

# Why do we kill animals for fur?

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- Introduce sociological animal studies
- What sociological mechanisms the industry uses to keep themselves together
- How does knowing this help for activism?
- Striking at the root



**A.G.**  
*Alexandre Guay*

## **A research project in sociology**

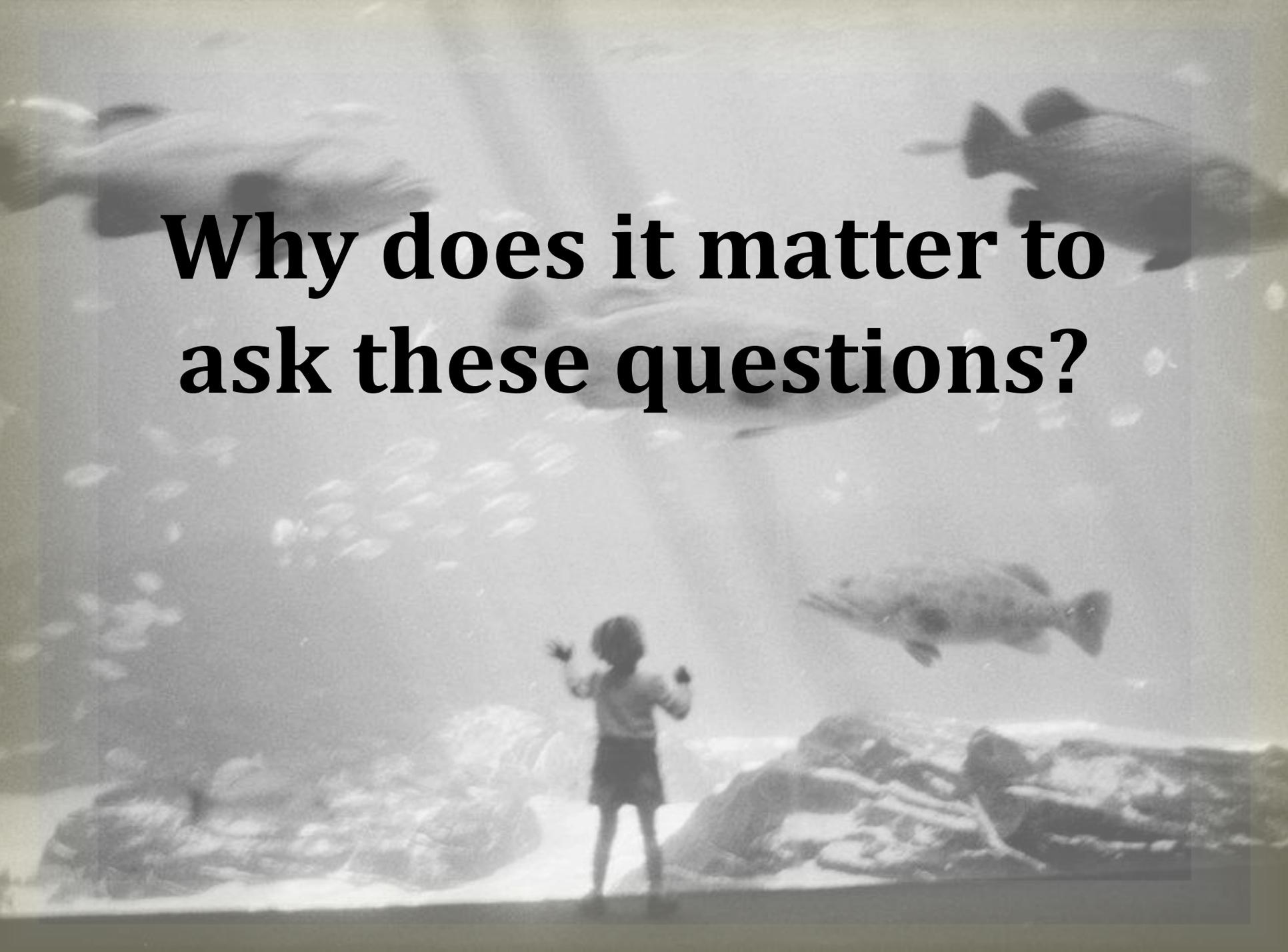
- **In-depth interviews with representatives of the fur industry**
  - **fur farmers**
  - **owners/workers of fur shops**
  - **furriers**
- **Final thesis paper**

# Sociological animal studies



- ❧ Research perspective
- ❧ Ally of the animal rights movement in the academic field
- ❧ „Exploration of the ways in which animal lives intersect with human societies.“ – Margo DeMello
- ❧ Explores the interactions between animals and humans: from pets to slaughterhouse workers
- ❧ How do these interactions influence us? Why do we treat animals the way that we do?

