by the question. Furthermore, the survey also documented that only 32 percent were comfortable trimming meat and sinew from the bone – and that the younger generations were more troubled by this task than the older generations. Young people had fewer skills cooking traditional Norwegian food, were more hesitant making gravy from scratch, and were less skilled in avoiding food waste.⁹⁴ Adding mince, onions, and spice to canned tomatoes to make a Bolognese sauce, or slicing a filet of chicken or loin of pork and adding a can of coconut milk and ready-made curry paste, is arguably both easier and less time consuming than deboning a beef brisket or slow cooking a shoulder of pork. Had the survey included questions about dejointing animals or cooking times for various cuts of meat, it might have told us more about modern consumers' skills, and not least their comfort, when it comes to transforming the animal into something edible.

Carnivorism Goes Digital

Norwegian food culture has changed dramatically in the second half of the 20th century, and this was not only in terms of wealth, internationalization,

and lifestylification. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, Norwegians' diet had changed, and people sought information in a different manner, adding the digital sphere to their everyday lives. The Meat Information Office managed to stay ahead of most of these changes, and in many instances, they were the force behind change itself. The digitalization of food knowledge and recipes is an example of this, and the internet became a powerful arena from which to distribute meat propaganda.

In June 1996, an “electronic cookbook” was launched on the web page “Food from Norwegian Agriculture.” The initiative was a collaborative effort between the various information offices. After the webpage had been in activity for 18 months, the Meat Information Office’s annual report for the year stated that “this medium has come to stay, and it is a timely medium for the Meat Information Office. For this reason, the Meat Information Office will maintain its efforts regarding the internet.”⁹⁵ The Office stayed true to their plan: In the year 2000, they launched a webpage with the general title *MatPrat*, which translates as “FoodTalk.” That same year, the information offices for dairy, for fruit and vegetables, and for eggs and white meat launched a joint venture on the webpage *Mat.no* (Food.no), but *MatPrat*, on www.matprat.no, outcompeted them. In its first year, the page grew from 8000 to 35,000 unique users.⁹⁶ Five year later, the number had grown to almost half a million unique users, and by 2009, they covered the whole digital media field: *MatPrat* even developed a popular smart phone app.⁹⁷ No less than ten meat promoting commercials aired on commercial TV and cinema the very same year. The annual report from 2010 provides more detail; it noted that *MatPrat* was now active on Spotify, had a Twitter account, and a Facebook page with 50,000 likes. “Within a day, we increased our ‘likes’ on our ‘fan page’ by more than 7000!”⁹⁸

MatPrat was evidently turning into something more than an information office for meat, and the graphic design of the annual reports themselves is telltale. By 2014, *MatPrat* had become a brand name used on the cover of the Meat Information Office’s annual report.

Branding is part of [the] commercial identity that differentiates *MatPrat* from competing brands, and awareness [of the brand] is a very important parameter. By 2014, 64 percent of all Norwegian consumers have an unassisted awareness of *MatPrat*, which is a very high figure. Comparably, the five closest competitors have unassisted awareness of between 5–12 percent. Accordingly, *MatPrat* has four times as high unassisted awareness as the closest comparable actors. *MatPrat* should be experienced as “What you need to know about food when you need it” in the consciousness of consumers, and all of 40 percent of these [consumers] claim *MatPrat* holds this position. (...) to conclude, *MatPrat* is Norway’s absolutely most used source for food knowledge, food information, recipes, and food ingredients, and provides gainful results according to the objectives of the Meat Information Office.⁹⁹

The Meat Information Office's migration to the digital sphere was, in other words, a great success, and expanded even further the already impressive reach of this entity. In 2020, the Meat Information Office, now rebranded as the Information Office for Eggs and Meat after having fused with the information office for eggs and poultry, but now increasingly known simply as MatPrat, had a budget of no less than 78.5 million kroner. The information office for bread and grains had only 4.2 million kroner to promote their products, while the information office for dairy had 24.5 million kroner. The information office for fruit and vegetables, which is given extra funding through the Ministry of Health, had a budget of 23.9 million kroner.¹⁰⁰ When looking at these numbers, it might not be so surprising to read in the annual report from 2014 that:

80 percent of the Norwegian inhabitants know the MatPrat brand. This makes MatPrat Norway's leading actor within food and food communication. Through our digital platforms: matprat.no, internet, mobile, tablet, and social media, MatPrat reaches the majority of the Norwegian population. Our message is also communicated through commercials (TV and digitally) and through various PR and press activities. In addition to consumer communication, the information office works with the industry and trade contributing to develop consumer orientation, primary and secondary schools through domestic science, educating teachers within the same subject at colleges, and by network activities in the field of nutrition, lobbying the authorities, understanding consumers, and strategic market analysis as well as strategic activity development.¹⁰¹

With such an all-encompassing agenda and powerful position in society, it might be unsurprising that they footed the whole bill to develop, author, and print a home economics book series with its own educational webpage set-up, featuring learning sheets distributed free to schools nationwide. No less than 98 percent of all pupils from the 5th to the 7th grade and 70 percent of the secondary pupils used the book and its e-learning sets for their home economics class. In addition, a special website for children was launched in 2014, called *MatStart*. Their unbashful goal for the website was to "take the position as the preferred source of food joy, knowledge, and inspiration for parents and children," and to make sure that this target group understood that MatPrat was the sender. One of the many interesting things about the brand MatPrat was the nebulousness of its sender. Was this governmental advice? Did *Norway* have its own food information office? Was MatPrat about food, in general, or about meat, specifically?

