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Jason Weems

Scale, a Slaughterhouse View: *Industry, Corporeality, and Being in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*

As far as the eye can see stretches a township of cattle-pens, cunningly divided into blocks, so that the animals of any pen can be speedily driven out close to an inclined timber path which leads to an elevated covered way straddling high above the pens. . . . Thus you will see the gangs of cattle waiting their turn—as they will wait sometimes for days; and they need not be distressed by the sight of their fellows running about in fear of death.

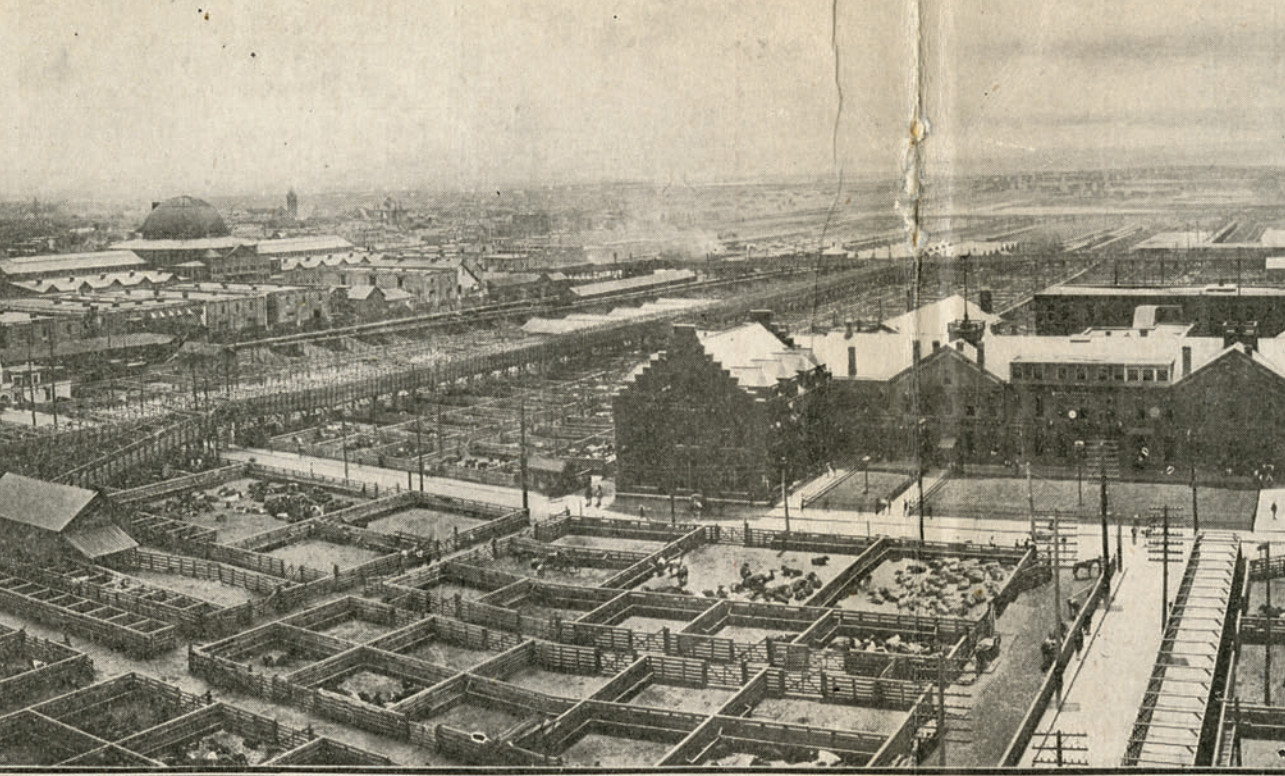
Rudyard Kipling, 1899¹

All day long the gates of the packing houses were besieged by starving and penniless men; they came, literally, by the thousands, every single morning, fighting with each other for a chance for life.

Upton Sinclair, 1905²

In June 1864, as the war to reunite the states bloodied the nation, the Chicago Pork Packers Association proposed a different union: that of the city's various livestock exchanges. In the name of efficiency, the group sought to consolidate the seven stockyards that dotted the cityscape into a single location. Working closely with the nine railroads that either serviced or financed the various yards, the newly chartered Union Stockyard and Transit Company purchased a large plot of

"A bird's eye view of the Union Stockyards, Chicago, From the Water Tower," (detail, see fig. 1).



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE UNION STOCK YARDS, CHICAGO, FROM THE W



unused swamp on the southern edge of the city. When the land had been drained and cleared, the company began construction of a vast labyrinth of loading docks, sorting alleys, and holding pens for beef, hogs, sheep, and horses. Within a few years, the city's major meatpacking companies relocated their facilities to the western edge of the stockyards. This concentrated tract of slaughterhouses and processing plants became known as "Packing Town." Together, the new conglomeration of pens and plants radically consolidated and rescaled the national livestock trade. In 1870, railroads delivered over three million animals to the Union yards from across the nation, but primarily from the vast prairies and plains of the American West. By the 1890s, these numbers had increased exponentially: in 1898, the year's tally for hogs *alone* handled by the stockyards registered at 8,817,114. On February 11, 1895, live hog receipts for a single day totaled 74,551. The figures for swine butchered were equally staggering, climbing from about 384,000 in 1874 to more than 2,407,000 in 1903.³

Astounding as they are, these quantities only begin to suggest the scale of Chicago's meat-making enterprise, which encompassed not only prodigious numbers of animals, but also new and massive formulations of space, labor, capital, commerce, and organization. At the start of the twentieth century, the list of achievements wrought by (or because of) the stockyards beggared belief. According to a tourist's guidebook, in 1907 the stockyards occupied over 500 acres. It contained 13,000 pens, 25,000 gates, and 300 miles of railroad track. On a hot day, it dispensed over 8 million gallons of water. The guidebook estimated that 45,000 people earned their living working directly in the stockyards and Packing Town, while another 250,000 Chicagoans were "more or less" dependent on the city's meatpacking industry. The stockyards' efficient system of livestock sorting, slaughter, and sales aggregated millions of dollars' worth of business transactions every day, while its allied systems of transportation shipped in live animals from across the continent and sent out processed goods around the globe.⁴ The guide also extolled the systems of administrative and industrial organization that marshaled activity in the stockyards and processing plants (often referred to collectively as "The Yards"). Each day an army of accountants scrupulously recorded and paid out thousands of dollars in livestock transactions while also handling the business's enormous income. Laborers worked alongside machines, forged into processes of automatic efficiency. In the slaughterhouses, packers bragged of a system for rendering animal bodies that was so all-encompassing that "nothing was wasted but the squeal."⁵



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE UNION STOCK YARDS, CHICAGO, FROM THE WATER TOWER.

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 “A bird’s eye view of the Union Stockyards, Chicago, From the Water Tower,” from Wood Brothers, *Facts and Figures of Chicago Live Stock Trade for Twenty-Four Years with Other Valuable Information* (Chicago: Press of the Chicago Dairy Farmers and Drivers Journal, 1904), 32–33.

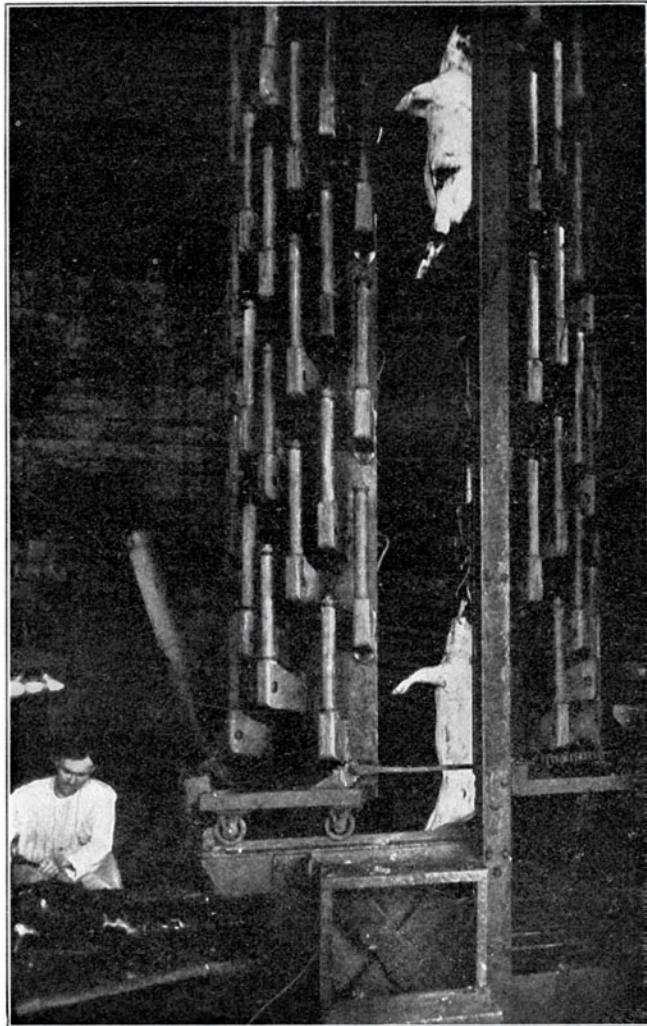
The ambition of the stockyards, we can imagine, is effectively communicated by a 270-degree bird’s-eye panorama photograph published as the two-page centerpiece to a 1904 book of meatpacking statistics (fig. 1). Taken from the water tower, this wide view of The Yards’ tightly regimented space is visually and even physically imposing—so much so that the editors had to cut the photograph in two and stack the pieces in order to fit the panorama within the confines of the publication. Oriented to the east and south of the site, the upper half of the photograph exhibits a gridwork of livestock holding pens stretching continuously toward a haze-filled horizon. Looking primarily west, the lower half again captures the pens, along with the vaunted elevated walkways that efficiently delivered livestock from the railroad platforms to the corrals, and later to the smoke-belching packinghouses beyond. Together, these two pieces of the photograph provide a plausible visualization of the site’s enormous scope while at the same time conveying

the fundamentally fascinating inability to see or understand it in any complete way—at the very least not in a single view. In answer to the latter condition, guidebooks usually complemented such expansive views of the whole with written descriptions and particular images that walked viewers through The Yards sequentially by place and process (fig. 2). As traveler and writer Walter George (1882–1926) observed some years later, “To watch an animal from pen to tin is an extraordinary experience.”⁶ It was also in many ways a difficult one.