**Why does it matter to  
ask these questions?**



# Fur industry in Estonia

- ❧ 200 000 animals killed per year
- ❧ A couple of big farms (the biggest kills around 170 000 animals), the rest are smaller farms
- ❧ The industry is small but has strong ties with the Finnish fur industry
- ❧ Wearing fur is a tradition from Soviet times

# Proposal for a ban on fur farming in Estonia



- ❧ Parliament discussed a ban on fur farming twice this spring: the ban was refused both times
- ❧ New elections in 2019: new possibility for a ban
- ❧ My research paper aims to contribute to the discussion for a potential ban from a sociological perspective
- ❧ Work continues until a ban is achieved



Norbert Elias

MIS ON SOTSIOLOOGIA?



ÜLDSOTSIOLOOGIA

Dolan

Attitudes to Animals

CAI 59 / A9

ANIMAL LIBERATION

THE DEFINITIVE CLASSIC  
OF THE ANIMAL MOVEMENT

PETER SINGER

2435  
An Invitation to

Social Construction

2E

Kenneth J. Gergen

DOING DISCOURSE RESEARCH

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Thinking Animals

WHY ANIMAL STUDIES NOW?

Columbia

PHELPS

CHANGING THE GAME

SUNSTEIN  
NUSSBAUM

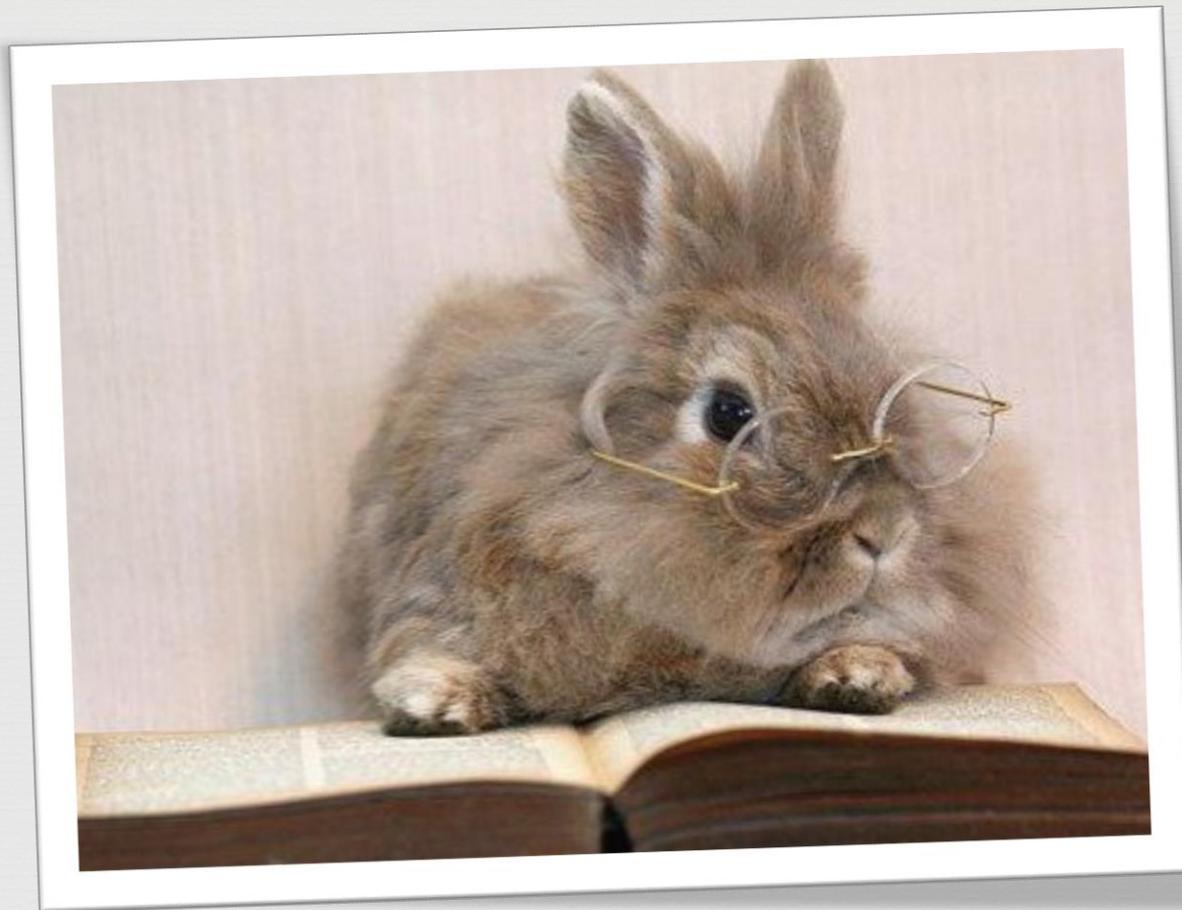
ANIMAL RIGHTS

316

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**Theoretical background**

- ❧ Sociological and critical animal studies (Arluke, Herzog, York, Shapiro, DeMello, Lester / Twine, Taylor, Peggs)
- ❧ Absent referent (Adams)
- ❧ Speciesism (Ryder, Singer)
- ❧ Animal-industrial complex (Noske)
- ❧ Antroparchy (Cudworth)
- ❧ Institutional violence (DeMello)
- ❧ Carnism (Joy)



**Research project:  
some results and findings**

# Construction of a „cage animal“



- ❧ „Cage animal“, „caged animal“
- ❧ „Bred animal“, „special-bred animal“
- ❧ The opposites of a wild animal
- ❧ New biological needs are created for these constructs
- ❧ Life on a farm is better for the animals because it eliminates threats (e.g for being eaten)
- ❧ Movement of the animal is not a part of the construct  
– since all the animals’ constructed needs are fulfilled, they don’t need to move

# Social construction of „an animal“



- ❧ „The categories (lab animal, pet, livestock) shape not only how the animals are seen but also how they are used and treated.“ (DeMello 2012)
- ❧ „Good shepherd“ (Serpell 1999) – farmed animals have a much better, safer and more comfortable life compared to wild animals
- ❧ Gives the farmers self-assurance; the feeling of doing the right thing without any alternatives

A photograph of a fur farm showing rows of cages with animals inside. The cages are made of metal wire and are arranged in a long line. The animals are mostly white and grey, and they appear to be sitting or lying down in the cages. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall atmosphere is one of a confined and industrial environment.

