I
Hidden in Plain Sight

The slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined
like a boat carrying cholera.
—Georges Bataille

In 2004, six cattle escaped from the holding pen of an industrialized slaughterhouse in Omaha, Nebraska. According to the *Omaha World Herald,* which featured the story on its front page, four of the six cattle made an immediate run for the parking lot of nearby Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, where they were recaptured and transported back to be slaughtered. A fifth animal trotted down a main boulevard to the railroad yards that used to service Omaha's once-booming stockyards. The sixth, a cream-colored cow, accompanied the fifth animal partway before turning into an alleyway leading to another slaughterhouse.[1]

Workers from the first slaughterhouse and shotgun-armed Omaha police pursued the cream-colored cow into the alley, cornering it against a chain-link fence. After failing to herd the uncooperative cow into a waiting trailer, the police waved the workers back and opened fire on it. The cow ran a few steps, then fell, bellowing and struggling to rise while the police fired on it again.

The shooting took place during the ten-minute afternoon break for the workers at the second slaughterhouse. Venturing outside for fresh air, sunshine, and cigarettes, many of the slaughterhouse workers witnessed the killing of the animal firsthand, and during the lunch break the next day the news spread rapidly among the slaughterhouse employees, fueled by a graphic retelling by a quality-control worker who had been dispatched to the alleyway by slaughterhouse managers to observe the events and, later, to photograph the damage caused to the walls by errant shotgun pellets.

"They shot it, like, ten times," she said, her face livid with indignation, and her words sparked a heated lunch-table discussion about the injustice of the shooting and the ineptitude of the police. She began recounting the story of an unarmed man from Mexico who had recently been shot by the Omaha police. "They shot him just like they shot the cow," she asserted, to the nodding assent of her co-workers. "If he'd been white they wouldn't have shot him. You know, if you are Mexican in this country, the police will do anything to you."

I am driving south through the area of Omaha where the killing took place, and as I approach it a putrid odor, at once sharp and layered, seeps through the metal, rubber, and glass of my car, nestles in the cotton threads of my clothing, and forces a physical reaction that builds in my stomach and mouth before erupting acidly into my throat. I have experienced this sensation before, walking through the open-air northeastern Thai food markets of my childhood or driving by chocolate factories in New Jersey: smells so totalizing the nose sends them instantaneously to the tongue and plays them back as images in the mind.

As I exit the interstate, the odor intensifies. I am nearing the center of the industrialized slaughterhouse's olfactory kingdom. A roadside sign, erected by the city, reads, "To Report Manure Spills or Odor, Call 444-4919." An empty assertion of bureaucratic power over the unruliness of smell, it is one among numerous symptoms of the ongoing conflict between the messiness of mass killing and a society's—*our* society's—demand for a cheap, steady supply of physically and morally sterile meat fabricated under socially invisible conditions. Shit and smell: anomalous dangers to be reported to the authorities in an era in which meat comes into our homes antiseptically packaged in cellophane wrappings. To enable us to eat meat without the killers or the killing, without even—insofar as the smell, the manure, and the other components of organic life are concerned—the animals themselves: this is the logic that maps contemporary industrialized slaughterhouses, where in 2009 some 8,520,225,000 chickens, 245,768,000 turkeys, 113,600,000 pigs, 33,300,000 cattle, 22,767,000 ducks, 2,768,000 sheep and lambs, and 944,200 calves were killed for their meat in the United States.[2]

This book provides a firsthand account of contemporary, industrialized slaughter and does so to provoke reflection on how distance and concealment operate as mechanisms of power in modern society. Although we literally ingest its products in our everyday lives, the contemporary slaughterhouse is "a place that is no-place," physically hidden from sight by walls and socially veiled by the delegation of dirty, dangerous, and demeaning work to others tasked with carrying out the killing, skinning, and dismembering of living animals. Taking the contemporary slaughterhouse as an exemplary instance of how distance and concealment operate in our society, in this book I explore the work of industrialized killing from the perspective of those who carry it out, providing a close account of what it means to participate in the massive, routinized slaughter of animals for consumption by a larger society from which that work is hidden.[3]

Like its more self-evidently political analogues—the prison, the hospital, the nursing home, the psychiatric ward, the refugee camp, the detention center, the interrogation room, the execution chamber, the extermination camp—the modern industrialized slaughterhouse is a "zone of confinement," a "segregated and isolated territory," in the words of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, "invisible" and "on the whole inaccessible to ordinary members of society." Close attention to how the work of industrialized killing is performed might thus illuminate not only how the realities of industrialized animal slaughter are made tolerable but the ways distance and concealment operate in analogous social processes: war executed by volunteer armies; the subcontracting of organized terror to mercenaries; and the violence underlying the manufacture of thousands of items and components we make contact with in our everyday lives. Such scrutiny makes it possible, as social theorist Pierre Bourdieu puts it, "to think in a completely astonished and disconcerted way about things [we] thought [we] had always understood."[4]

The physical escape of cattle from the Omaha slaughterhouse is also a conceptual escape, a rupture of categories.

Slaughtered by the tens of millions annually, six of these animals became front-page news when they briefly roamed freely through the city streets. Conceptually dangerous, their escape threatened to surface power relations that work precisely through confinement, segregation, and invisibility within a society that considers the manure—and even the smell—of these animals something to be reported to the authorities. In escaping the confines of the slaughterhouse, the cattle become, like the anthropologist Mary Douglas's definition of dirt, "matter out of place." And just as Douglas uses matter out of place to explore the taken-for-granted worlds of matter in place, so too does the escape of the Omaha cattle signal what might be learned about distance and concealment through a close exploration of the work of industrialized killing.[5]

Those who profit directly from contemporary slaughterhouses also actively seek to safeguard the distance and concealment that keep the work of industrialized killing hidden from larger society. On March 17, 2011, the Iowa State House of Representatives passed, by a vote of 66 to 27, HF 589, "A Bill for an Act Relating to Offenses Involving Agricultural Operations, and Providing Penalties and Remedies" (a similar bill is also under consideration in the Florida legislature). Supported by lobbyists for Monsanto, the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, and the Iowa Cattlemen's, Pork Producers, Poultry, and Dairy Foods associations, the bill makes it a felony to gain access to and record what takes place in slaughterhouses and other animal and crop facilities without the consent of the facilities' owners. The broad scope and severe penalties of this attempt to further sequester industrialized killing and other contemporary practices of animal production from view are particularly highlighted in two sections of the bill, "Animal Facility

Interference" and "Animal Facility Fraud," which were explained in an earlier version of the bill, HF 431:

> INTERFERENCE. The bill prohibits a person from interfering with an animal facility. . . . This includes producing an audio or visual record which reproduces an image or sound occurring on or in the location, or possessing or distributing the record. It also prohibits a person from . . . entering onto the location, if the person has notice that the location is not open to the public. The severity of the offense is based on whether there has been a previous conviction. For the first conviction, the person is guilty of an aggravated misdemeanor, and for a second or subsequent conviction, the person is guilty of a class "D" felony.
>
> FRAUD. The bill prohibits a person from committing fraud, by obtaining access to an animal facility . . . by false pretenses for the purpose of committing an act not authorized by the owner, or making a false statement as part of an application to be employed at the location. The severity of the offense is based on whether there has been a previous conviction. For the first conviction, the person is guilty of an aggravated misdemeanor, and for a second or subsequent conviction, the person is guilty of a class "D" felony.[6]

The penalties for these offenses are severe:

> CONVICTION FOR OFFENSES—PENALTIES. A class "D" felony is punishable by confinement for no

> more than five years and a fine of at least $750 but not more than $7,500. An aggravated misdemeanor is punishable by confinement for no more than two years and a fine of at least $625 but not more than $6,250.
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> CIVIL PENALTIES. In addition to the criminal penalties, a person suffering damages resulting from the commission of tampering or interference may bring an action in the district court against the person causing the damages to recover an amount equaling three times all actual and consequential damages, and court costs and reasonable attorney fees. In addition, a court may grant a petitioner equitable relief.[7]

The bill specifically criminalizes unauthorized physical access to industrialized slaughterhouses, unauthorized visual, audio, and print documentation of what takes place in slaughterhouses, and the possession and distribution of those unauthorized records regardless of who originally produced them.

A section of the bill detailing how the boundaries of the industrialized slaughterhouse and other animal production facilities are to be legally demarcated states: "A person has notice that an animal facility is not open to the public if the person is provided notice before entering onto the facility, or the person refuses to immediately leave the facility after being informed to leave. The notice may be in the form of a written or verbal communication by the owner, a fence or other enclosure designed to exclude intruders or contain animals, or a sign posted which is reasonably likely to come to the attention of an intruder and which indicates that entry is forbidden."[8]

Here, then, is a legal reinforcement of the industrialized slaughterhouse's physical isolation. The fences and walls that quarantine the work of industrialized killing from larger society are specifically described in the bill as containing animals and excluding "intruders"; these physical barriers receive a special legal status that supersedes the legal status of other, less socially fraught fences and enclosures. What is more, "animal facility fraud" is invented as a new criminal category, applicable to those who seek employment in the industrialized slaughterhouse in order to reveal what takes place inside its walls. Like the physical walls of the slaughterhouse, slaughterhouse work is set apart as something that contains specific prohibitions and criminal sanctions inapplicable to more socially neutral forms of employment. Finally, the act of recording images and audio inside industrialized slaughterhouses as well as the mere possession and distribution of such recordings are criminalized, investing such images with a particular legal condemnation that sets them, too, apart from other images and audio recordings.[9]

The scope of the proposed bill and the severity of its penalties are indicators of the deep fear held by slaughterhouse owners and other financial beneficiaries of animal-production facilities about what might result if the work of industrialized killing and other contemporary animal-production practices were made visible. Much like the response provoked by the escaped Omaha cattle, its overt targeting of those who intentionally reveal what is hidden in plain sight signals the existence of power relations characterized by confinement, segregation, and invisibility.

An examination of the everyday realities of contemporary slaughterhouse work illuminates not only the ways in which the slaughterhouse is overtly segregated from society as a whole, but—paradoxically and perhaps more important—

how the work of killing is hidden even from those who participate directly in it. The workers who reacted with outrage and disgust to the shooting of a single cow by the Omaha police participate in the killing of more than 2,400 cattle on a daily basis. The immediacy of the killing by the police of one animal provoked a revulsion that is utterly absent in the day-to-day operations of the slaughterhouse, during which an animal is killed every twelve seconds. Distance and concealment shield, sequester, and neutralize the work of killing even, or especially, where it might be expected to be least hidden.

Exploring industrialized killing from this vantage point draws attention to the distance we create through walls, screens, catwalks, fences, security checkpoints, and geographic zones of isolation and confinement. It reveals the distance we create by constructing and reinforcing racial, gender, citizenship, and education hierarchies that coerce others into performing dangerous, demeaning, and violent tasks from which we directly benefit. It makes visible the distance we create with language—in the ways we avoid precise descriptions of repugnant things, inventing instead less dangerous names and phrases for them.[10] And, by employing a method of ethnographic immersion, it also uncovers the distance those who study the social world often create between themselves and the world(s) they claim the expertise to describe, analyze, and explain. In short, this is an account of industrialized killing that illuminates distance in four metrics: physical, social, linguistic, and methodological.

In attending to these metrics of distance, I engage two broad formulations about the relation between power and sight. The first, articulated by the historical sociologist Norbert Elias in his monumental work *The Civilizing Process,* posits "segregation, 'removing out of sight,' [and] concealment as the major method of the civilizing process." Tracing the dual processes of Western state formation and manners, Elias argues that concealment and the *creation* of distance mark the primary relation between power and sight in the contemporary era: "It will be seen again and again how characteristic of the whole process that we call civilization is this movement of segregation, this hiding 'behind the scenes' of what has become distasteful."[11]

Elias traces this broad movement in Western societies by demonstrating how, concurrent with the centralization of violence in the modern state, physical acts and states of being such as nudity, defecation, urinating, spitting, nose blowing, sexual intercourse, the killing of animals, and a host of others were increasingly identified as repugnant and removed from view. Drawing on Western etiquette manuals to document changes in public standards for bodily functions, nakedness, sexual relations, table manners, attitudes toward children, and the treatment of animals from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, Elias convincingly reveals the following pattern: what once occurred in the open without provoking reactions of either moral or physical disgust has been increasingly segregated, confined, and hidden from sight. Manners surrounding the eating of meat are identified as particular historical evidence: table portions grow smaller, making meat less identifiably animal. "Carving knives also shrink, all the less to recall the instrument that deals the death stroke. . . . 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."[12]

"Civilization," which commonly presents itself to those living in contemporary industrialized societies and urban areas as a ready-made product suitable for inculcation in children and "barbarians," is in fact a long historical process still in the making, the political implications of which have yet to be fully understood. Key to an understanding of these implications is an exploration of what it means that a central characteristic of what are referred to as development and progress relies on the distancing and concealment of morally and physically repugnant practices rather than their elimination or transformation.

The account of industrialized slaughterhouse work in this book offers a detailed exploration of precisely the kind of phenomenon identified by Elias: a labor considered morally and physically repellent by the vast majority of society that is sequestered from view rather than eliminated or transformed. Considering this hidden work from the standpoint of those who perform it, however, also makes relevant an alternative formulation about the relation between power and sight that stands in contrast to Elias's emphasis on segregation and confinement. In this alternative formulation, a central mechanism of power in the contemporary era works by *removing* barriers to sight, by eradicating obstacles that create possibilities for darkness and concealment, and by installing instead what the social theorist Michel Foucault identified as "continuous and permanent systems of surveillance."[13]

Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's architectural plan for a new kind of prison, which he called the Panopticon, Foucault outlines how visibility functions as a mechanism of power:

> The principle was this. A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the centre of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of

> the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an overseer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the rings of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection.