This essay examines efforts to visualize, primarily through photography, the industrial redefinition of scale and corporeality at

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Illustration of a hog-scraping machine, from John O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards: A Handy Guide to the Meatpacking Industry* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1907), frontispiece.



Hog-scraping machine, open. As the hogs pass through on an endless chain, the machine removes the hair.

the turn of the century in Chicago's Union Stockyards. Physically and psychologically imposing, the stockyards epitomized a new scale of systematic and technologized industry that transformed Chicago into the "hog butcher for the world" and the gateway to the western half of the continent. The Yards also materialized new conditions for the conceptualization of living bodies: first rescaling them from the level of individual beings to that of the limitless multitude—whose primary markers were efficient mobility and extractable materiality—and then reconstituting them in the new industrial forms of commodity and capital. These acts of abstraction were enacted not only on the bodies of livestock but also on those of human workers, whose labor in the pens and packing plants also became transformed. At the same time, and perhaps inevitably, the systematic magnitude and organization of the slaughterhouse infiltrated the social structures of Chicago's working-class life and space. Choked tenements, teeming streets, and denuded neighborhoods became markers of an out-of-scale modernity in need of redress. The enactment of reform efforts, however, involved not only a technical but also a social judgment about scale: one in which the prerogatives of individual bodies vied with those of industry. To think and see in these new terms required even the most earnest Progressive critics to rescale the idea of the human subject relative to that of industry. The program that emerged for visualizing The Yards marked an attempt to simultaneously comprehend, celebrate, and disarm the massive-scale slaughtering system, and to rationalize its diminishment of living bodies (and beings) as inviolable wholes. The failure of the imagery to do so embodied, in drained blood and rendered flesh, the incommensurabilities of scale that existed between living bodies and industrial systems.

Imag(in)ing the Scale of Industry

By the time Walter George visited Chicago in the 1920s, the congruence between living bodies and industrial organization had already emerged as a common assumption in American life. In Chicago, arguably the most concentrated manufacturing city in the United States, the links between production and social life were remarkably direct, especially in relation to meatpacking. As the stockyards laid out its footprint of holding pens, the city expanded its grid. As livestock flowed into The Yards from all over the continent, workers streamed into the metropolis from around the world. In some ways, the symmetrical reconceptualization of industrial and urban forms illuminated new possibilities for the systematic structuring of modern space and

life at an all-encompassing and even sublime scale. In other respects, however, the ramped-up scales of production, space, and social relations neither strengthened industry nor clarified culture. As large-scale meatpacking gave rise to problems of labor, sanitation, and safety within the packing plant, the expansion of the city led to overcrowding, disease, and social inequality. These real concerns brought in tow more conceptual issues, most centrally a growing fascination with and uncertainty over the place of the individual in modernity's increasingly totalized and systematic, not to mention abstracting, order. Scale, in this context, became both an ingredient of modernization and a source of social and, indeed, individual uncertainty. The fact that meatpacking literally rendered living bodies (both animals and workers) into the raw materials of a radically repositioned industrial system made the stockyards, and the city that supported it, a fulcrum for the growing pains of early twentieth-century space and life.

We can surmise that the transformation of a living body into a salable commodity struck witnesses like George as extraordinary for many reasons. At the most basic level, the writer registered his response as that of one sentient being to another. "Death is so swift," he continued, "the evidence of tragedy so soon gone, that one feels no shock that flesh loses its character." Alongside this somewhat empathetic—yet immediately gainsaid—recognition of butchering as a "tragedy," however, came another more abstracted response wherein the violence done to the living body was effaced by the scale at which it was enacted. The magnitude of the stockyards enterprise, which had been engineered to enact a system of all-encompassing efficiency for the processing of not just one but rather multitudes of sentient beings, had rescaled the meaning not only of meat production but also of life itself. The implications of this new order, as George elaborated, were significant—and not just for cattle. "A superior force," he wrote, "which is called organized industry, has cut up the cattle on a traveling belt and carried them away. For a moment I had a vision of Chicago carried away on its own traveling belt. Carried away . . . where to?"⁷⁷ These words signal George's perception that the systematized treatment of animal bodies devised at the stockyards remade the human world as well. While the author later professed to find beauty in this seemingly immeasurable force, his purposeful ". . . where to?" suggests less certainty in the prospect of organizing human life at a new and overwhelming industrial scale.

The conflation of size and success was a commonplace in the visualization of industrial achievement in Chicago and more generally around the world, both during the twentieth century and also across

the broader footprint of modernity. During the European Renaissance, scale became a means for perceiving, characterizing, and evaluating the phenomenal world and, more importantly, the exercise of human authority and achievement on it. Through linear (Albertian) perspective, scale became a means to orient space and matter relative to the measure of an embodied human viewer.⁸ Europeans propagated this conceptual system across the real geography of the globe. Yet if the Renaissance established the human body (and subject) firmly as the measure of all things, ensuing developments quickly began to compromise this authority. As exploration expanded the human gaze across the earth and into the cosmos during the ensuing centuries, the natural world seemed to become an ever bigger and indefinite place.

The Enlightenment's burgeoning understanding of the universe as dynamic and unbounded instigated a substantial reevaluation of the natural world and its linked relationship to the human body as a standard of measurement.⁹ According to historian David Nye, a key component of this reappraisal came in the reemergence of the sublime, a construct through which the measure of scale came to rest not in the physical body but rather in human reason and imagination.¹⁰ This re-centering of scale from an effect of the natural world to one internal to the observer provided a basis for one of the most significant power transfers of modern times: the shift from a naturally ordered world to a human-made one.¹¹ The idea that the most extensive awareness and order, and thereby ultimate authority, resided in human thought rather than measurable nature was cemented as the cornerstone of Western thought, enabling activities from the colonization of the New World to the technological transformation of human life. The transfer of authority from natural order to human proved especially potent in the United States, where people began to assert grandiose ambitions for national expansion, dominance over nature, technological capability, and industrial efficiency, each at an all-encompassing scale.¹² By the 1880s, factories had become a potent symbol of such ambitions. Powered by steam engines and capitalized by vast corporations, these new schemata operated at much greater economies of scale and more extensively delineated systems of labor. Conceived of as self-contained and self-composing, they came to be understood as worlds unto themselves.

Imagining the factory as a world presented both possibilities and challenges for the turn-of-the-century American public. On the one hand, the self-contained factory could be understood as miniature, a microcosm of some larger configuration or reality that is complete

in every respect. As Susan Stewart has observed, a miniature does not call attention to itself but instead gestures outward to a larger world that it then interiorizes and encapsulates, “creating a shell-like, or enclosed, exteriority.”¹³ The effect on the beholder is one of transcendence. By pointing outward, the miniature condenses the whole world into a single vision and offers it to a beholder, who thereby becomes its possessor and controller. In this way, the factory-as-miniature conjures potent testimony to the ascendancy of human vision and authority over all others; the maker of a miniature is a shaper of worlds. Such control is further affirmed in the way that the miniature releases the beholder from dependency on the world by conceptualizing him or her as external to and distant from it. On the other hand, the factory-as-world can also be perceived as the gigantic: a thing that surrounds and envelopes the beholder, who as a result may only know or perceive it in part—never as a whole.¹⁴ The factory becomes a looming force, capturing and containing those whose lives fall within its system. Knowing it only in a limited way, the individual exercises little authority and instead becomes subject to its overall form and operations—which are immune to discrete exercises of human agency. More confusing still was the fact that these two viewpoints, while largely incommensurable, often operated simultaneously.

If coming to terms with the industrial-scale factory proved a tricky business for most Americans, it was especially fraught with regard to Chicago’s stockyards and packinghouses, where the systematized meting out of death made the idea of The Yards’ self-contained “worldliness” uncannily palpable. At most modern factories, death was an anomaly caused by accident; it was not a regularized occurrence. The packinghouses, by contrast, made the processing of mortality—the most essential scale by which subjectivity and being could be measured—their defining objective. This death-dealing, enacted at an enormous scale, generated fascination among the public and made the stockyards into a popular tourist destination that regularly drew over half a million visitors per year.¹⁵ George Lambert’s 1893 guidebook *A Trip through the Union Stock Yards and Slaughter Houses* equated the whole of modern Chicago to the meatpacking industry and opened with the admonition that “no one should fail to avail themselves of the opportunity to visit this great Stockyards and Packing Town, which is a city in itself.”¹⁶ Lambert’s counsel was apparently well heeded, as throughout that year visitors to the famed 1893 Chicago World’s Fair also filled the stockyards’ daily tours. Written accounts show that the tourists were exhilarated by the raw spectacle of the

slaughter, and equally so by the miraculous scale and mechanical efficiency of the works.¹⁷ Yet they also remarked on the sense of physical repulsion and psychological trauma—and even existential confusion—delivered to the viewer. French traveler and novelist Paul Bourget (1852–1935), who toured The Yards in 1894, summed up these conflicting sensibilities by noting of the packinghouses that “on the condition of having your nerves wrung once for all, these are among the places where you shall best see how American ingenuity solves the problems of prodigiously complicated organization.”¹⁸

The stockyards pushed the limits of the mind, soul, and, perhaps most strikingly, senses. The pens and packinghouses registered strongly in multiple ways as visitors described the pungency of excrement and offal, the piercing cries of stuck hogs and the hiss of knives passing through flesh, the clammy heat of the killing floors and the chill of the refrigerator rooms, and the slipperiness of blood under their feet. Even so, sight emerged as the central and most reflected-on mode of experience, and most narratives suggest that the purpose of visiting the stockyards was to see them. The endeavor of visualization, however, involved not only the physiological process of looking but also the mental negotiation of competing senses of scale and perspective. Intrinsic to the written accounts, these various visual constructions open up for dissection more readily in the photographs and illustrations produced of the stockyards and packinghouses that proliferated at the turn of the century.