The food writer Yngve Ekern was one among the many who pointed to the problems of MatPrat's meat pushing through text book *Kokeboka mi* (My Cookbook). There was a lack of objectivity, he claimed, when recipes for French toast added ham rather than jam. In fact, he found that there was

far too much meat out of place – the cookbook even contained a recipe for vegetable soup, in which the words “add a chicken filet or 100 grams pork” were part of the recipe. To maintain the label “vegetable soup” for such a concoction was deeply problematic, argued Ekern.¹⁰² Interestingly, the Meat Information Office/MatPrat later that year published a version of the same textbook with new graphic design, a new editor, omitting the chicken or pork from the vegetable soup, and adding some meatless meals – and even a vegan dish or two.¹⁰³

MatPrat retains its role as a self-proclaimed educator of the Norwegian public, and elegantly responds to public concerns and criticisms, mostly by incorporating them. MatPrat’s brand has become so powerful, in other words, that it, without any loss (indeed, probably with a gain) of status, can incorporate all sorts of non-meat foods to satisfy woke web surfers. At the time of writing, the webpage allows one to click on the banner for “Dish” and choose among categories such as dinner, breakfast, desserts, starters, vegetarian, vegan, cakes and picnic foods, and more. If, however, one clicks on the banner “Ingredients,” the basic purpose of the webpage becomes clear. Here, one finds the following items: beef, pork, lam, kid, chicken, hen, turkey, duck and goose, reindeer, fish and shellfish, eggs, game, minced meat, sausages, cured meat, and veal. Fish and shellfish are the only ingredients out of water in MatPrat’s pool of propaganda. Interestingly, minced meat and sausage were listed alongside animals, as if they were animals in their own right, or perhaps it is the other way around – that animals are listed as if they are simply ingredients.

Minced Meat Man

In the mid-2010s, the Norwegian chef Eyvind Hellstrøm became even more of a celebrity than what he already was. His original fame rested on a career as one of Norway’s prime restaurateurs, more specifically as the head chef of the renowned restaurant *Bagatelle*, which throughout the 1980s and 1990s was the spearhead of Oslo’s gourmet restaurant scene – for a long time the only restaurant in the capital with two Michelin stars to its name. After serving as its creative force for 27 years – and having by this time received both the second most prestigious (*L’Ordre National du Mérite*) and the most prestigious (*L’ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur*) decorations from France, as well as the highest such honor from Norway (*St. Olavs orden*) – Hellstrøm left the restaurant in 2009, citing severe disagreements with the main owner, billionaire Christen Sveaas. Hellstrøm’s exit caused much ado in the media, perhaps in part because the restaurant’s entire staff left with him. After only a few more years in business, *Bagatelle* was forced to close down, in 2014, due to a dwindling clientele.

For Hellstrøm, the decision to leave the restaurant, which was obviously his life’s work, was perhaps made somewhat easier by the fact that he, in

the year before his exit, had experienced tremendous success as a TV host, heading a new program, *Hellstrøm rydder opp* (Hellstrøm tidies up) – a Norwegianized version of Gordon Ramsay’s *Kitchen Nightmares*. As it happened, Hellstrøm was as made for TV, and even won the national award for “best male TV host.”

Since then, Eyvind Hellstrøm has done several seasons of this successful TV show, and also a spin-off version where he confronts home chefs with derailed diets, as well as many other concepts and appearances. He has, in short, become something of a latter-day enlightenment figure for good food, and has not shied away from criticizing industry, retailers, and consumers for their shared inclination toward “fast, safe, and cheap.” Hellstrøm’s mantra has been that we appear to have lost any idea of what good food means, that we have lost any living food culture, and that we need, first, to acquire a better understanding of what it is, exactly, that we eat, and then, to regain a sense of quality and pride in what we produce and what we cook.

On his way to making this argument, however, Hellstrøm – not least in *Hellstrøm rydder opp hjemme*, the home version of the show – offers interesting insights into some “worst cases” of Norwegians’ culinary culture. In one episode of particular interest for our purposes, Hellstrøm visits a 27 year old man, Cato, his wife, Renate, and their two year old son, Aron. Upon Hellstrøm’s arrival, the situation in this household was peculiar: Because of his diet, Cato had been banished by his wife to a separate room, so that their son would not take after his father’s odd dietary habits. Ever since childhood, Cato tells Hellstrøm, he has refrained from eating any meat other than minced meat. He originally got onto this track, he recounts, after some episodes of food poisoning, in particular one incident where he got really sick from eating chicken. He developed a strong reluctance to eat any meat that he was not positive was well done, and consequently, he went on a diet consisting almost exclusively of minced meat, since with this food, he would be absolutely certain that every last piece had been cooked and cooked properly. His parents had at first tried to convince him otherwise, but he resisted strongly, and they indulged him, to make sure that he ate anything at all. With time, this diet became an ingrained habit for Cato, with the result that, when Hellstrøm arrived, at least four of Cato’s dinners every week consisted of minced meat.

Cato is interesting not just as a worst-case illustration of Norwegians’ inclination toward minced meat, but also because he, at one point, demonstrates how the apparent lack of food culture he incarnates is itself a sort of – admittedly greatly impoverished – food culture. As an experiment, Hellstrøm organizes a blind test for Cato, lining up several different portions of minced meat, which he wants Cato to associate to brands. To the viewer, the task appears insurmountable. Each plate looks truly identical; together they form an indistinguishable series of grey meat mush. Amazingly, Cato excels! He has practically no knowledge of cooking, and has hardly eaten vegetables, fish, or other meats in more than a decade, but he

pinpoints each portion of minced meat to the correct brand. Hellstrøm himself is perplexed.

