

Valentin Thurn: “Taste the Waste”

Thurn, V. (Dir.) (2011): *Taste the Waste*. Documentary film. 92 minutes. Germany: Schnittstelle/ Thurnfilm.

For someone who cannot bear to see food being thrown away, watching this film is torturous. It is, however, worthwhile at any rate. “With the food we throw away in Europe and North America, all the hungry people in the world could be fed three times over.” Interviewing protagonists along the supply chain around the globe, “*Taste the Waste*” offers an informative yet inspiring view on the drawbacks of conspicuous consumerism.

In a lengthy discourse the film reveals how oodles of food are thrown away, and with them all expenses contributed along the supply chain. A disgusting picture of overabundance arises. This perverse “wastefulness” is contextualised by exploration of the link between the surplus on one end and privation on the other end of the supply chain. Arguably, the most shocking about this economy is that it is lucrative. The disposition of large amounts of food is more profitable than exploiting/utilising goods as much as possible.

Examining the vast discrepancy between commercial selection criteria grade and quality of nutrition, the film challenges the sensibility of current consumer standards of waste/food. After all, it is consumer choice that dictates commercial grade. Contrasting commercial quality set by retailers with nutritional quality, the documentary encourages a cutting short of the chain between agriculture/farmers and households/ end-consumers. Among those individuals defying the trend of escalating consumer friskiness and

governmental over-regulation of food standards, are two German dumpster-divers whose nutrition (almost) exclusively consists of still-edible food-stuffs disposed by supermarkets; a French food bank that feeds discarded commercial food to the needy; an Italian Slow Food convention which serves a meal to patrons created entirely from remnant ingredients; and a French baker who started recycling remnant bakery goods as fuel for his oven thereby evading food waste producing climate-affecting gases such as methane. Viewing these pragmatic activists adds an upbeat tone to this grim topic. However, arguably, as smartly observed by one of the dumpster-divers, many of these initiatives may be seen as an alternative product of the “food system” rather than a solution to it.

“*Taste the Waste*” nicely illustrates the paradox and perversion which is characteristic of many global issues that arise from large-scale commercial interests which trump/defeat local living and well-being. Eluding narration by letting interviewees’ voices tell the story, the documentary manages to inform without being supercilious. Although the film reveals a ghastly imbalance between superabundance and deprivation and the complete turning upside down of the notion of food and waste, with its pragmatic approach it offers the opportunity for the necessary discourse that comes before change.

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