The most all-encompassing type of stockyard visualization was the overview, which could often be experienced directly as part of a tour, as well as via the bird’s-eye illustrations that appeared in almost all guidebooks. Typified by the panoramic photograph depicted in figure 1, the overview was in essence a miniature in two dimensions. The objective of such views was to present the stockyards complex as a single object all at once. The photographer sought to achieve this by assuming a vantage point above the ground, thereby creating the perceptual and cognitive distance required to perceive the site as everywhere visible, contained, and self-sufficient. Through this distancing effect, the elevated viewpoint shrank the stockyards to the scale of the beholder’s field of vision. In the lower of the two halves, for example, the far off and raised vantage corrals the sprawling yards into a view that makes it possible to comprehend the systematic order of the holding pens and elevated causeways. While the pens kept the waiting animals in standstill order, the ramps ensured their efficient mobility by lifting them from the labyrinth of holding cells, limiting

their viewpoint to a single direction (tall walls and roofs ensured they could only see forward), and transporting them almost frictionlessly to the packinghouses. Similarly, by facilitating a vision that is at once static and all-seeing and everywhere mobilized, the overview evokes a detached and completely noncontingent “god’s-eye” sense of order and efficiency.¹⁹ Moreover, although it is not actually the case, the bird’s-eye photograph also produces a sense that all things contained in The Yards are visible on its surface. Because sightlines remain largely unimpeded by the usual blockages of ground-level vision—one can peer over buildings from above at a rooftop level, for example, rather than having the view stopped at them—the photograph constructs a sense of panoptic mastery for its viewers.

By expanding the beholder’s gaze, the overview has the complementary effect of highlighting the site’s extensiveness while simultaneously containing and structuring it. The upper image of figure 1, for example, not only stretches to The Yards’ distant edges; it also discloses its interior space to be not an overwhelming tangle, but rather an integrated and cohesive system. Once the stockyards complex could be perceived as such a singular whole, it might then be objectified. Thus fixed, or miniaturized, the site falls under the control of the beholder. For those seeking to conceptualize the stockyards and thereby exert authority over it, this representational possibility made the overview extremely important. It is appropriate, perhaps, that the publication in which figure 1 appeared, the Wood Brothers’ *Facts and Figures of Chicago Live Stock Trade*, was not a narrative guidebook, but rather a statistical study of the livestock and packing business at The Yards compiled by one of the nation’s largest livestock buyers. The panoramic view offered in figure 1 is surrounded by a bevy of charts and tables detailing the extraordinary scale and also the quantitative trends of business at The Yards, such as one recording the twenty-four-year-average pricing for full-grown cattle (fig. 3).²⁰ Appearing on the page immediately preceding the two-page-spanning, bird’s-eye imagery, the table enables the reader to perceive a striking analogy between its symbolic representation of cattle as a grid of statistical data and the pens of actual cattle captured in the photographic overview. It is remarkable how effectively this synthesis of numerical data and photograph consolidates and abstracts the process of meatpacking, living animals systematically transformed into abstract values.²¹

Taken in combination, the Wood Brothers’ panoramic overview and statistical table represent how corporate interests may have

Monthly Average Price for 1200 to 1500-lb. Beeves for 24 Years.

MONTHS	1903	1902	1901	1900	1899	1898	1897	1896	1895	1894	1893	1892	1891	1900	1889	1888	1887	1886	1885	1884	1883	1882	1881	1880	W'ly Av.
January...	45 20	45 15	45 05	45 40	45 35	44 70	44 45	44 00	44 30	44 20	44 85	44 10	44 25	44 05	44 05	44 25	44 40	45 00	45 50	46 05	45 35	45 00	44 35	44 85	44 80
February...	4 85	6 05	5 10	4 85	5 20	4 80	4 30	3 90	4 40	2 90	5 00	4 00	4 10	3 70	4 20	4 25	4 05	5 35	6 00	5 45	5 75	4 95	4 05	4 75	
March....	4 75	6 17	5 20	5 00	5 10	4 70	4 45	4 05	5 15	3 90	4 80	4 20	4 85	4 20	3 05	4 45	4 40	5 05	5 45	5 90	6 10	6 30	5 15	4 90	4 90
April.....	4 65	6 75	5 25	5 10	5 05	4 60	4 55	3 80	5 50	4 15	5 00	4 05	5 00	4 40	4 00	4 45	4 05	5 10	5 50	6 10	5 05	6 45	5 45	4 80	5 00
May.....	4 75	7 09	5 35	5 20	5 30	4 55	4 65	4 00	4 95	4 05	4 95	4 25	5 30	4 55	3 05	4 00	4 50	5 25	5 55	6 15	5 95	7 80	5 65	4 90	5 10
June.....	4 90	7 40	5 75	5 36	5 35	4 60	4 60	4 10	4 60	4 20	4 05	4 25	5 05	4 20	4 05	5 45	4 15	5 05	5 05	6 30	5 75	7 40	5 00	4 50	5 10
July.....	5 00	7 85	5 35	5 35	5 50	4 95	4 55	4 10	4 80	4 05	4 25	4 35	4 60	4 20	3 95	5 25	3 85	4 50	5 05	6 20	5 50	6 70	5 50	4 10	5 00
August...	5 20	7 80	5 30	5 55	5 80	5 10	4 80	4 30	4 85	4 40	4 20	4 30	4 35	4 20	3 05	5 15	4 10	4 20	5 05	5 75	5 25	6 30	5 10	4 60	5 00
September...	5 10	7 45	5 70	5 50	5 10	4 90	4 35	4 60	4 90	4 20	4 10	4 00	4 15	3 90	5 05	4 00	4 25	5 45	5 75	5 15	5 85	5 00	4 90	5 00	
October...	5 00	7 10	5 75	5 40	5 85	5 10	4 75	4 40	4 30	4 80	4 45	4 20	4 10	4 00	4 00	4 60	4 00	4 20	5 40	5 05	5 70	5 00	5 50	4 95	4 95
November	4 85	5 80	5 80	5 25	5 80	5 00	4 55	4 55	4 15	4 65	4 30	4 40	4 10	3 90	3 85	4 35	3 90	4 20	4 80	5 40	5 25	5 40	5 40	5 00	4 80
December.	4 65	5 30	5 75	5 20	5 95	5 05	4 30	4 50	3 70	4 05	4 40	4 40	4 25	4 10	3 80	4 30	4 10	4 10	5 05	5 05	5 70	5 50	5 50	5 10	4 80
Yearly Av	44 90	46 75	45 45	45 30	45 50	44 85	44 85	44 20	44 00	44 30	44 00	44 25	44 50	44 15	43 00	44 70	44 20	44 75	45 35	45 90	45 00	46 25	45 25	44 75	44 90

Average price for twenty-four years, \$4 95.

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Table showing beef prices over a twenty-four-year period, from Wood Brothers, *Facts and Figures*, 31.

fantasized the factory as a self-contained whole. Yet when pressed more closely, the overview also serves to draw such a vision into question. This is particularly evident along the horizon line of the photograph, where the shot's distance and haziness make it difficult to discern the actual borders of the stockyards complex. Instead, this imprecision signals the ways that the phenomenal world remained resistant to the prerogatives of capital and industrial-scale administration. Part of this limitation is technological and physiological, as neither the human eye nor the camera lens simply stopped registering information at the boundary of the stockyards. Instead they projected beyond it and in doing so demonstrated the limit to be constructed and artificial. The Yards was not a world unto itself, no matter the fantasies and hubris of capital. For this reason, industrialists often turned to less natural and more readily and easily manipulated representational modes, such as drawn maps, in instances where promoting a vision of industry as self-contained and self-supporting was required and desirable.²² At the same time, however, the unruly edges of the bird's-eye photograph probably reminded viewers of the phenomenal and subjective reality that underlay the abstraction and efficiency of the *The Yards*. Operating in this way as the human-scale unconscious of the statistical table, the photograph's indeterminacy evokes another kind of more subjective and embodied viewing.

Bodies in The Yards

In spite of its built-in claims of comprehensiveness, the overview told only half the story. Representations of the stockyards as a single and self-contained system necessarily occluded smaller calibrations and often effaced contingent and circumstantial values altogether, which usually meant the actions of both humans and animals as conceived at the scale of the individual subject. Such omissions were problematic in that they simplified complex and conditional operations into unrealistically set and deterministic patterns. One can imagine that such simplification could also be beneficial and even intentional, since it mystified the processes and principles—often more loaded and objectionable—through which systematized slaughter was conceived and enacted. In either case, the popularity of public tours, the informational guides printed for livestock traders and investors, the descriptions of The Yards in farming journals, and (as we shall see) the worker strikes and social criticism leveled at the site all suggest that people readily recognized the overview's limitations as means to capture the experience of being at the site.