Of course, this scene is just a set-up, a preliminary for the painful and embarrassing scene to come, where Hellstrøm invites Cato and his wife to the back of a truck from which Hellstrøm pulls a year of Cato's minced meat consumption, a whole 100 kilos worth – only now, *the meat is not minced*: “Here,” says Hellstrøm, while he tosses a container of indistinguishable animal body parts onto the truck bed, “is all the fat in that minced meat.” Grabbing a large lump of fat, holding it provocatively up to Cato, he says, “This stuff, this is what you eat every day, all this is in your minced meat. So, you think you eat clean meat, do you?” Hellstrøm's voice-over takes over, while the camera closes up on the lumps of fat: “Minced meat contains saturated fats of the worst kind. With these amounts of saturated fat in one's diet, one is at risk of brain hemorrhage and heart attacks.” Back to the live action, Hellstrøm drives home the point: “This here, is 100 kilos worth of cardiovascular disease ... of diabetes type 2 ... high blood pressure ... and so on, and so on.” Back to the voice-over, Hellstrøm continues to enlighten the public: “In addition to the fat, minced meat contains large amounts of sinew and cartilage. To me, this is an indeterminate and suspect product.” Hellstrøm now picks up a tube of minced meat, and cuts it in half in front of Cato, exposing the raw contents: “Do you really know what this is? This is *mass* from an animal carcass, which has been ground up in great amounts, tons of it, kilometers' worth of minced meat.” By this point, Cato appears thoroughly depressed. He nods carefully, utters an almost silent “yes,” and sheds a tear. “All Norwegians eat this,” Hellstrøm continues, “but *you* eat extraordinary amounts of it.” Now, as the scene climaxes, Hellstrøm picks up two handfuls of the fat lumps and, handing them to Cato, says: “Touch it, feel it.” Cato, now with his hands full of animal fat, is given an ultimatum by Hellstrøm: “All of this, the fat and all this crap, I can give you as a gift. It's one year's worth. Or you can turn this down, and say yes to joining me in turning this around.”

The episode, and this scene in particular, illustrates how many contemporary consumers have grown into “fast, safe, and cheap” habits that more or less explicitly deny the animal origin of meat. Cato is of course an extreme case, on the one hand, because he consumes substantially more minced meat than does the average Norwegian, but also because his basic reason for doing so has to do with safety, rather than with convenience or price. At the same time, he is no outlier – he does not, in principle, demonstrate a different tendency than do most Norwegians, he only takes this tendency quite a bit further. Like Cato, many Norwegians consume great amounts of minced meat, and it is in fact the largest single category of meat product – by far – in Norway. If one collapses minced meat with certain other meat products that have somewhat similar characteristics, like sausages and patties – meats that many think of as fast, safe, and cheap, but whose origins are obscure – this is in fact the most common way Norwegians consume meat today.

The episode further illustrates that the perception that a meat is fast, safe, and cheap is deceptive – it shows us how the strategic ignorance surrounding meat leads some consumers to replace industry and retail propaganda for knowledge and food culture. In Cato’s case, Hellstrøm exposes this dynamic very clearly. Cato’s assumption is that minced meat is, in fact, the only “safe” meat, but Hellstrøm calls this assumption out as a delusion: Not only is minced meat not the only safe meat, it is not safe at all – in fact, it is one of the most *risky* types of meat you can eat. Cato’s annual consumption of this food, Hellstrøm suggests, amounts to “100 kilos worth of cardiovascular disease.”

A more subtle reading of the scene will reveal, however, that the delusion in play here is of a particular sort. Neither Cato nor his wife is truly confused, we believe, about what minced meat is. Although they might not know exactly what minced meat consists of, they clearly have had some doubts about this food, otherwise they would not be on the show in the first place. Somewhere in Cato is a sense that his diet is not quite right, and that his exclusive faith in minced meat is in fact displaced and delusional. The above scene, where Hellstrøm forces him to face the lumps of fat that make up his annual consumption, is not so much a revelation for Cato as it is a confrontation with what he already knows, but which he has allowed himself to deny.

Although Cato, the minced meat man, is a special case, he is in reality just a slightly more extreme version of the average Norwegian consumer. Because this is so, the scene offers another helpful illustration: It suggests to us what needs to take place, more generally, to counteract alienation and confront denial. For what Hellstrøm does, one could say, is precisely to close the gap between meat production and meat consumption. An abyss has opened up between production and consumption, and Hellstrøm’s antidote is to try to close the gap: Consumers need to learn the facts, they need to know *what they eat when they eat meat*, and they need to know about the consequences of that consumption. In the place of denial – the comforting space where one allows oneself not to think about what one eats – Hellstrøm places confrontation. “Touch it, feel it,” Hellstrøm says, handing Cato the fat – the implication being that, *if you want to eat it, you should not be bothered by touching it*.