In Bentham's proposal for prison reform, surveillance—internalized by the prisoners to the point where they would police themselves—would replace overt physical punishment as the dominant mechanism of control over individuals. For Foucault, this ideal of total visibility underlies the application of modern disciplinary power across a variety of settings: prisons, insane asylums, military barracks, schools, and factories. It is a mechanism of power in which all is brought to light and nothing is hidden: "In the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point. The perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of malveillance."[14]

In an analysis of sight and power from the perspective of the state rather than the specific architectural instance of the Panopticon, James C. Scott also identifies the desire for increased visibility as a hallmark of the operation of power. Whether it be trees or people, Scott argues, a central characteristic of modern power structures is their impulse to rearrange and, if necessary, exterminate and create anew their subjects in ways that approximate an ideal of perfect visibility. This visibility, in turn, serves fantastical and fanatical projects of control, often under the legitimizing rhetoric of improvement and development of the very populations being fit into the grid. Mixed-growth forests are replaced with trees planted in straight lines conducive to counting and cutting; intercropping gives way to industrialized monocropping; ambiguous loyalties in overlapping systems of authority yield to clear-cut national borders and citizenship categories; and nomadic peoples are fixed in place and assigned surnames for the purposes of taxation, control, and "development." As with the Panopticon, this is a logic of power directly linked to an *expansion* of sight, a *leveling* of obstacles to visibility and transparency.[15]

Scott's state-centric perspective is later reversed when he focuses on the pre-1950s history of non-state spaces in the Southeast Asian massif, an area he terms Zomia. Richly describing the state-repelling geographic, agricultural, cultural, and linguistic technologies and tactics that constituted and defended one of the largest continuous non-state spaces in the world from encroachment by the rice-paddy state, Scott nonetheless concludes that these spaces are all but extinct, overrun by postcolonial lowland states employing a variety of strategies and tactics that materially share a powerful arsenal of what he terms "distance-demolishing technologies." The list of these technologies includes all-weather roads, bridges, railroads, modern weapons, telegraph, telephone, airpower, helicopters, and modern information technologies, such as global navigation satellite systems.[16]

These technologies are an extensification of the Panopticon: they work to expand the range of vision of a controlling overseer and, with that expansion, to come closer to realizing the fantasy of total transparency, the banishment of concealment. Power structures work here by "demolishing distance," both the distance that prevents the creation of self-policing individuals who have internalized an external gaze (in Foucault's disciplinary power) and the distance that depends on altitude, rugged terrain, and the cultivation of root crops to repel advances by lowland, labor-intensive rice kingdoms (in Scott's state power). The overall arch of this alternative formulation of the relation between sight and power is unmistakable: power operates by collapsing distances and exposing concealed spaces.

How might these broad characterizations about the relation of modern power to sight be understood together? One advances the idea that power operates through the creation of distance and concealment and that our understandings of "progress" and "civilization" are inseparable from, and perhaps even synonymous with, the concealment (but not elimination) of what is increasingly rendered physically and morally repugnant. Its alternative counters that power operates by collapsing distance, by making visible what is concealed.

The account of industrialized slaughter offered in these pages demonstrates how these seemingly contradictory characterizations relate in practice. By concentrating their vast historical sweep in an examination of what it means to actually carry out the work of contemporary killing in a society that hides such work in plain sight, I show how surveillance and concealment work together, how quarantine is possible in, and perhaps even enabled by, conditions of total visibility. Attention to industrialized killing from the vantage point of those who perform it demonstrates the capacity for sequestration and surveillance to exist in symbiosis as mechanisms of power in contemporary society. And as I explore in the book's final chapter, the potential for this symbiosis carries implications for movements from across the political spectrum that engage in what I term a politics of sight, defined as organized, concerted attempts to make visible what is hidden and to breach, literally or figuratively, zones of confinement in order to bring about social and political transformation.

This book also, of course, itself enacts a politics of sight by making visible a massive, routinized work of killing that many would prefer to keep hidden. It breaches the zone of confinement that is industrialized slaughter, challenging both those in broader society who want to consume the products of the slaughterhouse while keeping its realities hidden from view and those who financially profit from—and therefore seek to criminalize any unauthorized revelations about—the practices of contemporary industrialized killing. To make these practices visible from the perspective of those who perform them, I participated directly in the work of industrialized killing, gaining full-time employment in a slaughterhouse in Omaha from June through December 2004. During these five and a half months, I worked full-time on the kill floor, Monday through Friday, for nine to twelve hours a day, starting between 5:00 and 7:00 A.M. and finishing between 4:00 and 6:30 P.M.

Seeking employment as an entry-level worker without informing the management that I intended to write about my experiences, I started out as a liver hanger in the cooler at $8.50 an hour; moved to the chutes, where I drove live cattle into the knocking box to be shot; and finally was promoted to quality control, a position that paid $9.50 an hour and gave me access to almost every part of the kill floor. Serendipity and improvisation governed my movement through these different positions in the slaughterhouse, but given my interest in how industrialized killing might generate insights into the operation of distance and concealment in society at large, I could not have chosen three better jobs. Liver hanging in the frigid cooler put me at maximal distance from the killing, chute work put me into personal contact with the live animals and their slaughter, and my quality-control work brought me directly into the internal hierarchies of the slaughterhouse and made me a participant in its adversarial relationships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors.[17]

My movement from one position at the slaughterhouse to another structured not only what I saw but how I saw it and how I gave meaning to it. Once inside as an active participant, I found myself inextricably caught up in its networks of power, its "webs of local associations." In addition to the assumptions that surrounded my various jobs in the slaughterhouse, my self-presentation, appearance, and mannerisms combined to create certain interpretations of me by others. Primary, perhaps, was my appearance: the son of one Southeast Asian and one white parent, I have dark-brown skin, black hair, and narrow brown eyes. In the employment trailer, these features helped me get hired. On the kill floor, they were often misread: many co-workers were incredulous to learn that I was not Mexican; still others could not understand that I was Asian but not Chinese or Vietnamese. My bilingual English and Thai, my halting Spanish, and the relative confidence, trained through years of formal education, with which I voiced opinions and asked questions both impeded and facilitated my interactions with co-workers, supervisors, and USDA inspectors. Not least, I was a male in a male-dominated workplace, which made it extremely difficult for me to form relationships with the twelve or so females who worked on the kill floor. All these factors and more affected how I was seen by others and, consequently, what I was able to see.[18]

In addition to my hours working on the kill floor, I also spent time with slaughterhouse workers and USDA inspectors outside work, informing them in each instance of my intention of writing a book and obtaining their consent to use information they provided. In December 2004, finding the ethical dilemmas involved with my quality-control work untenable, I resigned and left the slaughterhouse, after which I spent an additional year and a half in Omaha conducting interviews with slaughterhouse workers and assisting community organizing groups on slaughterhouse-related issues.

