

being ground up alive for fertilizer; or simply being thrown out and expected to die in the trash, either by suffocation under a pile of other discarded chicks, or by starvation or dehydration. While the hens are valuable as egg producers, the males are mere cast-offs, unproductive, unnecessary, and literally of no value to the entire production process.

Though battery-cage eggs are produced in conditions of unimaginable cruelty for the hens, this is not to suggest that cage-free or free-range eggs are significantly different in terms of exploitation or suffering. These other methods of production may still rely on forced molts to increase productivity; they do still rely on debeaking; the same methods of slaughter still apply; and they are still caught within a productive framework where animals are essentially unwaged laborers producing value for humans. This very relationship of human dominance over animals is the problem, and though some forms of dominance are "nicer" than others, even nice exploitation is still exploitation in the end.

As with other commodities in contemporary capitalism, these eggs stand aside other products in exchange, and their productive relationships are lost to us, by and large. Recovering these relationships can help us—as in the case of uncovering the relations behind the products of human labor power—to uncover and fight processes of injustice, unequal power, and oppression. This is just one product; there are similar narratives for most other animal products as well. Milk—also the product of female animals and related to the productive processes of these animals—has a similar history, with male calves being killed off for veal. When the milking cows themselves are "spent,"—much sooner than they would see the natural end of their lives—they're turned into hamburger. Whatever industry you can think of that involves animals, odds are good that human dominance has allowed us a heightened power over animals driven by the profit motive, by the desire to spend the labor and bodies of animals. Though going into every single industry is beyond the scope of this book, there are more than 9 billion animals a year slaughtered in the US alone.³⁶ Just during the week I was writing this chapter, 599,000 cattle were slaughtered in the US, along with 1.8 million pigs, and almost 50,000 lambs.³⁷ Some of these animals produced commodities and then became the commodity of meat; others were simply raised as commodities, and ended

up that way through slaughter. None of these figures count animals killed in experiments or for testing products, marine life, "unwanted" animals euthanized in shelters, animals killed by hunters, or any of the other multitude of animals that are killed for human ends.

All of this death is big business: in 2006, the retail equivalent value of the US beef industry was some \$71 billion, and total US beef consumption stood at 28 billion pounds.³⁸ The US "broiler"³⁹ chicken industry had a retail equivalent value of \$41 billion, with 5.3 billion pounds exported, and value of \$1.9 billion dollars.⁴⁰

Add up all of the industries involved in animal exploitation, and it is easy to see that there are significant profits being produced on the backs of animals.

In addition to this kind of production being harmful for animals, it is harmful for humans who work in the industry as well. These relations of human domination are also hidden behind the mask of the commodity form. Slaughterhouse work is routinely ranked among the most dangerous occupations,⁴¹ and illegal immigrants are over-represented among slaughterhouse workers. Slaughterhouse work is also common in poorer communities in the United States. Virgil Butler, a former worker for Tyson, one of the largest chicken "processors," started catching chickens for slaughter when he was fourteen, to help support his family.⁴² Working for Tyson for ten years in various aspects of chicken slaughter, Butler saw workers treated as "disposable," and also worked in dangerous conditions that threatened worker safety. Because of the speed of the slaughter "line," workers were often at risk of cutting themselves, and Butler says that getting hurt wasn't "a matter of if, it was a matter of when."⁴³ Given the hours of the job and the demands for production speed, many workers also turned to amphetamines just to keep up with the line. Taking drugs is not uncommon in the slaughterhouse—other workers involved in the slaughter of various animals report the same experience, taking speed to keep up.⁴⁴