Hellstrøm rydder opp hjemme has typically been seen as braindead entertainment in the reality TV genre, which plays on viewers’ voyeuristic desire to revel in other people’s misery. We want suggest it is much more than that, that it fact diagnoses a problem of a certain scale, and that it even offers some proposals for cures.¹⁰⁴ Obviously, the problem of alienation from and denial of the animal origin of meat – or, for that matter, the loss of food cultures more generally – will not be fixed by a TV show. But Hellstrøm provides a good example, and his efforts to get the Norwegian public to take food more seriously, indeed to realize that our relation to the food we eat has actually become quite problematic, is not to be discounted. How this effort

can be scaled up and politicized is, of course, another matter. Meanwhile, we should acknowledge that Hellstrøm's shows have had a demonstrable effect of the lives of many of the individuals who have taken part. While the program itself is often a painful and embarrassing experience for the participants, many of them report of great lifestyle changes after being on the show. Cato is a case in point. About a year after his episode aired, Cato told a Norwegian newspaper that he had cut minced meat entirely from his everyday fare, and that he now had a much more varied and healthy diet, not least with his new favorite food, cod. As a consequence, he had, without a single minute of exercise, lost 18 kilos. He now took his meals together with his wife and son.¹⁰⁵

It is in every way logical that minced meat would become the preferred category of meat in today's world, since it is the perfect product for a meat industry out to maximize its profits, as well as for consumers who would prefer not to think too much about *how* the industry does just that. From the side of the industry, minced meat is handy because it allows it to recoup, as raw material, much of what would otherwise have been losses; from the side of the consumer it is handy because it carries no reminder of the animal origin of meat. Eating mince, one eats meat, but one does not eat an animal, since all trace of the animal has been removed – *elsewhere*, and by *someone else*. Minced meat is thus the perfect representation of both alienation and denial, and the immense growth of this food must, in the context of this book, be seen to represent a problem.

If that is so, Hellstrøm provides us with a cue for how to deal with the problem, however incomplete and imperfect it still is: In order to counteract alienation and combat denial, we must *expose* what it is that we eat when we eat meat, and we must force ourselves to *engage* with the production that enables our consumption. This move of Hellstrøm's will need to be politicized, however; it will need to be transformed from a dramaturgic technique in a reality TV show into a sustainable political agenda.

Notes

- 1 Clemens Bonifacius, *Fornuftigt Madstel: En tidsmessig Koge- og Husholdningsbog* (Christiania: P.F. Steensballes Forlag, 1864), iv.
- 2 Ole Marius Hylland, *Folkeopplysning som utopi: Tidsskriftet Folkevennen og forholdet mellom folk og elite* (Oslo: Novus, 2010), 143; Astrid Riddervold and Andreas Ropeid, "Popular Diet in Norway and Natural Science during the 19th Century: The Porridge Feud 1864-66," *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, no. 1 (1984): 48–65.
- 3 Kåre Lunden, "Forholdet mellom åker- og dyreproduksjon i eldre tid," *Heimen* 17, no. 3 (1978): 692.
- 4 Hilmar Stigum, "Norsk Matskikk," in *Norsk mat*, edited by Olga Ambjørnrud (Oslo: Landbruksforlaget, 1981), 9–16.
- 5 Henry Notaker, *Ganens makt: Norsk kokekunst og matkultur gjennom tusen år* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1993); Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere*, 31.
- 6 Astri Riddervold, *Konservering av mat* (Oslo: Teknologisk forlag, 1993).

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Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, we have selected and tried to make sense of a great many examples of how consumers have become alienated from the sites, skills, and justifications that make animals into meat – what we have framed as alienation along three intertwined axes: the *spatial*, the *social*, and the *cultural*. In our time, this alienation has gone so far that even some whose work involves transforming animals to meat are ignorant about what goes on at other links in the chain – witness the industrial chicken farmer who did not know how his chickens were killed. Our book has been, on this point, an elaboration, from within the context of Norway’s history, of John Berger’s point that, while certain categories of animals – like pets, mediatised wild animals, the totem animals of environmentalism – are more ubiquitous than ever, the animals we eat have largely “vanished” from our culture.

When this alienation has not engendered more of a protest, we believe this is because various mechanisms of denial have been put in place, which allow us to eat ever greater amounts of meat, while giving ever less thought to the processes that enable this consumption. To the extent the various forms of alienation we have described are functions of industrialization, it seems to us that the industrialization of meat production *requires* denial. Because of the so-called meat paradox, which refers to the inclination to care for animals while also wanting to eat them, we need some way of managing the discomfort that ensues. Denial is the word we have used for an assortment of different mechanisms that all allow us to look away, to avert our gaze from the system and the processes that our historically high meat consumption entails. It refers to our various ways of covering up, excusing, neglecting, or conveniently “forgetting” that the food we eat was once a living, breathing animal.

Some of these denial mechanisms are strategic in the plain sense, and have actively and intentionally been put in place in order to deceive and manipulate, such as when the meat industry engages in what we have called “welfare washing.” Others are less obviously strategic, less a result of any clear intentionality – as when a TV program for kids systematically fails to lay out the difference between egg-laying hens and broiler chickens, and also gives the impression that the lives of these animals have not changed at all in 100 years. But although these mechanisms must be placed along a spectrum

of intentionality, we would argue that they all work toward enabling our unprecedentedly carnivorous culture.

Having added a great number of examples and illustrations of alienation and denial across four different phases from farm to fork, as well as over a time period of about 150 years, our book up to this point slants heavily toward what one might think of as the “mainstream,” that is, what *most* people think, and feel, and do. We have cleared far less space for criticisms of the industrial way of producing meat, or for other, alternative, ways of keeping, killing, buying, and eating meat. Certainly, a somewhat different story would have emerged if we had spent more time in, say, the archives of animal rights or environmental organizations, many of which have made significant efforts to expose and counteract such denial.

In our defense, the numbers speak for themselves: Only a marginal portion of Norwegians are vegetarians, and only a tiny part of agricultural production in Norway is organic or free-range. While there are certain exceptions to the rule we have described, it is, in fact, the rule. Sociologists Vittersø and Kjærnes were thus right when they claimed that there has been, in Norway, a “politics of meat promotion” which “has not been met with broad [counter]mobilization, either from the environmental or consumer movements,” and that, “Most people lack knowledge about [the] consequences of growing meat consumption, and do not consider reducing their own meat consumption as a relevant [...] measure.”¹ In short, while Norwegians consume ever greater amounts of meat, they know increasingly less – and perhaps even *wish* to know increasingly less – about what they eat when they eat meat.