A second framework of visual representation, composed predominantly from the ground level, captured many of the qualities and quantities of the stockyards that were lost from above. At a glance, these views seemed to return to the orientation and scale of the ground-based, one might even say embodied, viewer. In the context of The Yards, however, the concept of incarnated viewership, though ostensibly more natural, was complicated and even perilous. The vast and labyrinthine physical expanse of The Yards and its equally extensive and intricate systems of operation—precisely those things the overview aimed to clarify and celebrate—overwhelmed the ground-level viewer who, when enmeshed within them, often felt incapable of seeing, and certainly understanding, anything at all. The fact of slaughter added a deeper psychological dimension, as the beholder experienced the disintegration of the sense of individual vision and being—which amounted to a kind of desubjectivization—in the context of the literal killing and dismemberment of countless living bodies. Akin to modern war or perhaps apocalyptic visions, the rendition of mortality at such a staggering scale—the serial efficiency with which living bodies were dispatched and butchered, one after the other—could not help but make one's own sense of corporeality and spirituality, and its fragile scale, a remarkably fraught proposition.²³

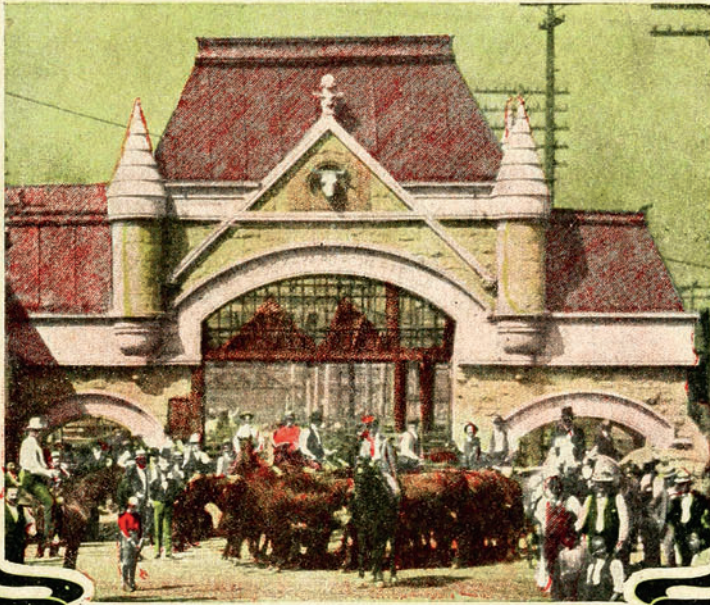
The strategies of ground-level picture making at the Union Stockyards were complex and multi-tiered, involving supplemental

and overlapping angles of vision and description. The efforts to make meatpacking visible, comprehensible — and, in a more basic sense, enduring — at a normative individual scale can be best unpacked by examining the expressive programs of the various guidebooks and illustrated histories of the stockyards. By the turn of the century, these publications had developed a remarkably consistent structure of representation and explanation. With few exceptions, such descriptive programs opened with textual and visual overviews of The Yards, followed by sequential narrations of the meatpacking process, which were often offered as travelogues that followed the route of livestock (and tourists) as they moved through the slaughtering process.

A key framing element in most guides, as in actual on-the-ground tours, was the stockyards' central gate. One of the first commissions of the famed Chicago architecture and planning firm Burnham and Root (another was the home of Union Stockyards founder and superintendent John B. Sherman), the gate was completed in 1879 and served as the main point for public entrance into the stockyards.²⁴ The "Stone Gate," as it came to be known, stood at the endpoint of Exchange Avenue and marked the beginning of the stockyards proper. Its purpose was both functional and symbolic, as it regulated the comings and goings within The Yards while at the same time symbolizing the separation of The Yards from the city and establishing its status as a self-sufficient and self-contained entity.

Almost every illustrated turn-of-the-century guidebook featured it prominently on or near its cover, including both the Wood Brothers' publication and John O'Brien's 1907 *Through the Chicago Stockyards*. In the latter (fig. 4), the gate appeared on the cover in an image that was almost certainly derived from a hand-colored photograph. Stretching across the tightly cropped and shallow pictorial field, the gate takes up the entire middle ground, with the attached guardhouse cut out entirely. The expansive dimensions of the stockyards are only vaguely visible through the main portal. The space before the gate, by contrast, is crowded with bodies. A small herd of cattle stands in profile in the center foreground with a collection of human figures surrounding them. These individuals represent a seemingly purposeful diversity of types: men on horseback, yard workers and ranchers, lower and middle classes, children and women. This crowding of figures humanizes the gateway, making it less imposing both as a structure and as a symbol of the stockyards beyond. The festive and showman-like spirit of the various figures conveys a surprising sense of intimacy, as if the gateway — whose smaller arches are seen to be not much taller than a standing

THROUGH THE
CHICAGO
STOCK
YARDS



RAND-McNALLY & COMPANY
CHICAGO NEW YORK

figure—opened onto a more intimate park or courtyard rather than an extensive and overwhelming industrial space.

Gaston Bachelard has proposed that the distinction between exterior and interior space has important implications for the perception of scale and being. Whereas exterior rationalizes the self as a function of the world, interior inverts this relationship by placing the world within the self.²⁵ Though it is doubtful that O'Brien and his publisher had such an existential transformation explicitly in mind, their gateway imagery suggests that some sort of psychological awareness was at work. O'Brien's individualized descriptions of the stockyards' various features and functions, some of which stretched several pages in length and were copiously illustrated with photographs, diagrams, and charts, made a significant effort to personalize the process of meat making by scaling it back to embodied experience. It is not enough to simply say that these images and narratives draw in to closer viewpoints (which they do); they also "see" spatial and social relationships at a different order than that of the industrial overview. The goal, we can imagine, was to make sense of the stockyards in ways that resonated with an actual experience of them by individual beings and bodies.

Like most guidebooks, O'Brien's narrative begins by offering the reader a concise history of the Union Stockyards, Packing Town, and the livestock industry in the United States accompanied by statistical data on current production. The purpose was to astound the reader with the enormous and systematic scale of both the site and the meat-packing industry. As the narrative shifted to describe The Yards proper, however, the focus changed. The text guided people, in seemingly real space and time, through the processes of stock handling and slaughter. The illustrations, meanwhile, sought to crystallize the overall experience into a discrete set of symbolic images. Some of these visions were focused on the stockyards' physical spaces and machinery, and others on the bodies of animals and human workers that circulated within it. In a frontispiece illustration of a hog-scraping machine (see fig. 2), a device that removed hair from the animal's carcass, what emerges almost immediately is a sense of the strange and fascinating subjugation of individual flesh-and-blood bodies to The Yards' relentless system of technologically driven industrial production. The full-page illustration includes three main elements: the machine that occupies the right section of the image, the hog carcasses that move on a vertical conveyor within it, and the worker in the lower left that tends the machine. The conveyor conjures a disconcerting sense of motion as the hog

4

Illustration of the stockyards' gate, from O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, front cover.

5
A view of the stock pens, from O'Brien,
Through the Chicago
Stockyards, 6.



A busy alley—Daily scene in the stock pens. The sheep houses may be seen in the background.

bodies lose touch with the ground, their natural plane of movement, and instead become subject to the artificial trajectories of the machinery. The representation of the worker in the lower corner enhances the mechanism's potency by diminishing his physical size and labor contribution, which becomes wholly subsidiary to the towering steel apparatus. The image communicates to the reader a troubling sense of the industrialized body: a form that is most useful and desirable only when it has been drained of blood and individual agency and objectified either as commodity or labor.

We can imagine that the frontispiece was intended to evoke the fascination and shock encountered at the stockyards—sensations that tourists described as simultaneously visceral, emotional, and

intellectual. The illustrations that followed, by contrast, sought to reconfigure this initial mixture of awe and uncertainty by invoking more secure structures of embodied order and viewing. An illustration of the outdoor livestock holding pens that appears a few pages later deploys the conventions of Albertian perspective as a means to stabilize space and scale (fig. 5). Positioned at the head of and slightly above a pen-flanked corridor, the beholder is able to utilize The Yards' gridded layout as a template for asserting visual mastery through measured geometry. Like in all such views, the converging orthogonal lines connect the scene directly to the gaze of the beholder, who becomes both the maker and primary inhabitant of the scene. The parallel fences of the individual pens cut horizontally across the illustration to construct a template for determining recession and diminishing proportionality. Overall, the visual effect is one that reconstitutes individual agency by aligning the stockyards' spaces with the gaze and scale of an embodied viewer.²⁶ Not coincidentally, an up-close photograph of the livestock in one of the pens that appears a few pages later seems to flesh out this sense of individuation (fig. 6). Singling out one animal from among the multitudes that were visible in The Yards, the image enables the viewer to see the livestock as self-sufficient and singular beings. The natural, one-to-one association of body to space is thus made possible, albeit briefly. Interestingly, such focus on individual

6
A view of cattle in a pen, from O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, 13.



First day at the yards—Corn-fed cattle shipped from western farms.