*„People project their thoughts and feelings to animals. We don't really know what they think or feel. Maybe when they're older, it would be ok for them to live in a drawer. We don't know their opinions. But the minimum standard is that the people would feel good at fur farms and they could get interactions with the animals. I think that's what is important.“*

– fur farmer, interviewee

# Constructing the life cycle of an animal



- ❧ An important part of all animal industries
- ❧ The life cycle is decided depending on the necessity of the industry – around 6 months for most fur animals
- ❧ Using the power position to decide how long the animal lives (= when is the best time to kill them to get the most economic benefits)

*„No, it doesn't make me feel uncomfortable. This is the life cycle. For a bug it's a few weeks. Life cycles are different. And alas, it has gone that way that for some animals who live on farms.. Well, their life cycle is shorter. It just is so. I see how this cycle goes and it's just a part of human life.“*

- Fur farmer, interviewee

# The purpose of animal existence



**K:** „It is said that it is an unnecessary suffering when an animal is born to a cage, gets killed and becomes a pillow case. How do you feel about it?“

**Fur shop owner:** „But with that it has given work and bread to the farmer, to a long chain of people. His life has not been unnecessary. Raising him has given work to the farmer and other people and afterwards it will offer satisfaction to the owner of the pillow, he can have a cool pillow case for example. It will offer happiness to the people from the pillow case.“



**Using cats and dogs  
for fur?**

# Using cats and dogs for fur?



***Fur enterpriser:*** „Animal protection can exist to a point where it doesn't interfere with freedom to enterprise. The farmer needs to be able to raise cows, pigs, sheep... if he wants to.“

***K:*** „What about cats?“

***FE:*** „Well the cat is a pet. If the society thinks that keeping cats in factory farms is ok, then why not. I don't understand why AR people protest the Chinese dog meat festivals. If they eat dog meat as a tradition in that country, then what is the problem? We don't have that tradition but they do.“

# Using cats and dogs for fur?



- ❧ Economic discourse on animal agriculture: it's business and we shouldn't interfere with business (if it comes with costs to improve animal welfare)
- ❧ A part of „keeping an animal“ in agriculture mostly is also killing them
- ❧ Dogs and cats usually don't have the status of an animal but they're rather „a member of family“. Since members of family are people, eating dog meat can be considered cannibalism in Western societies (Herzog 2010)
- ❧ What about using them for fur?