Nevertheless, in closing, we want to touch on some such recent alternatives to the mainstream, and we want to use these alternatives as a starting point for a discussion about what can be done. We close in this way not merely for the sake of achieving a measure of balance, but because many actors – including, to some extent, the meat industry – appear to be convinced that the “mainstream” is about to change, that consumers are now growing increasingly aware of their own meat consumption and its consequences. Along the entire chain from farm to fork, in fact, one appears to have examples that mainstream denial is being challenged, and that alienation is about to be overcome.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will describe a few brief examples of recent countermeasures, which appear to offer alternatives to alienation and denial. We will suggest, however, that these initiatives, though laudable in themselves, do not form an adequate basis for making significant change. We believe, rather, that to counteract alienation and denial, we need to attack the problem at its systemic root.

Living Lusciously, Dying Differently

In Revetal, outside of Tønsberg, about 90 kilometers southwest of Oslo, is a pig farm out of the ordinary. One does not have to travel the distance

to get a sense of its distinction; the farm's webpages give it amply away. A header reads, "Pigs should have good lives from birth to slaughter," and the accompanying text explains that this is precisely what Grøstad Farm aims to provide:

Here at Grøstad, pigs lead full lives, with a great deal of freedom. They snort away outdoors as well as indoors, and can decide for themselves whether to have an afternoon nap in the sun or go for a stroll in the forest, searching for roots.

The front page features a large photo of a woman, lying on the ground, in what appears to be mud, face to face with a pig.

We met the woman on the photo, Gry Beate, who also happens to be the owner of the farm. She explained how she and her husband had arrived at this unconventional – and by now, highly praised – form of pig keeping. They started out with a dream of being farmers, she said, so in their late twenties, they bought a pig farm. They knew little about farming, let alone pig farming, but they figured: *How hard can it be?* They were young, energetic, and ready to learn. They bought some sows and had them inseminated, and expected everything to go as planned. They soon regretted their decision, however: "It was awful," said Gry Beate. They found the pigs to be great animals, pleasant and intelligent creatures, and they felt it was wrong to keep them in cramped conditions with nothing to do – as they had been taught by pig keeping manuals to do. Gry Beate's pigs were not mistreated in any way; she and her husband adhered to all the rules and regulations. Nevertheless, it felt wrong. She recalls crying in the pig pen out of pity for her animals. So, one day, Gry Beate and her husband decided to simply let the pigs out. They opened up the longside of the barn, fenced off an area in the adjacent fields, and let the pigs outdoors. "Our neighbours thought we were absolutely mad!," she told us. Most everyone warned them about all the horrible situations that would ensue – the pigs would catch worms, get sick, and contaminate other pigs in the area with all sorts of infectious diseases – but Gry Beate and her husband decided to take any problems in their stride. As it happened, however, they did not meet many problems.

Since then, Grøstad Farm has only had what one might want to call minor problems: Gry Beate and her husband were worried about whether the Norwegian market was ready to pay extra for "happy pork," but soon found out that there was no reason for this concern. In fact, the farm was so successful that it could not meet the demand on its own, so it has now formed an alliance with three other farms in the vicinity. Today, Grøstad not only raises free range pigs, it also has its own charcuterie and butcher line, selling both raw and processed pork, including chops, filets, sausages, patés, and bacon.

The whole point of Grøstad, and the basis for its distinction from conventional farms, is to break with the industrial way of keeping pigs. The main

selling point of this break, as the farm's webpages present it, is animal welfare, the ambition to provide the animals that end up as our food with *good lives*: "Our animals wander freely over large areas of forest and meadow, and can decide for themselves how they want to spend their time. When night falls, they lie down in a bed of nice, dry straw in insulated huts." At the same time, they emphasize that pigs who have had happy lives also taste better: They have a "natural taste of Norwegian nature," the webpage claims, and "its meat is more marbled and has a better taste than industrially produced pork."²

The search for alternatives to industrial meat production has found its way also into the other steps of the process that makes animals edible. Live Skinnes, who is incidentally known under the online moniker "FarmGirlOfNorway," runs Nedre Skinnes farm, in Viken county, which aims to become the world's best "on climate issues, on animal welfare, and on social media."³ Nedre Skinnes is clearly distinct from the conventional Norwegian farm; not only do they farm free-range organic pigs and sheep, they also grow their own feed – in a conscious move to distance themselves from soy-rich imported animal feed. But what sets this farm apart even from other alternative farms, is its care for how animals die – an area that Nedre Skinnes has elevated to a happening of the utmost importance.

Most farmers we have spoken to, find the animals transport to the slaughterhouse distressing, and even animals who have lived in contentment are usually placed in cramped conditions in a truck and driven for hours to before they meet their end. Live wanted none of this. Therefore, in 2018, she and her husband built their own small-scale, but fully equipped, slaughterhouse – combined with a mobile facility that enables them to slaughter the animals while they are out snuffling about or grazing. The actual killing takes place just a couple of meters away from the rest of the herd, a measure which protects the animals from the stress induced by being removed from their companions. One pig at a time is lured away from the others and onto a platform. A pair of strong electric forceps are used to electrocute the animal over the neck, causing immediate loss of consciousness, before the forceps are moved on to the heart region. The pig is then lifted and bled over a tank. The Norwegian Food Safety Authority is present at all times to ensure that no more than 25 seconds pass from the loss of consciousness to the animal is bled out. They also have a bolt gun ready as a back-up.