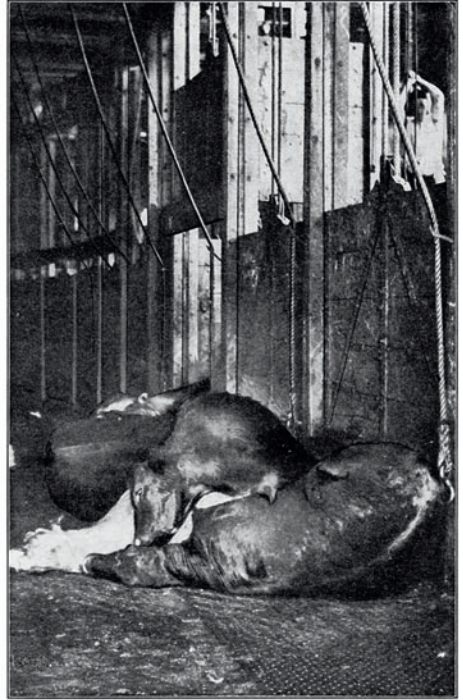
animals is a recurring trope within the guidebooks. While it usually functioned as a reassertion of conscious agency in a positive way, this was not always the case. The guidebooks often gave special attention to a particular category of stockyard animal, what author Joseph Grand described as the “bovine Judas.” These were individual animals trained to lead herds of their fellows from the pens to the packing-house “valley of death.”²⁷ Told in elegiac terms, the stories of these beasts usually anthropomorphized their subjects, ascribing to them great sense of self and will, but also placing them in disturbing complicity with the system.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of this rescaling of masses of livestock to the level of the single animal is that it enabled the killing act to be represented in an individualized way. While guidebooks’ narrative overviews quoted the impressive large-scale statistics of slaughter numbers and rates, their accounts of the actual process of butchering vacillated uncomfortably between the plural and the singular, with the slaughtering gang becoming the individual “knocker” and “cattle” becoming “the animal” — at least in descriptions addressing the moment of death.²⁸ The illustrational schema mirrored this shift. In O’Brien’s guide, for example, the picture of the individual steer (see fig. 6) was followed two pages later by a photograph depicting the moment in which a single animal, having been separated into an individual stall, experiences a sledgehammer blow to the head to stun it, or render it unconscious (fig. 7). Death occurred shortly thereafter when the senseless steer was hoisted by a back leg onto an overhead rail and its throat sliced. While the image does not hide the scale of the stunning floor, which can be seen to contain many stalls and sledgehammers, there is a notable concentration on the foreground, where an individual worker is highlighted in the act of dealing a single blow. Grand’s guidebook specifically characterized the slaughter as an “individualizing process,” noting that “from this point [the moment of stunning] the cattle are treated as individuals. They are no longer a herd, each steer becoming a ‘beef’ and thereafter going entirely on his merits as steak and roast.”²⁹ Through processing, the animal is reindividualized, although as a commodity unit rather than a “being” in the humanist sense.

In terms of a technical explanation, the limitations of indoor flash photography probably contributed to the tightly focused framing of the interior packinghouse illustrations.³⁰ The plants were often dimly lit, which probably made photography a challenge. Yet the highly personified descriptions favored by Grand and O’Brien in their narratives



Ready to strike the knockout blow.



After the knockout.

7
A view of the stunning of a beef with a sledgehammer, from O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, 15.

8
Stunned carcasses piled in an alleyway, from O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, 17.

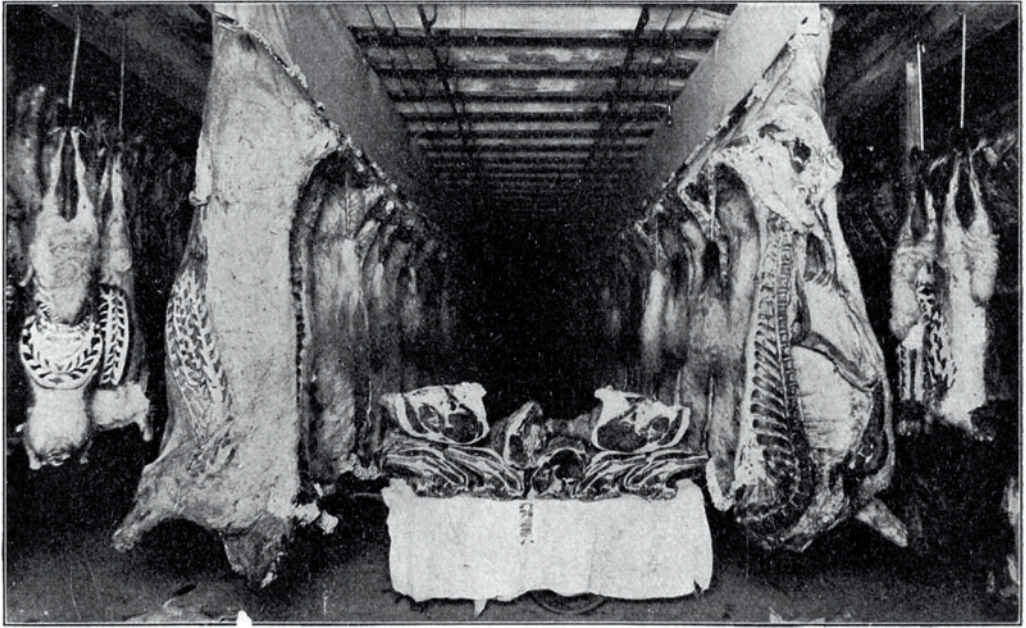
suggest the authors understood that the process of slaughter might be more palatable to the public if presented at a more limited scale. The next illustration from the killing floor seems to bear this contention out, as the sudden multiplication of animals upsets the guides' purposefully delimited, and thereby less shocking, illustration of slaughter (fig. 8). Showing a pile of lifeless bodies that have spilled from the individual stunning stalls into an alleyway, the photograph imparts a sense of confusion, disarray, and traumatic carnality.³¹ Unlike the rigorous sense of order asserted by the guidebook texts (and also, we can imagine, the human tour guides that ushered visitors through the plants), this photograph conjures in its slumping and piled bodies the raw and haunting shock of formerly living beings rendered fatally inanimate. That it is a heap of multiple bodies rather than just one heightens this effect. Collapsed atop one another in a lumpy twisting mound, the carcasses invoke a kind of writhing fleshy horror that forces the viewer to realign the individualized act of death-dealing with the industrial scale of its enactment. Even the corporate owners of the plants, whom we might imagine as insensitive to such mass carnality, seemed to understand the psychological stakes of their industrialization of killing. A souvenir guidebook published by the

meatpacker Swift and Company, for example, made an effort to sanitize hog killing via an illustration that diverts attention from the shackled animals and killing machinery in the background to the playful child of a middle-class tourist couple in the foreground (fig. 9). Its text is equally elusive in its recasting of the butcher as a “dispatcher,” a rich double entendre that suggests killing but also the more benign act of sending something to a destination—which was also commercially appropriate.³² Yet a sense of horror persists, as the young child, whose body is approximately the same size as the hog in the background, appears to teeter on the bannister as if about to fall into the machinery. Stranger still is the way that, like the hog, the child is pictured as suspended in the air on a horizontal timber whose trajectory parallels the beam supporting the dangling animal. In an uncanny appropriation of meatpacking terminology, it can be said that the youth’s body is also on the “rail.”

While it may have been tempting to view Packing Town as little more than a horrific and bloody slaughterhouse, the guidebooks echoed the sentiments of middle-class tourists in resisting such simplification. As O’Brien asserted, modern meatpacking was understood to embody the systematic mobilization of capital, technology, labor, and resources at the highest order. Speaking of the packinghouse, he wrote, “Its internal economy exhibits the refinements of human ingenuity.”³³ The ingenuity, of course, lay in how quickly and efficiently the packing system made bodies disappear, or perhaps better stated, dismembered

9
A company representation of a packinghouse tour, from Swift and Company, *Visitors Reference Book* [Chicago: s.n., 1903], not paginated.





Christmas display in beef cooler.

10
A view of the beef
cooler, from O'Brien,
*Through the Chicago
Stockyards*, 37.

them into something else. As much as they came to see the spectacle of death, people also visited the stockyards to witness this new economy of industrial production.

The bulk of the O'Brien guidebook's thirty-six illustrations pictured some specific aspect of the packing process, as the narrative traced the pathway of the animal through the slaughterhouse machinery, from killing to the removal of hide and offal, butchering, inspecting, processing, and packaging for final distribution. Arranged in this way, the photographs gave the process a rational frame while simultaneously highlighting its scale and efficiency. The illustrations also prioritized comprehensiveness, and O'Brien made a particular effort to demonstrate a multitude of the different products and uses derived from the animal's raw materials.³⁴ While a few of the photographs called attention to machinery and human labor, these concerns mostly remained subsidiary to images showing the changing disposition of the carcass. This is the case in even the most labor-centric illustrations. For example, in a depiction of the cutting room, where skilled knifemen separated whole carcasses into individual cuts, it is the converging orthogonal lines of hung and trimmed meat that appear to give order and purpose to the scene. By contrast, the stopped-and-staring crowd of butchers and onlookers seems to be both physically disorganized

THROUGH THE STOCK YARDS

1-Round	24.09%
2-Loin	16.50
3-Flank	2.53
4-Rib	9.64
5-Navel	8.46
6-Brisket	6.00
7-Chuck	22.05
8-Shank	6.75
9-Suet	3.98
	<u>100.00</u>



The accompanying illustration shows the general style of cutting the full side of a dressed beef. The choicest porterhouse steaks are cut from the part numbered 2; the popular club-house steaks, from the part numbered 13; and the sirloin steaks, from the part numbered 12. Numbers 5 and 6 show the parts generally used for corned beef. The table gives the percentages of the different cuts.

and visually out of place among the static columns of inanimate beef. As in the earlier illustrations of the cattle pens, the photograph delights in the projection of Albertian order and perspective, which again serves to bring industrial scale under the beholder's mastery. Perhaps for this reason, images of dressed carcasses hanging in chilling coolers (it was preferable to have all bodily warmth dissipate before finer butchering) became among the most popular of packinghouse views. O'Brien's photograph of the beef cooler conflates the deep perspectival recession of the room with the countless carcasses hanging in rows from its ceiling (fig. 10). As an added bit of staging, the photograph also features a display of beef cuts on a rolling cart in the foreground.

Although not the endpoint of the packing process (which came in the form of steaks, canned meats, and other even more heavily processed commodities), the beef cooler photograph marks the apex of the stockyards narrative. It is the point at which the animal body is fully and irrevocably rendered from animate being to industrial product. Up to this point, the transformation has been messy and psychologically fraught, as its human (and photographic) witnesses struggled to balance two incommensurate frameworks of flesh: one in which animal bodies appeared as sentient wholes and in a natural order, and another in which they registered as defined but irretrievably abstracted components in a coldly calculated industrial system. The O'Brien guidebook outlined the visual cast of this transformation of flesh into meat (two very different words) in an unassuming but semantically powerful illustration a few pages later. This final vision of the butchering process reconstitutes the bovine body in an informational and expressionless two-dimensional diagram mapping out the various cuts of meat (fig. 11). The dotted lines and numeric coding marked into its interior partition this once living body into a typological map of meat as commodity—one whose scale of measurement is that of the proportional percentage.