Though the problems of slaughtering small animals should not be underestimated, slaughtering large animals takes on another dimension of danger, as animals weighing several hundred to several thousand pounds are chained up by their legs for what is essentially a bloody disassembly line. Again, because of the speed of production in

start
 here
 ↙

slaughterhouses, many animals are at least partly conscious while being slaughtered because they are incorrectly incapacitated. The results for both animals and humans are disastrous. In her book *Slaughterhouse*, Gail Eisnitz examines the problems of neglect and abuse in slaughterhouses in the United States, showing through first-person interviews how these problems are manifest in the system itself. Eisnitz interviews workers who skinned animals that were still blinking, kicking, mooing, and shrieking. While this is obviously horrific for the animals, it also clearly dangerous for the humans working near several thousand-pound cows thrashing about, reeling in pain from the process of slaughter. Occasionally, cows will fall from the chain they are hung on, and crash to the floor, or they may kick and debilitate anyone working on the line. The conditions for the slaughter of pigs are no better, and the primary concern of the slaughter operation is to keep the line moving, to keep profitability up. Eisnitz's interview with one worker, Ed Van Winkle—infamous in local circles for working at ten different plants—reveals the depths of the problems with this profit-first mentality in hog slaughter:

"Do you think the problem is a function of the stun operators?" I asked him. "Or the equipment?"

"I think the whole problem is the attitude," he replied. "As long as that chain is running, they don't give a shit what you have to do to get that hog on the line. You got to get a hog on each hook or you got a foreman on your ass."

Van Winkle sounded tired, worn down, too battle-scarred to bother with machismo.

"When I started with Morrell it was a very different company. At some point there was a dramatic switch, caused by greed, in my opinion. Production took precedence over employee welfare. If someone got hurt, you weren't supposed to shut the chain off; you were supposed to drag him off the floor and keep the chain going. The chain became the most important thing. Everything else fell by the wayside."

"In the last few years, conditions at Morrell's have gotten worse and worse. Today, management doesn't care how the hog gets up on that line. Management doesn't care whether the hog is stunned or conscious, or whether the sticker is injured in the process. All Morrell cares about is getting those hogs killed."⁴⁵

In order to move pigs through the slaughter operation as quickly as possible Van Winkle and other workers did just about whatever was necessary to move the operation along. Van Winkle describes taking prods and sticking them into the pigs' eyes to get them to move, and watching drivers using pipes to kill hogs that either refused or could not to go through chutes into the slaughterhouse. Admitting to beating eleven hogs to death in one day, Van Winkle said:

"Hogs get stressed out pretty easy," he continued. "If you prod them too much, they have heart attacks. If you get a hog in the chute that's had the shit prodded out of him and has a heart attack or refuses to move, you take a meat hook and hook it into his bung hole [anus]. You try to do this by clipping the hipbone. Then you drag him backwards. You're dragging these hogs alive, and a lot of times the meat hook rips out of the bung hole. I've seen hams—thighs—completely ripped open. I've also seen intestines come out. If the hog collapses near the front of the chute, you shove the meat hook into his cheek and drag him forward."⁴⁶

As one of the first parts of the process of slaughtering pigs, the pigs must be "stuck," or bled to death before they enter a scalding tank to remove their hair. The people who do the "sticking" are called "stickers," and often because of the speed of the slaughter line, stickers fail to adequately and accurately cut the pigs, meaning they bleed to death more slowly. Instead of dying quickly, the pigs sometimes drown in the scalding tank. Van Winkle said that he wasn't sure if the pigs burned to death or drowned first, but in either case, it was horribly cruel, and also dangerous for the workers on the line, since the inadequately "stuck" pigs thrashed around violently. In an environment where people are wielding knives and working quickly to keep up with a fast-moving line, the danger is amplified for human workers. Van Winkle complained to management, to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), and to the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), yet his complaints resulted in few substantive changes:

"Instead of taking care of it, they gave us mesh gloves, because a lot of us were getting cut in the hands. But when you put a mesh glove on a knife hand, you might as well grease the knife. Live hogs were kicking our knives out of our hands. Next, they gave us finger rings that were attached to the knife. When a hog kicks you, the knife

stays in your hand. So instead of a flying knife, you've got a double-edged blade flopping around in your hand."⁴⁷

Van Winkle himself was injured on the line, as Eisnitz writes:

"I got cut across my jugular," he said. "I was scared, scared to death. Stitches go with the territory in a packing house. I can live with stitches. I can live with getting cut once in a while. What I can't live with is cutting my own throat.