Nedre Skinnes makes no secret of the rationale for its out-of-the-ordinary slaughter: "We live so far from processes of life and death," the farm's webpage declares, "but, even so, people need to realize that the paté, the sausage, and the minced meat in their tacos ARE dead animals." It suggests further that we should eat less meat, "but that the meat we do eat should actually have lived a good life, be reared sustainably, and be killed in a dignified way." The main trend, however – the mainstream to which Nedre Skinnes wants to offer an alternative – "goes in the opposite direction, making cheap production the main goal, and all other aspects secondary."

We cannot but be impressed by Gry Beate, Live, and other farmers who are clearly more committed than most to the idea that we should give animals good lives as well as good deaths. With their commitment to this idea they take on an even greater risk than does the average farmer – and a farmer’s life is in general quite risky. For someone who wants to emulate Grøstad or Nedre Skinnes, the stakes are high, and success is far from guaranteed. The only thing that is guaranteed for farmers like these, is that making this deep commitment into farming practice requires work – *hard* work, and plenty of it.

And that, indeed, might be one reason why farmers such as these are few and far between. Indeed, we suspect that one reason why these farms have been so successful, despite their far more demanding standards for both ecology and animal welfare, is the fact that there are so few of them. They stand out very clearly from the rest of the field. At least in Norway, someone looking for an alternative to industrial meat has very few options, and those who do offer that alternative supply consequently make good business, and are noticed. This is good news for the few farms who do operate according to a post- (or non-)industrial logic, since they – necessarily – become the go-to outlets for consumers looking for alternatives. However, we see very few signs that the mainstream agricultural apparatus in Norway, that notorious “iron triangle,” is taking on a deeper commitment to ecology and animal welfare. If anything, the trend, as we can see from the statistics as well as from the industry’s annual status updates, is so-called “structural transformation” – which is agricultural code for *further industrialization*. And while we do not want to venture prophecies, we would not expect the emergence of alternatives like the ones at Grøstad or Nedre Skinnes to change anything much. They add diversity to what is offered to Norwegian consumers, and – to be clear – we believe this added diversity is a very good thing. All else being equal, we doubt, however, that these alternatives can eat their way into the mainstream. To believe in that prospect is to radically underestimate the power of the industrial mainstream – what, in a somewhat deceptive phrase (given that it only fairly recently became the norm), is called “conventional” production.

Buying Directly, Eating Morally

With the phrase, “the power of the industrial mainstream,” we refer not simply to the iron triangle. Those actors *are* powerful, to be sure, but as we hope to have shown with this book, the system of meat production that these actors helped bring about emerged alongside new consumer needs and habits. As Roger Horowitz has also argued, the production and consumption of meat in industrial modernity has evolved in tandem – and the factors that have impacted supply and demand have been diverse indeed: urbanization and congestion, transport and logistical chains, hygiene and disease prevention, the emergence of legislation and the judicialization of society, the

emancipation of women and the emergence of households with two breadwinners, technological development (at each step in the chain from farm to fork), general increase of wealth, advertising and propaganda, globalization and international influence, and more.

There is, in other words, not one single, or simple, reason why many consumers today are alienated from the animals that become their meat. To the contrary, this situation is the result of a whole myriad of factors, which are interlinked in complex ways. This is why we suggest that the emergence of alternatives – farms that, in contrast to the industrial system, actually allow animals to have their natural needs met – will not be enough to create significant and lasting change. At the very least, we will have to see movement also within the sale and consumption of meat, as well as in its production.

And indeed there are alternatives even here. In fact, farms like Nedre Skinnes have decided to leapfrog the supermarket chains and make their meat available online or through e-mail. Perhaps an even easier option than buying a halved or quartered carcass of an animal straight from the farmer, are the so-called REKO-rings that appear at regular intervals throughout Norway. Their retail and distribution model offers customers a way of ordering products directly from the producer, via closed groups on Facebook. The REKO-ring groups are based on a Finnish idea that has been adopted by Norsk Bonde- og Småbrukarlag (The Norwegian Small Farmers' Association), and which relies substantially on the contribution of volunteers. The first Norwegian REKO-ring was established in 2017, and in 2020, there were 120 of them spread across the country. There are about 500,000 registered customers who shop regularly through a system that includes 500 independent farmers.⁴

And even more accessible alternatives exist. The webshop, *Dyrket.no* [*dyrket* means “grown”], is a source of local food produced with organic or biodynamic principles, where customers can buy their food online and have it delivered on their doorstep. Again, by leapfrogging the supermarkets, the idea is that the small independent producers get a better deal, and not least, that their organic produce is available for busy families without having to attend a REKO-market. Some of the producers are organic, while others claim to farm by organic principles, though they remain uncertified. *Dyrket.no* provides a market for the producers and a shopping venue for customers who are willing to go the extra mile and pay the extra price.

As far we can see, services like these could actually offer the customer a convenient way of buying meat, where the imperatives of the supermarket no longer eats its way into the production of meat. Supermarkets are far more expensive to run than webpages, and have relied, since the start, on treating meat as just another ingredient, offered as cheaply as possible, to attract customers. Web-based buying schemes could possibly circumvent this dynamic, partly because they are – at least under the right circumstances – cheaper to run, and partly because it offers another retail context entirely, which could possibly allow one to re-establish the relation between seller and buyer in a new way, on another set of imperatives.