Perhaps more so than any early twentieth-century manufacturing effort, meatpacking crystallized the visceral stakes of subjecting life to the machinations of industrial scale. Viewed from the standpoint of modern production, the system visualized in the sequence of images from the stockyards panorama to the beef diagram represents the triumph of large-scale rationality, technology, and organization over the contingencies of embodiment and self-determination.³⁵ Yet another sense of measure endured, as demonstrated by the shock and revulsion of tourist accounts, or the expressive and psychological incongruences manifested in the visual juxtaposition of piled, lifeless

11
Diagram of a beef
carcass, from O'Brien,
Through the Chicago
Stockyards, 45.

bovine bodies with the abstract, rationalizing diagrams of those same bodies when viewed as commodities. This other scale—one of pain and, by extension, sentience and mortality—stood at odds with the rationalization, depersonalization, and abstraction of The Yards’ industrial order. As Elaine Scarry has argued, pain is irretrievably invisible; it resists quantification and objectification and remains always locked into the body that experiences it. Possessing no external referent and largely incommunicable, pain “is not available to sensory confirmation,” and can only be represented and interpreted by the most imprecise and slippery of measures and metaphors.³⁶ At the same time, pain reorients perception of scale to a condition in which all measurements point inward—away from outside comparisons and toward the innately interiorized sensibility of the self. As such, pain is deeply encoded in the human psyche as a core condition of embodiment and individuality; it insists on a one-to-one equation between the body and experience of the world. Knowing this, we understand pain as the most steadfast marker of the body as defining measure. Just as pain makes the body into the world, it also establishes its fragility, and mortality, as the essential measure of being.

Of course, not photographs, language, or even first-hand observation could make the experiences of animals at slaughter fully available to beholders.³⁷ But at issue is not whether guidebook readers or even stockyards visitors and employees felt the animals’ pain. Rather, the premise at stake in the context of Chicago’s burgeoning industrial modernity was whether witnessing violence against the body (any body), especially when inflicted in a systematic and purposeful way, imperiled the viewer’s sense of selfhood, either through analogy or, in stronger terms, empathy. Such a perception of existential alignment between human and animal bodies was anathema to The Yards, whose entire conceptual system relied on the premise that the individual body was not the consequential scale for the world. Indeed, proponents of industry, which is what the guidebook authors ultimately were, almost certainly shaped their accounts of meat processing into celebrations of industrial achievement precisely to leverage one sense of scale against another. They intended their citations of extraordinary facts and figures, along with their other visual and rhetorical strategies, to astound their audiences with the size and scope of the stockyards, while to the greatest extent possible downplaying and obfuscating the stakes manifest in such a scale. In their eyes, mortality was not a measure unto itself but rather a means to an end—the realization of a new order of action that in itself became a crowning human

achievement. By diminishing the resonance of pain and empathy—of the individual as the scale of being—the guidebooks’ pictures worked to illustrate this end. As Scarry rightfully warned, however, attempts to represent and thereby objectify pain carry with them significant practical, but more importantly, moral and ethical consequences.³⁸ With regard to animals, such concerns would have been invisible to turn-of-the-century culture, which largely viewed them as objects.

The City as a Stockyard

Animals, however, were not the only bodies at risk in the stockyards. The many men, women, and children working in Packing Town constituted a multitude nearly equal to that of the livestock: one for whom the stakes of industrial scale were equally dire. Tourist guidebooks tended to gloss over the laborers and their working conditions by sublimating their agency and labor into the overall operations of the system. When workers were mentioned, it was typically via the hyperindividualization of a few clever characters or the recounting of seemingly comedic working-class rituals such as the daily “can rush,” in which packinghouse workers hurried to nearby taverns on their lunch break.³⁹ Wages and working hours received scant attention, as did the major strikes that paralyzed the industry in 1886, 1894, and 1904 and led to harsh reprisals from plant owners.⁴⁰

By the early 1900s, however, the experience of the working classes at the stockyards and especially in the packinghouses became the focus of its own literature, one in which scale was again very much of primary concern. As the processing plants expanded, their labor needs grew rapidly and worker numbers increased almost exponentially. Men, women, and children flooded into Chicago in answer to this demand, some of them coming from the rural United States and many more arriving as immigrants from Europe. These foreign newcomers, mostly peasant farmers and urban laborers, came at first from Ireland and Germany and later from Central and Eastern Europe, and often arrived with little money and almost no familiarity with the English language. They typically knew even less about the jobs at the packinghouses and the living conditions that awaited them.⁴¹ Along with these disadvantages, it became the case that the numbers of arriving workers often outstripped the labor needs of the plants. Sensing an advantage, the stockyards administrators used the large and often desperate labor pool as a means to keep wages low while giving little concern to working conditions. As University of Chicago sociologist Charles Bushnell (1875–1950) recounted, a man-

ager at one of the largest packinghouses expressed his valuation of his employees with the terse declaration that “when one cog wears out we put in another.” An attitude so bereft of “human interests,” that treated a worker “without personal recognition or personal standing,” Bushnell concluded, could not help but “arouse in the workman a corresponding spirit of hostility, and make him a mere sullen plodder or resentful savage.”⁴²

Bushnell’s groundbreaking study of stockyards labor published in 1902, *The Social Problem at the Chicago Stock Yards*, typified the Progressive ideals and modern sociological methods brought to bear on social conditions in the packinghouses and also in the largely immigrant working-class community offhandedly referred to as the “Back of the Yards.”⁴³ Like many of the new century’s social reformers, Bushnell set out to critique the dehumanizing and antidemocratic configuration of modern labor that was epitomized by, but not unique to, meatpacking. Though he understood the problems of “large-scale industry” as a universal condition, he also clearly if perhaps subconsciously discerned a deeper analogy between the meatpackers’ treatment of animals and workers. In explaining his goal of bringing forth better conditions for the stockyards laborer, Bushnell invoked a common, but in this context tellingly overdetermined, colloquialism. Describing the social needs of people in an industrial society, he explained, “Man is more than a political animal (in the narrow sense). Man is also a distinctly social animal, a constructing animal, a reflecting animal, an artistic animal, a religious animal.”⁴⁴ Bushnell’s rhetorical intention here was a positive one, as he enumerated the qualities that best animated human life. Yet a more subversive interpretation of the metaphor is also possible. In the risks workers faced in the stockyards lay their possible negative association with animals: that they might be looked upon as so many carcasses to be used up by the system.

The emergence of documentary photography at the turn of the century probably compelled Bushnell to deploy illustrations in his study. Even so, the degree to which the sociologist’s program of visual representation mirrors that of the guidebooks is unmistakable, especially with regard to scale and point of view. Bushnell opened his description of the stockyards with the use of three illustrated overviews. A panoramic photograph of the stockyards taken from the water tower—probably the same one used in the Wood Brothers’ guidebook (it is cropped differently)—appears at the base of a multipart world map showing the expanding reach of Chicago’s meatpacking industry.⁴⁵ This same panoramic view is also duplicated as an etching on page 3

of Bushnell's text. The third instance appears in a photograph of the Armor and Co. packing plant taken from a balloon tethered several hundred feet above the ground. As in the guidebooks, these overviews serve to establish the scale of the enterprise by demonstrating its awe-inspiring immensity and highlighting its corresponding systematic unity. Next, Bushnell presented a series of photographs from the interior of the packinghouses. On the whole, these images closely resemble the look and pattern of the guidebooks' visual narratives, with the important exception that the sociologist also included illustrations of the plants' power-generating and administrative infrastructures. Bushnell found the inclusion of these elements vital to his critique, as they better displayed the unseen industrial and organizational forces that drove the system. A photograph of the Swift company general offices in particular reveals the sublime scale of supervision by which the system was governed. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the extensive and tightly regimented grid of accountants' desks that fills the photograph bears a striking resemblance to the matrix of animal pens that so often were the focus in photographs of the nearby stockyards. In this regard, Bushnell described the modern livestock and meatpacking industry as an "almost miraculous system," noting that it "includes virtually in a single organization all of the various agencies for handling the stock from the time it reaches the yards to the time it is sent out in the form of consumable goods to the public."⁴⁶

Bushnell also found much to admire in the scale and organization of The Yards' social and labor structures. He described this system as a model of efficiency and regulated order, likening the marshaling of human workers to that of a "thoroughly organized and highly trained industrial army."⁴⁷ Yet such regimentation came at substantial cost to the individual worker and the community, whose needs were subjugated to those of production. The great number of unemployed, itself also an army, kept wages low. Because livestock arrivals fluctuated from day to day and packers did not allow workers to leave the plant until all available animals were processed, workdays could become interminable. Inversely, low animal numbers caused workers to be dismissed early or turned away altogether without any wage for that day. These uncertainties made the prospects of everyday life perilous. Plant working conditions added further stress. The packing houses were dark and bacteria-laden, the work backbreaking, and injuries numerous. Cuts, which were frequent given the nature of butchering, often proved catastrophic because of infection and lack of medical care. The practices of firing political activists, suppressing unionization,

and strikebreaking ensured that workers—many of whom were also uneducated, spoke little English, and had limited high-order comprehension of industrial ideology—remained disorganized and politically powerless.⁴⁸