"After I cut my neck, I told the foreman, 'I'm not here to die, I'm not going to stick any more hogs for you.' I met with management and told them, 'You can't force me to stick live hogs. The law states I don't have to do something I feel puts my life in jeopardy. Well, my life's in jeopardy so I'm not sticking any more hogs.'"⁴⁸

In addition to the physical injuries of actually working in the job, slaughterhouse work also takes a psychological and emotional toll on workers. Van Winkle described how people working in the "stick pit" develop an "attitude that lets you kill things but doesn't let you care." Van Winkle described the effects this had on him in his job and in his personal life:

"You may look a hog in the eye that's walking around down in the blood pit with you and think, God, that really isn't a bad-looking animal. You may want to pet it. Pigs down on the kill floor have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later, I had to kill them—beat them to death with a pipe. I can't care.

"When I worked upstairs taking hogs' guts out, I could cop an attitude that I was working on a production line, helping to feed people. But down in the stick pit I wasn't feeding people. I was killing things. My attitude was, it's only an animal. Kill it.

"Sometimes I looked at people that way, too," he said. "I've had ideas of hanging my foreman upside down on the line and sticking him. I remember going into the office and telling the personnel man that I have no problem pulling the trigger on a person—if you get in my face I'll blow you away.

"Every sticker I know carries a gun, and every one of them would shoot you. Most stickers I know have been arrested for assault. A lot of them have problems with alcohol. They have to drink, they have no other way of dealing with killing live, kicking animals all day long. If you stop and think about it, you're killing several thousand beings a day."⁴⁹

The anger and alienation that follows these workers home often manifests itself as violence against families and against the communities where they live. It is a violence that readily leaks out beyond the boundaries of the slaughterhouse. Like Ed Van Winkle, Virgil Butler found himself becoming increasingly violent the longer he worked at Tyson, and he also noticed the same violence in others he worked with, some of whom abused their families. The logic of modern animal production demands that animals are moved through slaughter rapidly, with little regard for the side-effects on people and animals. Animals suffer as they are inadequately stunned and slaughtered while still conscious; people, who must do this slaughtering, suffer as they work to silence the parts of themselves that are innately repulsed by the violent acts demanded of them by their work.

Despite the ripple-effects throughout society, the consumption of animal products is so entrenched in our economies and cultures, that most of us eat the by-products of this exploitative system several times a day. As a result, most of us remain blissfully unaware of the violence done to people and animals in our name—for our desires. Similarly, most of us are also blissfully unaware of another aspect of animal abuse for profit, which is entrenched in our scientific and research cultures and lies at the heart of the drug approval process in the United States.

VIVISECTION

Though you may be ready to accept that the production of animal products represents an unnecessary imposition of power over animals and significant attendant suffering, many of you will undoubtedly balk at abolishing vivisection, or the use of animals for research and testing purposes. After all, our cultural logic dictates that animal testing provides what appears to be an unambiguous human benefit; we learn that animal testing provides medical advances that we need to continue to eradicate disease, solve medical problems, and develop surgical techniques. Yet, as we peek behind the locked laboratory doors, we can see that vivisection—much like the production of animals for food—is an unnecessary, cruel, and frivolous imposition of suffering on animals for human ends. Moreover, vivisection is big business, and