I entered the kill floor to provide an account of contemporary industrialized slaughter, not to expose a specific place. Had the latter been my goal, I would have had ample opportunity when, in a catalyst for my resignation, a USDA inspector approached me and asked me to testify about my knowledge of food-safety practices in the slaughterhouse. Based on my commitment not to implicate specific individuals or places in my research, I declined to testify, and the slaughterhouse I worked in remains unnamed in this book. Likewise, most individual names have been changed.[19]

The slaughterhouse I worked in continues to operate today. It employs close to eight hundred nonunionized workers, the vast majority immigrants and refugees from Central and South America, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. It generates over $820 million annually in sales to distributors within and outside the United States and ranks among the top handful of U.S. cattle-slaughtering and beef-processing facilities in volume of production. The line speed on the kill floor is approximately three hundred cattle per hour. In a typical workday, between twenty-two and twenty-five hundred cattle are killed there, adding up to well over ten thousand cattle killed per five-day week, or more than half a million cattle slaughtered each year.

In this book I employ a narrative format, often quoting conversations verbatim and letting the sensory, corporeal complexity of the slaughterhouse take precedence over neatly hewed analytical insights. My account relies centrally on context, with an emphasis on little things and multiple voices, and with a tolerance for ambiguity: I strive, in short, for "a writing strategy in which curiosity is not overwhelmed by coherence."[20]

This narrative format reverses a long-standing tradition in academic writing in which a deductive, often linear analytical argument structures the writing; in this tradition, if ethnographic fieldwork notes or verbatim quotations from conversations make an appearance at all, they do so as docile, heavily policed excerpts. Typically, these truncated descriptions or conveniently supportive quotations from informants are strategically sprinkled throughout the text to bolster both the analytic argument and the ethnographic authority of the author. By aiming for a writing strategy molded largely by the requirements of narrative rather than analysis, I hope to make room for the ambiguities, silences, and multiplicities in the experience of the work of killing. This strategy also challenges the reader to use these narratives as a way to think through what it means, from the perspective of lived experience, to perform the daily work of industrialized killing.

"My whole work has come to resemble a terrain of which I have made a thorough, geodetic survey, not from a desk with pen and ruler, but by touch, by getting down on all fours, on my stomach, and crawling over the ground inch by inch, and this over an endless period of time in all conditions of weather," wrote Henry Miller in "Reflections on Writing." In the pages that follow, I abandon desk and ruler and provide a close-range account of the daily work of industrialized killing, of what it means to smell, see, hear, taste, and touch it. This account is sensory but not intentionally sensational, not merely another contribution to an "anthropology that seeks out the loathsome and disgusting and delights in it," in the words of Ian Miller. After all, the persistent, dull ache of a wet glove against a bare hand in the near-freezing slaughterhouse cooler and the pen scratching hurriedly over the mandatory food-safety paperwork in the quality-control office are as much a part of what it means to perform the work of modern industrialized killing as the cutting smell of diarrhea in the chutes and the soft, mechanical *pffft-pffft* of the captive-bolt gun penetrating the skulls of steers.[21]

You may find the descriptions in the pages ahead both physically and morally repugnant. Recognize, however, that this reaction of disgust, this impulse to thumb through the pages so as to locate, separate, and segregate the sterile, abstract arguments from the flat, ugly, day-in, day-out minutiae of the work of killing, is the same impulse that isolates the slaughterhouse from society as a whole and, indeed, that sequesters and neutralizes the work of killing even for those who work within the slaughterhouse itself. The detailed accounts that follow are not merely incidental to or illustrative of a more important theoretical argument about how distance and concealment operate as mechanisms of power in contemporary society. They *are* the argument.

VI
Killing at Close Range

Job Number 8, Presticker*: uses hand knife to make incision along length of the cow's neck, giving the sticker access to jugular veins and carotid arteries. Must take care not to be kicked in face, arms, chest, neck, or abdominal area by cows that are reflexively kicking, or kicking because they have not been knocked completely unconscious.*

"Guys, no more livers next week."

It is James, the red-hat supervisor in charge of the cooler, and he mumbles the words as he hands Ramón and me our Friday paychecks in the warming room while we take off our gear and get ready to head home. "But don't worry," he quickly adds, "we'll try to find some work for you guys. Just come back on Monday and we'll try to find something else."

We learn later that Russia or Korea—nobody really seems to know which—has temporarily stopped importing livers, and the management has decided to stop packing them until demand picks up again. And just like that, with two days' warning, Ramón and I find ourselves out of our jobs. Driving home, Ramón is anxious, asking me repeatedly what we are going to do, whether we are going to be fired, telling me he doesn't know how to use a knife and is not sure what other kind of work he can do. I commiserate, but internally I find the possibility of a break from the endless monotony of the cooler exciting and am hopeful that this will provide an opportunity to see a different part of the slaughterhouse. On the way home we stop at a Mexican grocery store, where Ramón picks up two tamales and a forty-ounce Miller Genuine Draft. I buy cheese, chips, and salsa. As we carry our bags to the car, Ramón asks me again whether we will have to look for another job. I tell him that I just don't know.

On Monday morning, Ramón and I stand nervously in the hallway opposite the kill floor office, hands in our pockets. Javier walks by whistling. We stop him, and he says he doesn't know what we'll be doing, but we should change into our work clothes and wait near the cafeteria. After about fifteen minutes of standing around in the hallway outside the cafeteria while kill floor workers rush past us to get to their stations, Ramón decides to check in the cafeteria to see whether someone is waiting for us in there.

Equally nervous at the thought of being out of work, and, like Ramón, knowing that each second that passes after the kill floor starts operating bodes ill for our chances of being given another job, I head onto the kill floor, where I see Bill Sloan, the son of the manager, talking with Ricardo, the red-hat supervisor.

"Do you guys know where I can work?" I ask.

"Do you have any knife experience?" Bill asks.

"No, but I can learn."

Ricardo shakes his head ominously.

"Guys, do you have anything outside in the chutes? I used to work on a ranch, and I'm good with live cattle," I plead.

Ricardo and Bill glance at each other, and Bill nods his head slightly. They both talk into their radios, then Ricardo motions for me to follow him through the clean side of the kill floor, where a line of white hats is standing ready for the first carcass of the day to make its way down the chain, and duck under a half-open garage door onto the gray-hat, hide-on, dirty side. There the line has already started, and the cattle swinging from the chain appear increasingly lifelike as we move down the line against the flow of production. Finally we arrive at a raised platform behind a gated area. A man in a black T-shirt leans over a waist-high barrier, a cylindrical silver gun in his hands, and every six seconds or so there is a *pffft, pffft* as the killing bolt strikes the cow, then retracts back into the gun in the man's hands, after which the cow falls forward onto the green conveyor belt below.