*„Should I refuse work because it's the skin of a cat? I think we wouldn't say no, we would do the hat. It's not an endangered species. The world is full of cats, they're everywhere. I think we wouldn't hunt them for their fur, that's not worth the trouble. I don't think anyone would do such a stupid thing. But we can use it, if someone comes with their own cat fur. Collars have been made from cat skin. I haven't seen them but I've read about it.“*

- Fur enterpriser, interviewee

# Using cats and dogs for fur?



- ☞ Cat-dog issue is a test of different categories of animals (pet, companion animal, fur animal, farm animal)
- ☞ Emphasis on „what would be accepted in the society“, not „what is accepted“
- ☞ There is no taboo with using cats or dogs for fur

**K:** „Why I'm asking if there are any animals who's fur you wouldn't use... what about a scenario if someone brought you the skin of their cat or dog?“

**Furrier:** „But maybe these are her precious cats whose furs she's been collecting for 5 years? Maybe she wants a vest as a memory?“

**K:** „Would you do it?“

**F:** „Well why not. What if she brought the skin of her dear sheep? There is no difference actually.“

# Gap between different parts of the animal industry



# Gap between different parts of the fur industry



- ❧ Representatives of fur shops and furriers visit fur farms but willingly avoid going to the animal cages
- ❧ Discourse of ignorance (Michael 1992)
- ❧ Willingly choosing not to know how the animals live, what conditions they are in, what procedures they go through or how they are killed (self-preservation)
- ❧ Division of labor: animal industries' special

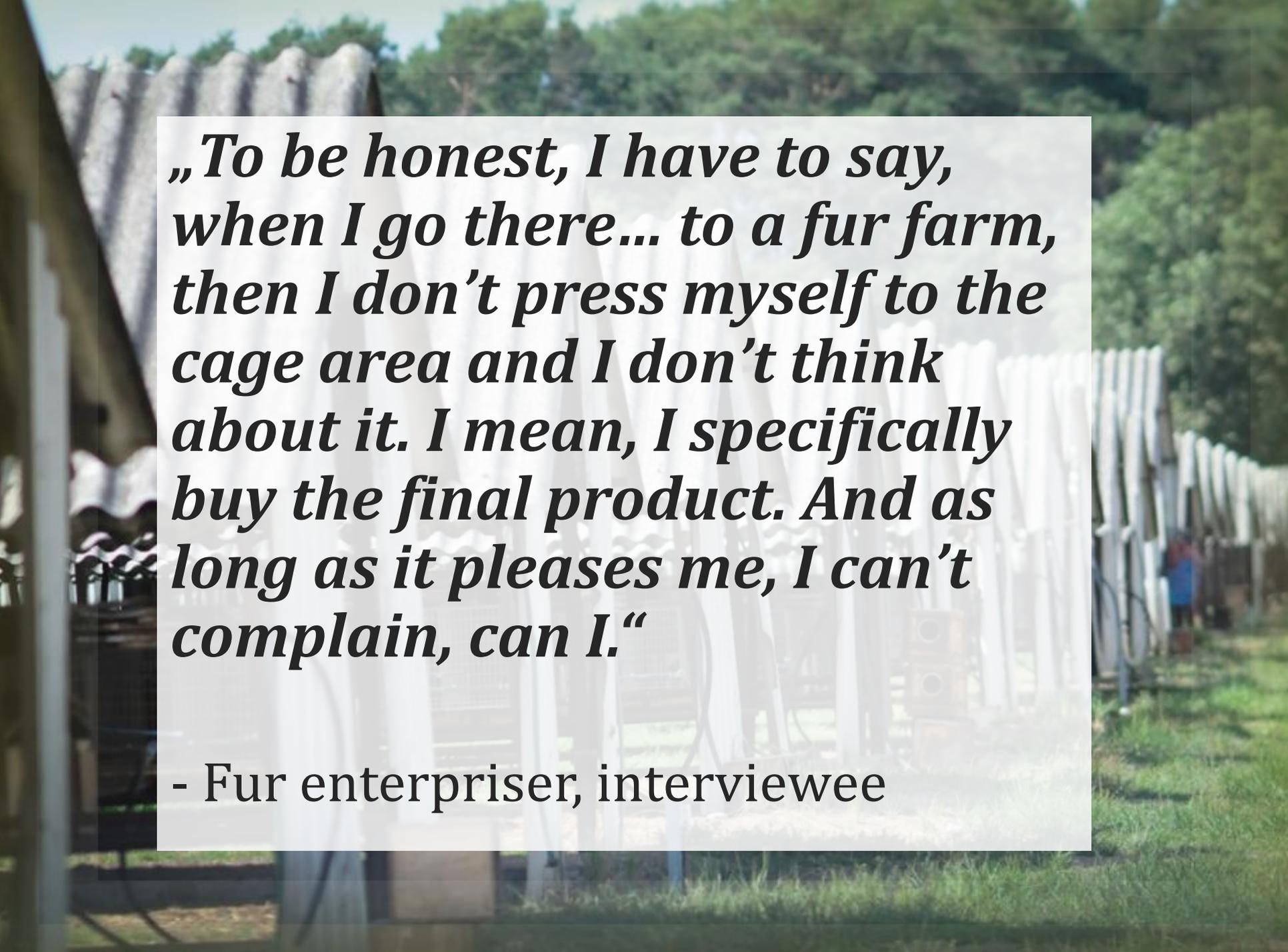
# Division of labor in animal industries