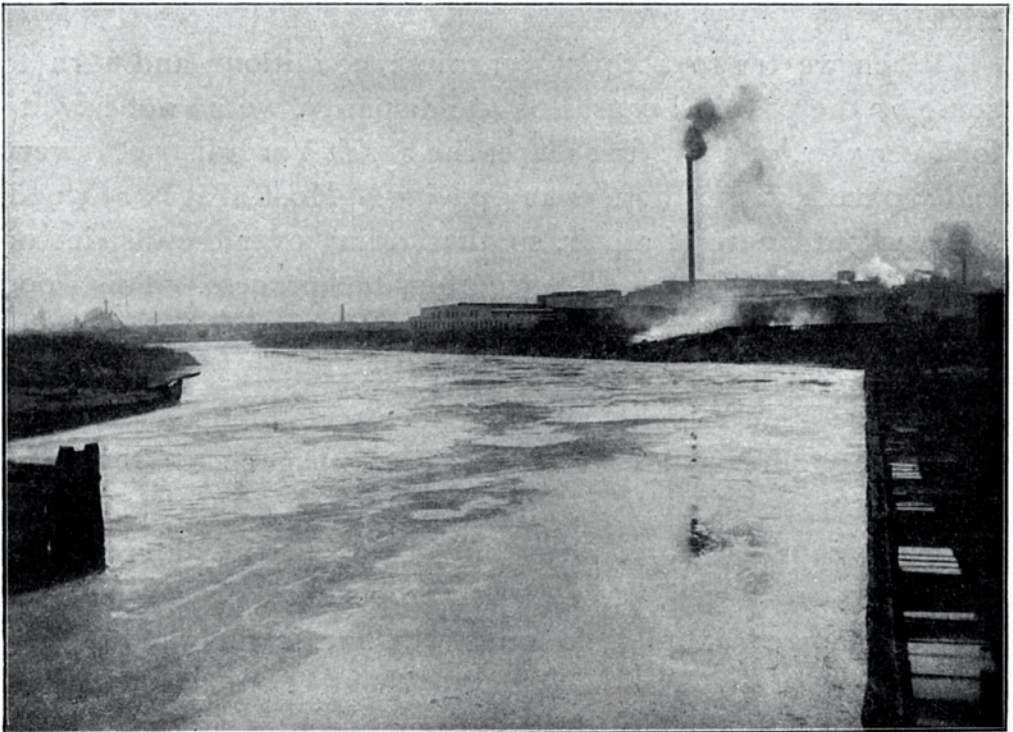
Although Bushnell's text delineated the physically and mentally debilitating conditions of packinghouse labor, its illustrations of these activities evinced for the most part only a posed and mechanical sterility that seemed almost implicitly to celebrate the system. Part of the reason had to do with the limits of visual representation, which could not convey the multisensory effects of meatpacking: the plants' uncomfortable temperatures, oppressive humidity, foul stench, poor air quality, and deafening machinery, and the noises of laborers and animals. More of it had to do with the technical limitations of photography, whose instantaneous images could not convey the grinding effects of the labor and environment over time. The most obvious shortcoming of the illustrations in conveying actual conditions, however, derived from the authority of meatpacking officials who controlled access to the production floors and almost certainly regulated image making there. The inability of the photographs to express the full stakes of packinghouse labor testifies to the powerful sanitizing capabilities of large-scale industry, which amount to another of its dehumanizing effects.

Bushnell's imagery from outside the plants offered a more biting critique, especially the series of photographs depicting the Back of the Yards, the working-class neighborhood adjacent to Packing Town. Operating beyond the reach of packinghouse censorship, these illustrations replaced the celebration of industrial scale with the identification of its more pernicious human outcomes. In total, Bushnell included seven photographs highlighting the deleterious conditions of working-class life and the wasted landscape where it took shape.⁴⁹ Organized as a sequence, Bushnell's illustrations open with two views of the Back of the Yards, one of which shows the neighborhood's unpaved and mud-mired streets and the steep open ditches that served as sewers. A second offers a view of the nearby South Branch of the Chicago River, which bordered the Back of the Yards and also served as the main dumping point for Packing Town's industrial waste (fig. 12). Though the photograph is hard to decipher because of print quality, we can be sure that its primary purpose was to show the layer of industrial filth, often several feet thick, that blanketed the water's surface. People began to refer to the river as "bubbly creek" in a sarcastic description of the toxic meatpacking effluvia that poisoned the waters and the gaseous

pustules that erupted through the river's thick scum layer.⁵⁰ By showing the river in its ruinous state, Bushnell presented a new aspect of The Yards' operations, one of decidedly dire consequence. It could be argued that the photograph functions to celebrate industrial achievement by presenting the river as a vast natural feature that has been rigidly channeled for maximum utility. Yet as the viewer, aided by Bushnell's text, peers at the oozing and chemically coagulated waters, what emerges instead is a sense of their unnatural stillness and, on a higher level, the immense environmental degradation enacted by industry. The inclusion of an emblematic factory smokestack in the background, and its eerie (and almost painterly) reflection on the river's stagnant surface of filth, provides a visual indictment of the stockyards' large-scale defilement of the natural world.

12
The South Branch of the
Chicago River, from
Charles Bushnell, *The
Social Problem at the
Chicago Stock Yards*
(Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1902), 39.

This visualization of filth and environmental corruption carried into Bushnell's illustrations of working-class life. A page after the street view, the author included a photograph of the large, open-air garbage dump that bordered the Back of the Yards on its western edge. As in the river photograph, the dump picture emphasizes the almost



VIEW OF SOUTH BRANCH OF CHICAGO RIVER.



CITY GARBAGE DUMP IN THE CHICAGO STOCK YARD DISTRICT (RECENTLY ABANDONED).

13
View of the city dump
near the Back of the
Yards, from Bushnell,
Social Problem, 42.

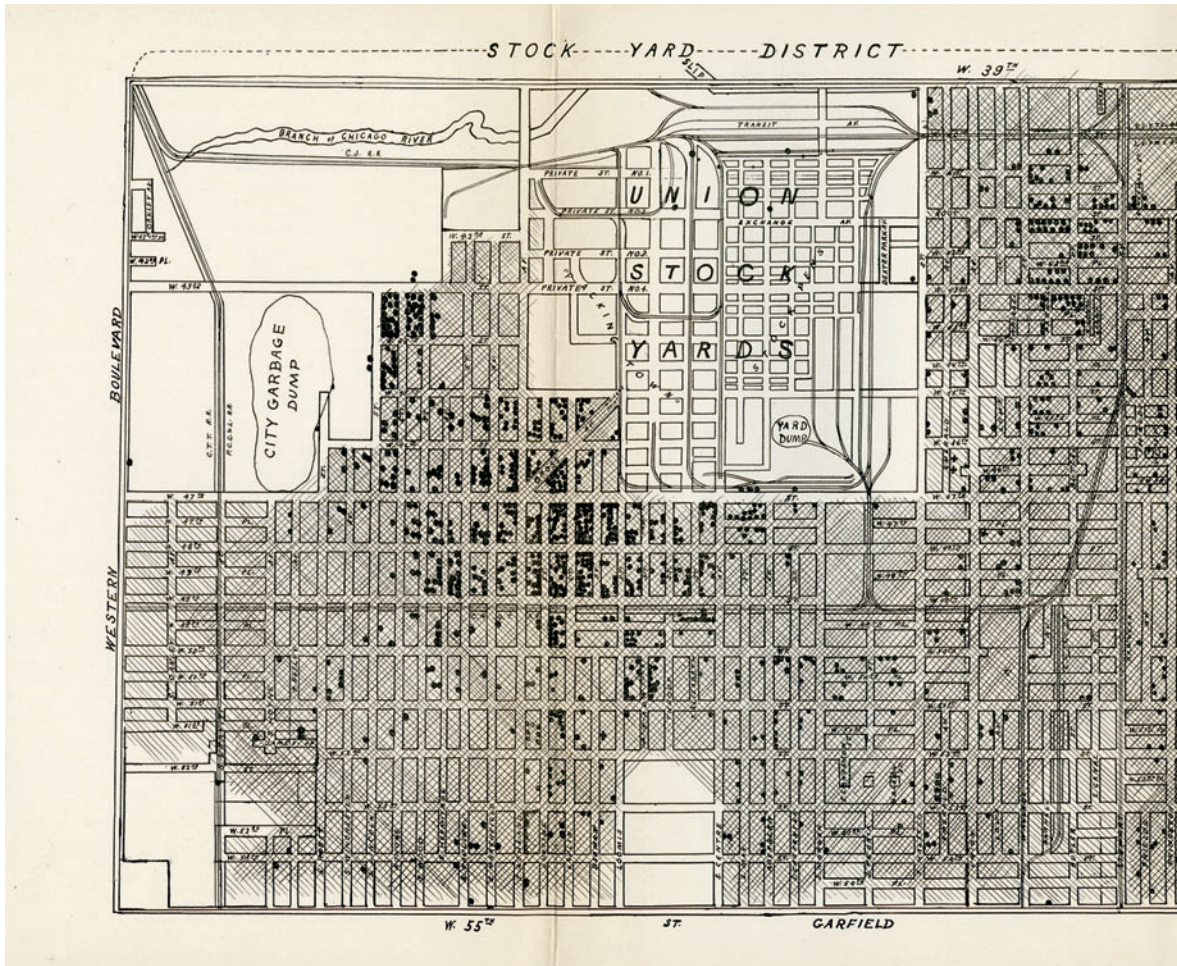
immeasurable filth of the landscape, thereby drawing a direct link between the large-scale industry of the stockyards and its equally substantial though decidedly less desirable by-products. Oriented horizontally and staged somewhat panoramically (perhaps in implicit mimicry of the earlier photographic overviews), the illustration also reveals a bevy of figures—men, women, and children—standing amid a thick and seemingly unlimited field of trash (fig. 13). A garbage dray appears behind them, its driver unloading further refuse. A series of small working-class houses lines the horizon to cement the direct physical and psychological connection between the neighborhood, its inhabitants, and the dump landscape. Again, a single industrial smokestack projects from the horizon where it is enveloped by a sooty haze. In complement to this wide-angle photograph, Bushnell next printed a closer-in view of the trash pile, this one focusing on a handful of the numerous child garbage-pickers who combed the dump regularly in search of “trophies.” Its caption makes the reader aware of the picture’s Christmastime date, which in turn transforms a desiccated conifer tree the children have scavenged into a symbol of social dissolution. Once again, smoke-stacks on the horizon confirm the ever-present and comprehensive grip of the meatpacking system on the lives of individuals. Unlike the more celebratory pro-industry views captured in the guidebooks, however, Bushnell deploys his photographs to suggest how large-scale systems of production pervert and dissolve the human-scale frameworks of culture and community.