Of course, a webshop or any other scheme that promises to circumvent the conventional system, placing consumers in more direct contact with farmers who, in turn, set higher standards for ecology, animal welfare – and, consequently (or so they claim) taste – needs to attract customers. And there is the rub. For, as we have shown, the market for food in Norway is extremely tight-knit, dominated on one side by a few large cooperatives and on another by only three large retail companies. This concentration makes it excruciatingly hard for challengers to break through, and gain a position in the awareness, not to mention the everyday lives, of consumers. The central actors' power vis-à-vis the government and the consumer, is so massive that any challengers stands in danger of being drowned out.

Some retain hope that consumer choice will still, somehow, save the day. In a critical book on Norway's contemporary food culture, noted Norwegian food journalist, Joacim Lund, urges his readers to begin eating *the whole animal*. His analysis is interesting because he, on the one hand, goes rather far toward placing the blame for the current situation on a retail industry that has put profits ahead of all other concerns. Even more so than in other countries, he notes, supermarket retailers in Norway have enacted something of an alimentary monoculture: The selection of products in an average supermarket is far lower, for instance, than in most other European countries. Consequently, Norwegians know increasingly little about the meat they eat, but they are experts in minced meat. On the other hand, though, Lund's proposed solution, and the agency he leaves us with, is the prospect that we could become more interested and discerning consumers. He says that we can circumvent the current system – which he acknowledges is bad for animals, for the environment, and for human health – by way of three steps: First, we must begin to *plan*. Only if we plan properly, can we make sure to get the most for our money, and not be fooled by deceptive advertising and price tags that entice us to make fast and convenient choices over smart ones. Next, we must eat *less, but better* – not least when it comes to meat. If we eat less meat, we can buy more of our meat from producers “you know have a good operation.” Finally, we should begin to eat *whole food* – that is, unprocessed, seasonal foods. By way of these “three simple rules of thumb, you will become a super consumer,” Lund boasts; “they will allow you to eat like nobility, while saving yourself and the rest of the world in one go.”⁵

Lund provides an interesting example of how these rules could translate to everyday life. Many are fooled by the price tag to think that fillets of chicken is the price-wise option, he says, but actually, buying a whole chicken from a seemingly more expensive high-end producer which places sustainable feed and animal welfare at the center, might be just as sensible.

If you know how to disjoint a chicken, you can easily cut out the breast fillets. It takes no more than 10 seconds, maybe 15 before you gain the skill. The breast fillets from this type of chicken are much bigger than

the normal ones, so if served with, say, pasta and a good sauce, half a fillet is more than enough for one person. So there, you have the first family meal from your chicken. Then you can remove the legs. Again, it takes no more than a few seconds on each side. The legs on these chickens are big, so maybe you want to cut them in two, let the wings accompany them, and go Indian, with rice and all the rest. There's your second family dinner. Finally, you can take the rest of the carcass, divide it into bits, and make a broth. When the broth is cooked and poured through a strainer, you pick off the remaining meat on the carcass and make a risotto or a soup of both. That leaves you only with the bones, and three family dinners from a single chicken.

To underline that this is just one example, Lund adds that, "This way of thinking can be transferred to almost anything."⁶

It is not our intention to discount the contribution that consumers can make toward positive change. In fact, to do anything at all with alienation and denial, consumers – ordinary people – is key. We are quite certain, however, that Lund's solution is insufficient, if not also somewhat misplaced. This "way of thinking" will surely have appeal to some, but as we hope to have shown, most consumers have left this kind of thinking behind for some quite complex reasons. It is in part due to how the production, distribution, and sale of meat products has changed, as Lund also points out, but it is also, in no small measure, due to how the lives of most people have changed. What Lund describes, more or less, is the way of thinking of the traditional housewife, but as we have shown, the death of the housewife necessitated new ways of thinking about meat, as well as new ways of making it – or rather, mostly, of *not* making it. The slogan "fast, safe, and cheap" is not just a piece of retail PR, it is also something of a necessity for a busy, modern family with two adults in full jobs. The days of disjointing animals and cooking broth in one's own kitchen are long gone for most consumers, and when such practices disappeared, so did the attendant skills. As the survey we cited shows, young people are far less at ease than are older people when it comes to disjointing and preparing animal foods.

One might of course consider it a worthy goal to resurrect these practices and skills – to go back, as it were, to an earlier time, when people did in fact plan, eat less (sometimes better), and "whole" food – but there are reasons to question such an agenda on grounds of realism as well as politics. First, there is, as we see it, no particular reason to believe that most people desire anything but the "fast, safe, and cheap." Through our studies, we have in fact become convinced of the contrary, that a large part of the population is quite happy to be free – unlike their parents and grandparents – of having to spend time and energy in front of the cooker. Most people are quite comfortable with the *status quo*. Furthermore, we have next to no idea about what it would take to persuade this group of people that they *should* be interested in changing the way they relate to the animals they eat.

Even if one were to manage to get large parts of the population on board, however, there is reason to be wary of what the political implications of Lund's agenda might be. Although it does of course not follow as a logical consequence, a return to the old ways of planning, parting, and preparing meat could all too easily become a return also to the old gendered division of labor. After all, all the work that Lund suggests we need to bring back, used to be *women's* work.