We climb the steps to the platform, and as we edge our way past the shooter, I can see the glistening sweat on his neck, even though it is only half past seven in the morning. Passing through an aluminum swinging door, we are suddenly beyond the walls of the slaughterhouse in a half-open enclosure. The odor is sharp and immediate, an acidic mixture of manure, urine, and vomit that stings my eyes and throat. Cattle, hooves clapping against the floor, push their way nose to rump in a continuous stream of hide up a chute with concrete walls about four and a half feet high and a foot thick. Two men stand on either side of the chute using metal-tipped prongs connected by wires to a live electrical line, plastic paddles, and a leather whip to push, nudge, and shove the cattle one by one through a dark hole at the end of the chute. There a conveyor catches them under the belly and lifts them off their feet, propelling them forward through a metal box to the knocking box, where the man in the black T-shirt stands ready to shoot them.

Covering the whole area is a low tin roof, only three or four feet from the top of my hard hat, dully lit by long fluorescent bulbs encased in plastic covers that are speckled with bits of feces. On either side of the chutes, three foot–wide concrete walkways are bordered by chest-high walls with plastic sheeting that stretches from the top of the walls to the frame holding up the roof.

From the hole in the wall that leads into the slaughterhouse, the chute descends at a steady slope for about fifteen feet before splitting into two parallel chutes. Known collectively as the serpentine, these chutes lead down into a circular area about forty feet in diameter called the squeeze pen. The cattle's movement from the squeeze pen up the serpentine is controlled by a series of gates and trapdoors. Beyond the squeeze pen, the cramped chute leads into a huge room with a peaked ceiling fifty feet high that is open to the air near the rafters. The enormous floor space is divided into pens with metal gates; some are empty, while others hold groups of cattle. This area is followed by the scale room, where cattle are weighed, and a raised concrete ledge where transport trucks unload their cattle.

Ricardo leaves me at the top of the chute in the charge of a short stocky man with a thin mustache named Camilo. In addition to the two of us, three other men work the area between the squeeze pen and the top of the chute. Directly across from Camilo and me a short thin man named Gilberto whistles and prods the cattle through the opening in the slaughterhouse wall. The squeeze pen and lower serpentines are worked by Fernando, a tall nineteen-year-old who immediately asks me if I belong to a gang, and Raul, a quiet man in his thirties who wears a blue bandanna in place of a hard hat and listens to a Walkman.

Gilberto and Camilo explain that our job is to "keep the line tight": to keep the cattle moving up the chutes and into the knocking box. Most of the cattle are moved into the primary serpentine chute, but five or six are also kept in the secondary chute in case there is a lull in the first chute. The cattle are organized in lots by seller, and when Fernando or Raul calls "Lot!" one of the upper chute workers uses an orange hide marker to write "LOT" on the back of the last animal from that group.

The size of a lot is determined solely by the number of cattle sold to the slaughterhouse from a single source: it can be as small as one or as large as several hundred. To be able to track the overall quality and age distribution of cattle from a source, lots are kept together when they are killed, and when the knocker sees the orange "LOT" on the back of an animal, he blows a loud air horn that signals to the supervisors and the workers responsible for keeping track of the lots that one lot is ending and another is beginning.

Camilo hands me an electric shocker and emphasizes that I should not use it when a USDA inspector is present. Because there are only two approaches to the chute area, one from the back through the cattle pens and the other from the front through the kill floor, the chute workers have developed a signal: a short whistle followed by a finger pointing at the eyes means that an inspector is coming over.

After a few hours in the chutes, it becomes clear to me that both Gilberto and Camilo use the electric cattle prods extensively, sometimes sticking them under the animals' tails and into their anuses. The cattle jump and kick when shocked in this way, and many also bellow sharply. Gilberto uses the prod in almost rote fashion, shocking practically every animal, especially as they near the hole in the slaughterhouse wall that leads into the knocking box. Even when the cattle are tightly packed, with the nose of one animal pushed up against the rear of the animal in front of it—sometimes even with its head squished between the hind legs of the animal in front of it—Gilberto still delivers the electrical shock, often causing the cow to mount the animal in front of it.

Already caked in feces from their time in the feedlot, the transport truck, and the slaughterhouse holding pens, the cattle are packed so closely together as they push their way up the chutes that the defecation of one animal often smears the head of the animal immediately behind it. The impact of hooves against concrete splatters feces and vomit up over the chute walls, covering our arms and shirts, and sometimes hitting us in the face.

Running up the serpentine with swinging heads, the cattle are no more than a few inches away from us, separated only by the torso-high sides of the chute. Some poke their noses up over the chute wall to sniff at our arms and stomachs. I can run a bare hand over their smooth, wet noses, a millisecond of charged, unmediated physical contact. At close range, even caked in feces and vomit, the creatures are magnificent, awe-inspiring. Some are muscular and powerful, their horns sharp and strong. Others are soft and velvety, their coats sleek and sensuous. Thick eyelashes are raised to reveal bulging eyeballs with whites visible beneath darkly colored irises. I see my distorted reflection outlined in the convex mirror of their glossy eyes: a man wearing a hard hat, wielding a bright orange paddle. I look crazed, a carnival-mirror grotesque, upholder of a system that authorizes physical, linguistic, and social concealment to allow those who consume the products of this violence to remain blind to it. And what of the cattle, what of each of the twenty-five hundred creatures that are run through this chute each day? What do they see as they race by? What do they experience in the final moments before their deaths?

After months of the sterile, interminable monotony of hanging livers in the cooler, I am shocked by this confrontation with live cattle. Almost immediately, I resent Gilberto and Camilo for using electric prods (hotshots) on the animals, and after Camilo leaves the upper-chute area to take Raul's place in the lower chutes so that he can go to a doctor's appointment, I lean his prod against the back wall and pick up one of the orange plastic paddles instead. The rest of the day turns into an emotionally and physically draining blur of the "Hey, hey, yah, yah" call of the chute men, the slapping of the plastic paddle against hides, the bellowing and rearing of rolling-eyed cattle, and the incessant *pffft, pffft* of the knocking gun as it punctures one skull after another for hours on end.

Now that I am working on the dirty side as a gray hat, I am supposed to use the dirty men's bathroom and dirty men's lunchroom. We are the dirty men, no longer meant to interact with the clean men, the white hats. The chutes and pens, though, provide an informal gathering place of their own. Maintenance workers, supervisors, and USDA inspectors all use the semi-open area of the chutes as a place to take a cigarette break, to escape the confinement of the kill floor, to stand and talk while the stream of cattle runs by.