- 33 United Egg Producers. Us Egg Industry <http://www.unitedegg.org/useg-industry_generalstats.aspx> (2 March 2007).
- 34 ———. "United Egg Producers Animal Husbandry Guidelines for Us Egg Laying Flocks, 2006 Edition," United Egg Producers <http://www.uepcertified.com/docs/2006_UEPanimal_welfare_guidelines.pdf> (20 February 2007).
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 8.8 billion of these alone are chickens, slaughtered as "broilers" according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Poultry—Production and Value 2006 Summary," (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 2007). For more on slaughter numbers, see also National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Livestock Slaughter," Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 2007.
- 37 These figures came from reports generated by the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service web site, <<http://marketnews.usda.gov/portal/lg>>.
- 38 Economic Research Service. Background Statistics: U.S. Beef and Cattle Industry, United States Department of Agriculture, <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/news/BSECoverage.htm>> (27 August 2007).
- 39 "Broilers" are chickens under thirteen weeks old that are destined for consumption (as opposed to egg production).
- 40 Economic Research Service. Background Statistics on U.S. Broiler Industry, United States Department of Agriculture <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/News/broilercoverage.htm>> (27 August 2007).
- 41 United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. Industry Injury and Illness Data 2005, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics <<http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshsum.htm>> (30 August 2007).
- 42 Kymberlie Adams Matthews. "Whistleblower on the Kill Floor: The Satya Interview with Virgil Butler and Laura Alexander," *Satya Magazine* <<http://www.satyamag.com/feb06/butler.html>> (February 18 2006).
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Gail A. Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment inside the U.S. Meat Industry* (Prometheus Books, 1997), 85.
- 45 Ibid., 80–81.
- 46 Ibid., 82.
- 47 Ibid., 85.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., 87–88.
- 50 Gary L. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?*.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Mark Rowlands, *Animals Like Us*, ed. Colin McGinn, Practical Ethics Series (London: Verso, 2002).
- 53 C. Ray Greek and Jean Swingle Greek, *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: The Human Cost of Experiments on Animals* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002).

- 54 Mark Rowlands, *Animals Like Us*.
- 55 Mark H. Bernstein, *Without a Tear: Our Tragic Relationship with Animals* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
- 56 C. Ray Greek and Jean Swingle Greek, *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: The Human Cost of Experiments on Animals* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002).
- 57 Mark H. Bernstein, *Without a Tear: Our Tragic Relationship with Animals*.
- 58 C. Ray Greek and Jean Swingle Greek, *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: The Human Cost of Experiments on Animals*.
- 59 Ibid., 61.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 John J. Pippin, "The Need for Revision of Pre-Market Testing: The Failure of Animal Tests of Cox-2 Inhibitors," (Washington, DC: Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, 2005).
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 John Gartner. "Vioxx Suit Faults Animal Tests," *Wired Magazine* <<http://www.wired.com/news/technology/medtech/0,68260-0.html>> (23 February 2007).
- 64 In his report for the Physician's Committee on Responsible Medicine on the problems with Vioxx animal models (*The Need for Revision of Pre-Market Testing: The Failure of Animal Tests of COX-2 Inhibitors*), John J. Pippin, M.D., F.A.C.C. points to the possibility of human clinical pharmacology, microdosing technology, *in vitro* and *in silico* approaches, human stem cell technology, and pharmacogenomics as potential avenues for testing that "will provide data far superior to current animal testing and typically limited clinical trials." A thorough review of alternatives is beyond the scope of this book, but readers are encouraged to visit Greek and Greek, *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese*, for a more thorough review of alternatives to animal testing and vivisection.
- 65 Gary L. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?*, 38.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Gary L. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?*.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Charles River Laboratories. Charles River Laboratories 2007 Research Models & Services, US Catalog <http://www.criver.com/flex_content_area/documents/rm_mm_c_2007_US.pdf> (15 March 2007).
- 72 Gary L. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?*, 35.
- 73 Mark H. Bernstein, *Without a Tear: Our Tragic Relationship with Animals*, 133.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Jim Mason, *An Unnatural Order: Why We Are Destroying the Planet and Each Other* (New York: Lantern, 2005).
- 76 Ibid., 262.
- 77 Ibid., 263.