

## animalized and (re)animalized by benoit cezard

In recent decades, food continues to be a subject that causes concerns and public debates in western countries: food scares, junk food, healthy eating, fair trade, organic or GMO farming etc. Presenting both desire and repulsion, the growing meat production and consumption has become an industry that obeys market rules. While a lot of people I know choose to be vegetarians or vegans, I have often asked myself why we consume meat and how we perceive it. In connection with that, I decided to do a photography project, which is not a pamphlet against meat-eaters – I'm not a vegetarian either – but rather a personal observation in China, the country I have been living in since 2006.

Two types of meat consumers are differentiated by the French sociologist Claude Fischler: *zoophages* the flesh-eaters who experience no discomfort recognizing the animals they eat, and *sarcophages* are those who willing to consume only an abstract substance where nothing is identifiable from the animal.

In the West, except in advertisements or on packaging where it allows a certain evaluation of a quality of the product, the link with the animal is avoided. Everything is staged to forget that the meat dish has anything to do with a dead animal. Thus, the meat ends up disembodied, de-animalised. Is there nothing more anonymous than a steak or a slice of ham packaged ? Meat who bring us back to the nature of the animal such as offal products are less and less consumed in favor of parts of the animal as the muscle. The fat and bones also become devalued by many consumers.

In China, even if this disembodiment (de-animalisation) risks to become more and more present, with the advent of large distribution, it is less perceptible. When I arrived here, I was very surprised to find numerous products directly comparable to the animal. Heads and necks of ducks, ears, tails of pigs and tongues find themselves surrounded with lungs and intestines.

Culture shapes our taste according to multiple learning experiences. It builds or deconstructs our relationship to cooking, to the table, according to codes, to models, which are part of the tradition and identity. Taste allows us to express ourselves and to identify the culture to which we belong. Many Westerners who travel or live in China experience frequent disgust by seeing Chinese markets or butcher's shops. Often coming from countries where the animalism of the meat is removed, some find themselves shocked at the sight of certain pieces of meat displayed. The problem is not really for me the disgust beyond Chinese food but rather the quasi- systematic racist allusions that may follow or the shortcuts that can be made. Yet, how would a stranger traveling in France and smelling cheese, tasting snails or frog legs react? By photographing, I want the spectator to be confronted by his own disgust and be able to reflect on culture and food culture

Thinking about this subject led me to make two closely related photographic series : animalized and (re)animalized. The first series offers a more documentary approach, and allows us to realize the bestiality of certain pieces of meat. All these pieces were found in normal markets and supermarkets in Wuhan. The second series concentrates on a single animal, the duck. One of the culinary specialties of Wuhan is the duck's neck. Every day, thousands of ducks are killed for the only market of Wuhan: in the street, there are numerous stores where heads and necks are piled up. You can often see Wuhanese serenely eating the neck or head of the duck on buses or while watching a TV series. Duck head is presented in its complete form. When you eat it, you actually really eat the head of the duck, not a part of it (eating the head of the duck consists mostly of sucking brain and eating the cheeks) . Even if you really can see you are eating an animal, and not an anonymous piece of meat, the fact that is roasted change your personal feeling about it. You are not eating animal but meat. That's why I chose to make triptych which can show the reverse process, from the freshly killed animal to the animal cooked.