That afternoon, finished before the rest of the kill floor because the work of the chute men is done when the last animal is run through the chutes (it will be another forty-five minutes before that same animal is hanging in the cooler as two perfectly split half-sides), I wait for Ramón in the hallway. When he emerges from the clean men's bathroom almost an hour later, his hair and shirt are damp with sweat, and his clothes and arms are covered with small white specks of intestine. Driving home, he tells me he started out the day on the dirty side, unshackling the chain from the hind leg of the animals after they were attached to the overhead rail with a sturdier hook. He could not keep up with the work, and after the morning break they moved him to the gut room, where he threaded small intestines onto a coil that releases jets of water into them to clean them. Ramón complains that the gut room smells terrible, and that the work is hard, but he can probably get used to it. Then, after a few minutes of silence as he pulls bits of intestine out of his hair and tosses them through the open window, he says that he is going to look for another job since there is no future in this plant. As I drop him off, we agree that it will be better to drive to work separately from now on since work in the chutes begins at 6:30 and ends around 4:00, while work in the gut room begins after 7:00 and does not end until close to 5:00.

Next day in the chute the disagreement between me and the other chute workers over the use of the electric prods grows more heated. Camilo has replaced the knocker, and I am in Camilo's place in the upper chutes, standing across from Gilberto, using the plastic paddles to move the cattle. Both Gilberto and Fernando soon start yelling at me to use the electric prod. It is not just a matter of keeping the line tight, of making sure that there is little or no space between the animals, but also of keeping the line moving as quickly as possible so that the knocker and shackler can build up a surplus of stunned and shackled animals before the indexer spaces them evenly on the rails. Without the electric prods, the momentum of the line of animals is sufficient to move the cattle through the opening in the slaughterhouse wall into the knocking box, but not at the pace that the chute workers want. When shocked, the animals jump into the box, moving the line more quickly and reducing the probability of an animal's balking and holding up the line behind it.

Once, when the line moves too slowly for Fernando's liking, he sprints up the walkway from the squeeze pen, grabs the plastic paddle out of my hand, and shoves the electric prod into it. "You motherfucking pussy!" he yells. "Do your job and use the fucking hotshot!"

"Why?" I yell back. "What's the point of shocking them? They're all moving through the line anyway."

"The point is pain and torture," Fernando retorts, laughing. "Now do your motherfucking job and keep this line tight!" he screams, sauntering back down the walkway to the squeeze pen.

Across the chutes, Gilberto looks at me and shrugs before shoving his electric prod into the anus of one of the animals, causing it to kick back and then lunge forward into the animal in front of it.

"Why do you have to do that?" I yell at him.

He shrugs again, smiles, and keeps working. Furious, I repeat the question.

"Okay," he finally shouts back; "you wanna know why I use this?" He shoves the tip of the electric prod across the chute in my direction. "I use this because I like to have my work. And if we don't keep these cows moving through, they're gonna call us up to the office and we're going to get fired. That's why." Later that day we talk some more, and I learn that Gilberto has three children, aged twelve, nine, and six, and today is their first day of school.

By my third day in the chutes, after several warnings from Steve, the red-hat supervisor in charge of the area on the dirty side that includes the chutes and the pens, to "keep it tight," I too increasingly rely on the electric prod. The point of using the prod is not "pain and torture," in Fernando's mocking words, but rather avoiding conflict with co-workers and supervisors; in addition, once the abstract goal of keeping the line tight takes precedence over the individuality of the animals, it really does make sense to apply the electric shock regularly. Rather than electrocuting an individual animal, the prod keeps a steady stream of raw material entering the plant, satisfies co-workers and supervisors, and saves me from having to expend the energy it takes to move the animals with plastic paddles.

I try to take advantage of my proximity to the knocking box to learn something about the work of shooting the animals. One of the red-hat supervisors is temporarily manning the knocking gun for Camilo, and I ask him whether I could be trained to do that work. He says, "Yeah, I'll train you later. Now get back there and keep the line tight."

Later in the day, when Camilo is back at the knocking box, I ask him to teach me how to do the job. He tells me there are different controls in the knocking box area: one button powers the entire system; a lever controls the conveyor that runs under the animals after they enter the knocking box and lifts them off their feet; a second lever controls the side walls that move in and constrict the animal to keep it as still as possible before it is shot. Finally, there is a control for the overhead chains, which lift the cattle off the lower platform once they are shot and shackled.

The cylindrical gun is suspended in the air over the knocking box's conveyor, balanced with a counterweight and powered by compressed air supplied via a yellow tube. Camilo tells me that using it is not easy: the knocker has only one shot, and although the animals' bodies are restrained, their heads thrash wildly. It takes a combination of patience and good timing to hit an animal squarely in the skull about three inches above the eyes.

After shooting a couple of cattle, Camilo motions for me to take the gun. I do so while he controls the conveyor and the side restrainers. I am so focused on the gun that I do not even notice the animal that comes through on the conveyor. Its head swings back and forth wildly, eyes bulging. Then it stops moving for a moment, and I hold the gun against its skull and pull the trigger. Nothing happens. The gun has to be pressed harder against the animal's skull for the safety to be deactivated. I press again, harder, and pull the trigger. The gun recoils in my hands, and I see a hole in the animal's skull. Blood sputters, squirts, and then begins flowing steadily from the hole and the animal's eyes roll up into its shaking head. Its neck is extended and convulsing, and its tongue hangs out the side of its mouth. I look at Camilo, who motions for me to fire again. I shoot, and the animal's head falls heavily onto the conveyor below. Camilo advances the conveyor and the animal drops onto the lower conveyor, where it is shackled. There is already another animal in the knocking box, head swinging and eyes large in terror. I shoot two more animals, then Camilo takes the gun from my hands, warning, "They're looking at us." Two red-hat supervisors are standing farther down the kill floor, gesturing for me to return to the chutes.

Back in the chutes, Fernando asks, "Why you out there doing that? You want to be the knocker?" When I say maybe, he responds, "No, you don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. Nobody wants to do that. You'll have bad dreams." This is the same man who told me that the point of using electric prods was "pain and torture."

Fernando's reaction turns out to be common. In the lunchroom, heating up my food, I talk to Jill, one of the two quality-control workers. We know each other from earlier conversations about dealing with the USDA inspectors when they watch the liver-hanging work.

"So, are you working in the pens?" she asks.

"Yeah."

"How do you like it? Do you like it more than the livers?"

I shrug noncommittally.

Jill holds her nose.

"Yeah, it smells pretty bad out there," I agree, then ask, "Do you know when the livers are going to start up again?"

"No, I don't know."

"I want them to train me to do the knocking," I offer.

She looks up, surprised. "You want to be a knocker?" Her voice is incredulous.

I shrug again.

"I already feel guilty enough as it is," she says.

"Do you really feel guilty?"

"Yeah. Especially when I go out there and see their cute little faces."

"Well, basically if you work here you're killing cattle," I say defensively. "I mean, aren't we all killing these cattle in one way or another?"

There is an uncomfortable silence.

"How long have you been working here?" I ask, shifting the conversation, and I learn that she has been at the slaughterhouse for three years. She has taken classes to qualify for a USDA inspector's job, but does not want to apply for one because the work involves traveling and she has three small children at home.