- ❧ These people who take care of animals usually are not the same who kill them
- ❧ Some scientists who conduct animal experiments want the animals to be brought to them unconscious or dead so they would not have to see the animal alive (Arluke 2004)
- ❧ The workers at factory farms are not the same people as in slaughterhouses and the workers at the base of slaughterhouses won't be the same people as on the kill floor (Serpell 1999)

*"Yes, I have been there. I go there for only one purpose, to buy the result that comes from there.... I buy the result, I go there with a specific purpose – I ask my son who drives me there with a car, he is always busy. Then we settle the contracts, I take the furs and go. I don't go walking around there. But I pat my cat and dog at home with great pleasure."*

- A furrier, interviewee

The background image shows a fur farm with rows of cages. A person is visible in the distance, and there are trees in the background. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box.

***„To be honest, I have to say, when I go there... to a fur farm, then I don't press myself to the cage area and I don't think about it. I mean, I specifically buy the final product. And as long as it pleases me, I can't complain, can I.“***

**- Fur enterpriser, interviewee**

# Absent referent



- ✧ With every animal product there is an absence: the death of the animal who is replaced by the product made out of her (Adams 1990)
- ✧ The absent referent functions to remove all connections between an animal and the person consuming animal products and the animal from the product made out of her
- ✧ Allows the moral abandonment of sentient beings

# Absent referent (Adams 1990)



*„It’s just material for me. I don’t think whether it ran around or something. If you start thinking about everything, you can lose your mind, you can eat chicken and think maybe it was a rooster and was alive one day. You can fry eggs and think oh, god, this is an unborn chick! If you start thinking about everything like that, you can lose your mind.“*

- A furrier, interviewee



***„I deal with material that comes to me, let's put it that way. I don't deal with... I don't deal with, like, I don't get like a live fox, whose throat I'd slit and blood would be everywhere and what else... I don't deal with that.“***

***- A furrier, interviewee***

# Normalizing fur farming



- ❧ Connecting fur farming with other animal industries
- ❧ Using the high popularity and important position of other animal industries, trying to add the fur industry into that list
- ❧ Using popularity as a normalizing tactic
- ❧ The construction of „natural“

**K:** „How would you describe the conditions in the fur farm that you visited?“

**Fur enterpriser:** „How would I describe them... Conditions made for animals. You are comparing them to human conditions. Like in a pig farm, where pigs live in crates. It's the same thing. I can't see a big difference between raising other agricultural animals and raising fur animals. There is no difference. Animals are kept in decent conditions, there is veterinary help...“

# Summary



- ❧ A category of „cage animal“ is used
- ❧ The needs of „cage animals“ are constructed by what the fur farm can offer
- ❧ Since the needs can be met on a fur farm, the industry considers it acceptable to slaughter the animals
- ❧ Dogs and cats did not have an untouchable position
- ❧ Absent referent is a visible symptom not only among consumers but also among workers of the industries

# Activism to put an end to fur farming



- ✧ Using zoologists, cognitive ethologists and other scientists to debunk the species' difference myth
- ✧ Understanding where the representatives of the industry are coming from
- ✧ Blocking mechanisms to be able to do the job
- ✧ Addressing the absent referent: connecting fur products and animals

**Thank you for listening!**  
**Questions?**