Possibly Proposals

If the alternatives and counter-movements we have touched on above are either misguided or insufficient, what *would* be a sensible way forward? The first thing to keep in mind, we believe, is that the issues at hand do not lend themselves to a quick fix. Alienation from and denial of the animal origin of meat are not the straightforward products of government policies or industry propaganda – although those are indeed central parts of the picture. Rather, as we stated at the start of this book, we need to approach these phenomena as products of complex bundles of economic, social, and cultural incentives. This means that we need to acknowledge not only how government and industry are at work to produce strategic ignorance in citizens and consumers, but also how citizens and consumers themselves make a solid contribution to the obfuscation. As we have shown, a steady stream of criticism has for some time been directed at the meat industry and at our meat-eating habits, but for the most part, such criticism has failed to have an impact on consumption levels. After the most recent such exposé, Norwegian meat sales even went up significantly! The complexity of this issue keeps us from offering anything like a set of tangible “policy proposals.” Instead, we restrict our final comments to what we call “possibly proposals” – ways of thinking and acting that might, *possibly*, take things in the right direction.

The first, and most general, such proposal is that we, as citizens, need to *take back agriculture as a political issue*. Another way to say this is that we need to act more, and more often, in our capacity *as citizens*, and not just in our capacity as consumers. As we have noted, agricultural policy and development has traditionally been left to the so-called iron triangle, and has hardly been subject to public deliberation at all, outside this constellation of “interested” parties. The fact is, however, that we are *all* interested parties in this matter; almost all of us eat meat, and meat is in every way part of our everyday lives. That we should care so little about the political and infrastructural premises for what we put on our plates every day, is more than a little odd. After all, motorists care about roads, elderly about pensions and care homes, and young families about day care, schools, and youth clubs. Almost everyone has something to say about health care or taxes – presumably because they are affected by policies in those areas. But while agricultural policy too affects everyone, hardly anyone cares. Without

a change in this area, we see no reason to be hopeful. If agricultural politics do not, to a far greater extent, become everybody's concern, we do not expect anything much to change. The politicization of agricultural issues is, as we see it, a precondition for any other effort to have any effect. Reversely, if more people did begin to see that greater democratic involvement in and control over agricultural development is in fact both possible and desirable, we, as citizens, could act to bind ourselves to more responsible choices when we act as consumers – say, by increasing the taxation of meat, by raising the bar for animal welfare practices and inspections, by spending more on neutral information and schooling about agriculture, and so on.

A related proposal is to carry on, in other forms and forums, the work we have started with this book, of *exposing that which we have grown accustomed to neglect*, to bring to light that which has been cast into the dark. The effort to teach people about how animals lived in the past, how and why these lives changed, how they look today, and what the implications of those lives are, is hard work – not least because one is up against forces whose financial and organization muscles far outweigh those of the critical voices. However, if the many Davids that are already out there – scholars, journalists, authors, organizations, and certain government entities, and more – would form alliances, they might still topple the Goliath. The first step of this exposure agenda would be to mount a sustained attack against all forms of propaganda and disinformation issued by the industry. We must, in other words, work to make “welfare washing” a thing of the past. If this alliance of actors were to have any success at this, however, the next item on the agenda would be to expose itself, as it were; it would not be enough to simply call out the meat industry, one would also have to acknowledge that untruths, garnished truths, or just a general lack of attention to truth, is an asset also for the consumer. Those who struggle with the meat paradox – and many do – use denial as a way to look away. They are not – at least not in any strict sense – forced to look away; they choose to do so. For exposure to the realities of today's meat production and consumption to have any effect, it would have to expose consumers' complicity in the matter.

Finally, a proposal that would certainly work if one could “just do it,” but where the conundrum is just to get people to do it, is to *eat less meat*. This proposal should not be read as a stand-alone, for in that case, we would be back to making a fetish of consumer choice, as Cross and Proctor caution us not to. But while consumer choice is compromised in all sorts of ways, that does not mean it is non-existent. What good, exactly, can the consumer do? The obvious answer would seem to be, “Become a vegetarian.” We do not consider a large-scale vegetarian revolution to be feasible, however, and are also not convinced it would be desirable. A less meat-intensive diet, however, is both desirable and (possibly) feasible. First of all, eating less meat is a simple solution to the many practical problems associated with our current level of meat consumption. At least in theory, downsizing our meat consumption requires very little of us; anyone can start reducing their intake of

meat *immediately*. If it were to happen on a large scale, the consequences of this change would also be obvious: It would reduce the environmental impacts of what we eat, and could also (depending on what we replace for meat) be beneficial for human health. Possibly, it could also raise the bar for animal welfare, at least if we pursued the rule of eating “less, but better,” since we would then be sending a signal to producers that we had become more discerning and more demanding meat eaters.

This too would be going back to the old days, but it would not have the same sort of backlash as the “back to the cooker” agenda. Rather, to become a more selective meat eater would be to regain the bond that existed between the old farmer and his animals; it would be to re-enact the contract that today has been long lost, where one assumed a measure of mutuality between humans and animals. Reducing our consumption of meat might also work as a relative antidote against alienation and denial, since to make a conscious choice about the matter could – possibly – be a first step toward enlightening ourselves about what we eat when we eat meat.

Notes

- 1 Vittersø and Kjærnes, “Kjøttets politiske økonomi,” 74.
- 2 See www.grostadgris.no.
- 3 See <http://www.nedreskinnes.no/om/om-oss>.
- 4 “REKO-ringen,” Norsk bonde- og småbrukarlag. <https://www.smabrukarlaget.no/norsk-bonde-og-smabrukarlag/matnyttig/lokalmatringer/aktive-reko-ringer/>. Accessed: May 26, 2021.
- 5 Joacim Lund, *Hele bøffelen: Håndbok for deg som vil spise godt og redde verden samtidig* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2015): 206–207.
- 6 Lund, *Hele bøffelen*, 190.



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