The next morning, I am at work early for the free annual employee checkup provided by a company called Healthy and Well and paid for by the slaughterhouse. As an incentive to come to work an hour early, have your blood drawn to check for cholesterol levels, do a flexibility test (you sit with legs extended and see how far forward you can reach), have your blood pressure taken, and fill out a short questionnaire about your eating, sleeping, drinking, and smoking habits, the company provides a free breakfast of scrambled eggs, milk, juice, cereal, bananas, grapes, bagels, and cream cheese.

Rick, the safety coordinator, is responsible for enrolling employees for the checkup, and I sit across from him with a plate of scrambled eggs. When I tell him I want to be trained as a knocker he coughs on his eggs, then after a few minutes says, "You seem like the kind of person who would be really good for a desk job." It fits with a running conversation we have been having in which Rick has been encouraging me to start taking classes at the community college nearby and start looking for some other kind of work.

Later, I see Christian, Umberto, and Tyler, the railers from the cooler, and I join them. Christian and Umberto need to start working and eat and leave quickly. When I tell Tyler I shot three animals with the knocking gun the day before, he urges me to stop. "Man, that will mess you up. Knockers have to see a psychologist or a psychiatrist or whatever they're called every three months."

"Really? Why?"

"Because, man, that's killing," he says; "that shit will fuck you up for real."

I have no opportunity to become a knocker because my next day in the chutes, the fourth, is also my last. The day begins poorly. I am late to work, leaving me five minutes to get my gear on and get out to the chutes. Within minutes, an animal kicks up a big chunk of excrement that hits me squarely in the right eye. It stings, and I rinse it out with water from the sink at the knocker's stand, but I am worried about infection. Despite my increased use of the electric prod, Gilberto and, especially, Fernando continue to yell at me to "use the fucking hotshot," "watch your fucking side [of the chutes]," and "turn off the fucking fan." This last concerns an ongoing fight between Fernando and me over whether to turn on a large circular fan meant to provide some air circulation in the suffocating confines of the upper-chute area.

An hour into our work, a large brown heifer collapses in the knocking box just before it reaches the conveyor belt, blocking the passageway and shutting down the production line. Four USDA inspectors arrive, along with Roger Sloan, the kill floor manager, and his son Bill. They shoot the animal with the portable handheld knocking gun and attach a cable to its front legs. A winch drags the cow through the knocking box by its legs, clearing the way for the killing to resume.

Moments later, another animal collapses just inside the passageway leading from the squeeze pen into the primary chute. Steve, the red-hat supervisor, comes out, looks at the downed animal, and tells Raul and Fernando to route the remaining cattle up the secondary chute. A few minutes later Miguel, another red-hat supervisor, comes over and after talking into his radio orders everyone to take an early morning break. After the last animals are moved through the chute into the knocking box, the line is shut down, and the downed animal is shot with the portable knocking gun and dragged by the winch through the chute into the slaughterhouse.

Unbelievably, forty minutes after we return from morning break a third cow collapses in the chute. Lower down the chute, Gilberto has been shocking the cattle with the electric prod; I am using a plastic paddle to coax the animals through the hole into the knocking box. Shocked from the rear by Gilberto's electric prod, a cow mounts the steer in front of it. When the plastic paddle I am using to push the front-most animal into the knocking box spooks the animal behind it, the line of cattle in front of the cow that has mounted the steer pushes back, flipping the cow over onto its back and pinning it between the two sides of the chute. The cow struggles to right itself, but with the narrow passageway and downward slope slick with feces and vomit, it cannot get up. It soon lies still, breathing heavily and jerking its head back and forth, while the animals behind it come to a halt. Gilberto is furious, pointing at me with the electric prod and yelling, "You did this!"

Alerted by the stopped line of cattle, Fernando sprints up from the squeeze pen. "Good fucking job, Tim," he says when he sees the downed cow. Gilberto grabs a pair of metal rings off the wall behind him and tosses them to Fernando while I stand back against the wall. Fernando inserts the rings through the cow's nostrils, clamps them shut, and attaches them to a yellow rope, which he jerks heavily, trying to make the cow, now lying flat on its back, sit up and flip over onto its legs. Steve and several line workers from inside who have been alerted to the problem by the knocker join in the pulling. The pressure on the rope stretches the cow's nostrils until they are almost translucent. Finally, the men pull so hard that they rip the cow's nostrils and the nose rings fly out, hitting Juan in the hand. "Fuck!" he screams. The animal is thrashing back and forth in the chute now, its hide completely covered with the feces and vomit that layer the chute floor.

Richard, one of the maintenance workers who has been out in the chutes designing a compressed air–powered vibrator to use instead of the hotshots, is standing next to me against the wall. He looks appalled by what is happening. Steve motions to Gilberto to begin driving the cattle over the downed cow and raises two fingers to his eyes, signaling that all of us should be on the lookout for USDA inspectors. With electric prods Gilberto and Fernando push the remaining cattle over the downed cow, and they stomp on its neck and underbelly trying to escape the electric shock. Leaning against the wall, I look at Richard, who says shakily, "Man, this isn't right, running them other cattle over this cow like that. I'm not going to take part in this. I'm not going to stand and watch this." I nod my head in agreement, but both of us continue to stand against the wall.

After three cattle trample over the downed cow, I approach Steve and ask, "Do you really want to run the cattle over this one? If the other cattle break something in this cow, then it will never be able to get up." Steve ignores me but a moment later motions for Gilberto to stop driving the cattle over the downed cow, turns to Richard, and screams, his face only a foot from Richard's, "I'm going to get a cable and pull this beef through, and I want you to keep your fucking mouth shut about it. I don't want you to say nothing about it like the last time. Do you understand?"

Looking a bit stunned, Richard replies, "Um, yeah, I guess so."

"You keep your mouth shut," Steve says again, for emphasis.

Steve yells for some of the workers to get the cable and hook it up to the winch. But then his radio crackles with an alert from one of the red-hat supervisors inside the kill floor that the USDA is on its way. Yelling “Forget it!” he shouts at Fernando to get the water hose, which Gilberto hands to me and I hand to him, and begins hosing the hoofprints off the downed cow so that the inspectors will not be able to see that it has been trampled.

Within minutes, two USDA inspectors walk over. “What do you want me to do with this beef?” Steve asks them. The USDA veterinarian who usually inspects the live cattle says, “I want you to knock it and take it out the door.”

“Which way, this way?” pointing down the chute back toward the pens.

“I don’t care which way you pull it out, I just want you to take it outside. I don’t want you to hang it”—meaning he does not want it processed.

Suddenly, Steve turns to me and orders, “You go see Ricardo in the lunchroom.”

I assume that I will be fired because of the downed cow, as Fernando and Gilberto are in agreement that it is my fault. It is also possible that Steve does not want me present when the inspectors ask employees how the animal went down. I go look for Ricardo; not finding him in the cafeteria, I return to the chutes. The USDA inspectors and the downed cow are gone, and the cattle are moving through the chutes again. Roger and Bill Sloan are now in the chutes with Ricardo, and Gilberto is talking to them, his hands gesturing furiously. When they are finished talking with Gilberto, Bill Sloan turns to me: “What happened?” I tell him that the animal went down when it was pushed backward by the line of cattle in front of it, omitting any reference to the nose rings and the cattle being run over the downed animal. Roger, Bill, and Ricardo confer in a small huddle. As they leave, Roger turns to Gilberto and me and says clearly, “If this happens again, you two can both go home.”

Roger and Bill return to the clean side of the kill floor, but Ricardo hangs back, talking with the knocker as he works. I approach him and ask whether the livers are going to start again on Monday. When he says he thinks so, I ask if I can be moved back to work on the liver line. “I really don’t like being here,” I say; “we have to use the electric prods too much.” Ricardo tells me he will see what he can do.

Less than an hour later, a utility worker I have never met before enters the chute area and announces, “Someone is going home.” Sullen and silent since our admonishment by Roger, Gilberto and I glare at each other. “I don’t know who it is,” the utility worker says, “but they told me to come back here because someone here is going home.” Fernando, who has moved up the chutes with the last lot of cattle to be killed before the lunch break, points at me, laughs, and says, “Yeah, tell this motherfucker to go home.”

After pushing the last few cattle through the knocking box, we go to the dirty side lunchroom, where Ricardo pulls me aside and tells me that Ramón and I are both being moved back to the cooler to get ready for the livers that will be starting again next week. “We have some extra guys, so since you don’t want to be out there in the chutes anymore we’re gonna switch you with the other guy so you can work with the liver guys again,” he says.

I walk over to the clean-side lunchroom to tell Ramón, who is happy to learn that we will be working together on the liver line again. Just before the lunch break ends, James, the supervisor in charge of the cooler, tells Ramón and me to head down and spend the afternoon cleaning off the carts and hooks in preparation for the livers on Monday. "When you guys are done with that," he says, "just go to the box room and fold some boxes. But don't work too fast so you'll still have some work to do tomorrow [Friday]. You can leave at three, but don't let anyone see you, and I'll put you down for working the whole day. Then on Monday, everything is the same as before. You guys will start at seven hanging livers downstairs in the cooler."

In my four days working as a gray hat in the chutes, I drove no fewer than six thousand individual cattle into the knocking box, watched many of them get shot through the skull at close range, and shot three with my own hands. And although I spent most of this time in the chutes driving the cattle rather than as the knocker, Tyler's words—"Man, that's killing . . . that shit will fuck you up for real"—resonate deeply. "Fucked up" is exactly how I feel; it is how I would describe many of the chute workers, and it captures the rawness and violence of the perpetual confrontation between the living animals and the men driving them, myself included. What the experiences of Fernando, Raul, Gilberto, and Camilo suggest, though, is that three and a half days in the chutes, three and a half days in close proximity to the knocking box, is insufficient to understand what it means to do the work of killing at close range. Indeed, the experiences of the other chute workers indicate that there is some undetermined length of time, different for each individual, after which "fucked up" becomes routine, normal, and it is any sign of resistance to using the electric prods, to running live animals over a collapsed one, to piling the animals up like dominoes to be killed that becomes characterized as abnormal. Like Rick, Jill, Tyler, and many of the other kill floor workers, though, I do not want to traverse the terrain of routinization and normalization. The mythologizing of the work of the knocker—the almost supernaturally evil powers invested in the act of shooting the animals by the other kill floor workers, including, notably, the chute workers themselves—makes possible the construction of a killing "other" even on the kill floor of the industrialized slaughterhouse. It legitimizes and authorizes statements like the one made by Richard the maintenance worker, statements underscored rather than undercut by the fact that those making them are themselves contributing daily to the work of the kill floor: "I'm not going to take part in this. I'm not going to stand and watch this."

It is true. I would rather be cleaning hooks and hanging freshly eviscerated livers by the tens of thousands in the segregated confines of the cooler. The divisions of labor and space on the kill floor work to fragment sight, to fracture experience, and to neutralize the work of violence. But what I realize as I settle back into the hypnotic rhythms of wiping hooks and hanging livers by their posterior venae cavae is that this fragmentation, fracturing, and neutralization also create pockets of refuge, places of safety and sanity even here in the heart of the slaughterhouse.

The cooler and its monotonous rhythms are not only physically segregated from the correlates of killing by walls and partitions and the sterilizing effects of cold. More important, the cooler is also psychologically and morally segregated. Like Tom, Jill, and the other kill floor workers, I prefer to isolate and concentrate the work of killing in the person of the knocker, to participate in an implicit moral exchange in which the knocker alone performs the work of killing, while the work I do is morally unrelated to that killing. It is a fiction, but a convincing one, particularly for those already seeking to be convinced: of all workers in the plant, only the knocker delivers the blow that begins the irreversible process of transforming the live creatures into dead ones. Although the sticker technically kills the cow, it is unconscious by the time it reaches him. Only the knocker places the hot steel gun against the shaking, furry foreheads of creature after creature, sees his reflection in their rolling eyes, and pulls the trigger that will eventually rob them of life: only the knocker. If you listen carefully enough to the hundreds of workers performing the 120 other jobs on the kill floor, this might be the refrain you hear: "Only the knocker." It is simple moral math: the kill floor operates with 120 + 1 jobs. And as long as the 1 exists, as long as there is some plausible narrative that concentrates the heaviest weight of the dirtiest work on this 1, then the other 120 *kill floor workers* can say, and believe it, "I'm not going to take part in this. I'm not going to stand and watch this."

Months after I stopped working on the kill floor, I argued with a friend over who was more morally responsible for the killing of the animals: those who ate the meat or the 121 workers who did the killing. She maintained, passionately and with conviction, that the people who did the killing were more responsible because they were the ones performing the physical actions that took the animals' lives. Those who ate the meat, she claimed, were only indirectly responsible. I took the opposite position, holding that those who benefited at a distance, delegating this terrible work to others while disclaiming responsibility for it, bore more moral responsibility, particularly in contexts like the slaughterhouse, where those with the fewest opportunities in society performed the dirty work. My friend's position was the "120 + 1" argument, an argument replicated across myriad realms where morally dirty work is performed by a select few, out of the sight of the many who implicitly or explicitly authorize it but manage to evade responsibility for it by virtue of their citizenship, the taxes they pay, their race, their sex, or the actions of their ancestors.

But perhaps it is the preoccupation with moral responsibility itself that serves as a deflection. Perhaps there are at least some who would be willing to disavow the "120 + 1" argument and accept moral responsibility for the killing as a condition of benefiting from it, as long as they could continue to be shielded from any direct contact with or experience of it. In the words of the philosopher John Lachs, "The responsibility for an act can be passed on, but its experience cannot."[1] What might it mean, then, for all who benefit from dirty work not only to assume some share of *responsibility* for it but also to *experience* it: seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching what it means to be the 1 in the 120 + 1?