Of a piece with the documentary photographs of steelworkers and child laborers that Lewis Hine (1874–1940) produced later in the decade, Bushnell's illustrations drive home at a poignant personal scale the problems enacted on human life by the stockyards system.⁵¹ As such, they are diagnostic in the sense that they study the individual case, which then becomes evidence for constructing a more complete and encompassing model of social conditions. It was the latter interest in large-scale modeling, more so than an investment in the plight of specific individuals, it turns out, that drove Bushnell's critique. The sociologist presupposed that in the context of an industrial system operating at a large and unified scale, the episodic individual viewpoint had limited relevance and influence, even in questions of community life. In recognition of this, Bushnell followed the emerging trends in his field (many of them pioneered in Chicago) to envision a critique of social relations that was itself presented at industrial size. Alongside his human-scale photographs and "personal visits, observations and interviews," Bushnell also engaged in extensive quantitative analysis of public health records, birth and mortality numbers, education data, and so forth.⁵² He presented this information in his text through an extensive program of graphs, charts, and maps. One such image, a large foldout orthogonal map of the packing plant communities and the adjacent middle-class neighborhood of Hyde Park, exemplifies the sociologist's faith in the language of large-scale visualization (fig. 14).⁵³ Within the map, each dot represents a family in economic distress, and the various patterns of crosshatch shading signify the average yearly income for families living that area. In effect, the map takes the qualitative expressivity of the photographs and quantifies it. Social relations and human suffering take on the abstraction and objectivity that were the primary elements of industrial scale. Poverty and mortality are not experienced by specific beings, but rather are distributed across objective space as a statistical function. In this way, the social body could be rationalized, abstracted, and managed, not unlike the animals in *The Yards*.

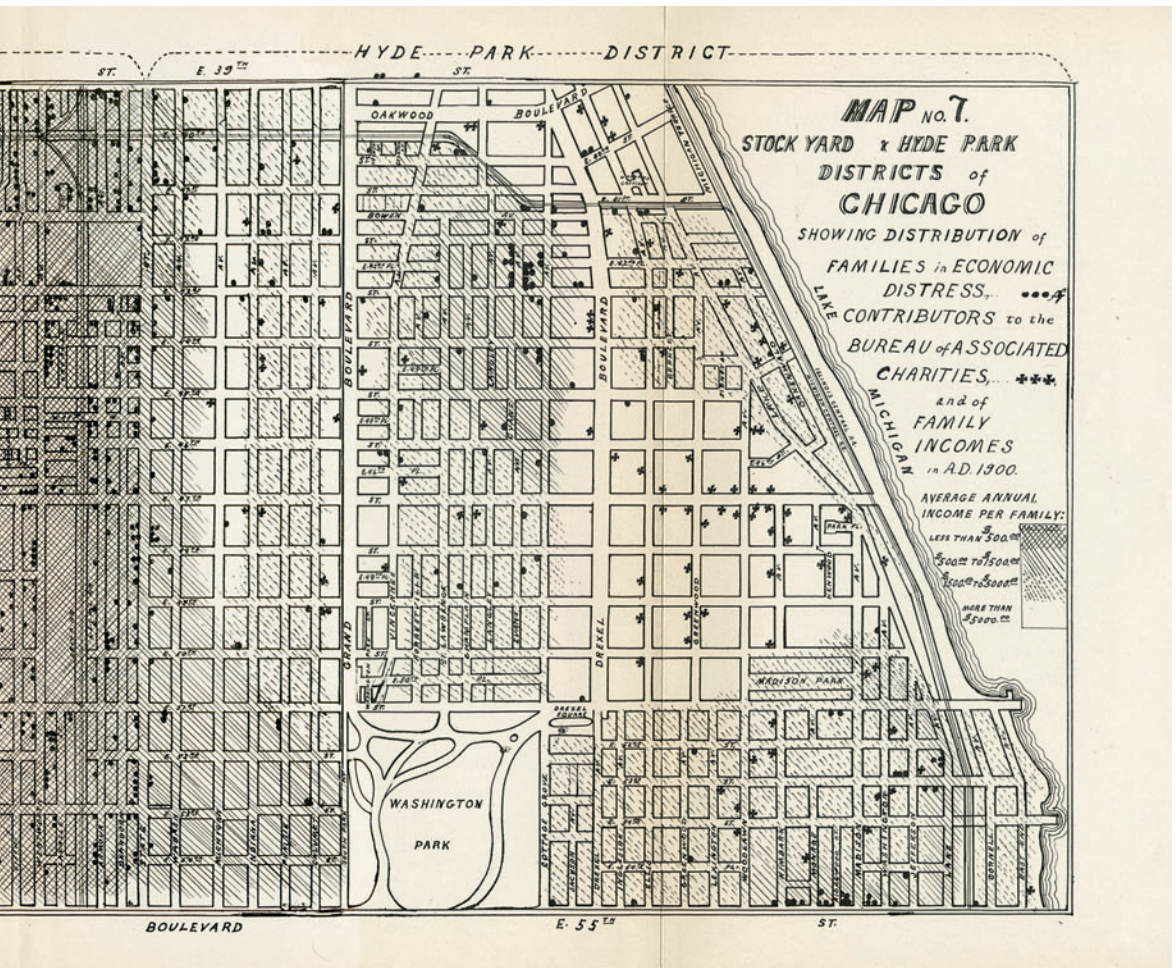
Given his own sense of the miraculous capabilities of modern industry, Bushnell certainly believed that by making the dissolution of the social body visible in a comprehensive way, he laid the groundwork for an equally totalizing amelioration of those conditions. Such was the faith of people in modernity during the early twentieth century, a confidence held even by some of its most ardent critics. The simple truth was, however, that in vastly scaled and industrially gridded America, people often mattered far less than production.

The stockyards' function of holding cattle in advance of slaughter was sadly not so different from the city's purpose of amassing laboring bodies for use in the plants. The meatpackers' commodities thus were doubly replete with processed and abstracted bodies: both animal and human. In some respects, the slow and incomplete social response to the work of Bushnell and others confirmed Scarry's warning that objectifying the pain (and subjectivity) of others, even for altruistic purposes, can be treacherous. As she observed, once the "felt attributes of pain" are lifted into representation, they can then be attached to referents other than the human body.⁵⁴ In the case of the stockyards, this is the final dehumanization of scale and perhaps modernity's greatest irony. By quantifying working-class suffering at the order of industrial scale, Bushnell unwittingly took possession

14
Map showing the distribution of families in economic distress, from Bushnell, *Social Problem*, insert between pages 48 and 49.



of those experiences away from their individual bearers and ascribed them to the system. Thus, in the sociologist's final analysis, large-scale industry was the suffering body in need of attention, not the workers. His proposed solutions to the "social problem" at the stockyards were, for the most part, reforms to the meatpacking business that were designed to improve *it*, with the idea that if the system were more effectively managed, better living and working conditions would thereby emerge. Even here, the individual being is butchered at the scale of industry.



- 1 Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes* [1899], repr. ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 104–5.
- 2 Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* [1905], 8th ed. (New York: The New American Library, 1909), 82.
- 3 The 1870 statistic appears in Louis Wade, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown and Environs in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 47. The remaining numbers are taken from Wood Brothers, *Facts and Figures of Chicago Live Stock Trade for Twenty-Four Years with Other Valuable Information* (Chicago: Press of the Chicago Dairy Farmers and Drivers Journal, 1904), 24, 17.
- 4 John O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards: A Handy Guide to the Meatpacking Industry* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1907), 14–16. Figures for the total acreage of the stockyards vary from publication to publication, in part because of frequent expansions and whether the meatpacking plants were included as part of the footprint (O'Brien appears to include them, though he does not explicitly state it).
- 5 This phrase became a common means for celebrating the famed efficiency of Chicago's modern meatpacking methods and is nearly ubiquitous in the contemporary literature. The author first encountered the phrase in Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 38.
- 6 Walter Lionel George, *Hail Columbia* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1921), as reprinted in Bessie Pierce, ed., *As Others See Chicago: Impressions of Visitors, 1673–1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 470.
- 7 *Ibid.* Suspension points in original.
- 8 Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura* [1435], ed. Martin Kemp (New York: Penguin Press, 1991).
- 9 David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Boston: MIT Press, 1999), 6–7.
- 10 As Nye's discussion suggests, the literature on the sublime is rich. Most modern accounts of the sublime begin with its theorization by Burke and Kant, as does my work. See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757] (Oxford University Press, 1990); and Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952). Other writings that contributed significantly to my thinking but are not otherwise cited include Neil Cooper, "Scale Words," *Analysis* 27, 5 (Apr. 1967): 153–59; Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941); Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Colossal: Engineering the Suez Canal, Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower and Panama Canal* (New York: Periscope Publishing, 2012); Katherine Jones, "Scale as Epistemology," *Political Geography* 17, 1 (1998): 25–28; Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 [1867] (New York: International Publishers, 1967); Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [1962], trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1995); Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
- 11 Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, 8.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 17 and 17–43 *passim*.
- 13 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 45.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 70–71.
- 15 The estimate of a half a million yearly visitors comes from Dominc Pacyga, *Slaughterhouse: Chicago's Union Stockyards and the World It Made* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 1. That tourism was a sizable part of the industry is further demonstrated by the fact that the stockyards and most packinghouses employed trained guides to direct tourists. Many of them also published guidebooks as did multiple private presses. Evidence suggests that tourists came from all social classes. The guidebooks probably circulated mostly among the middle and upper classes.
- 16 George Lambert, *A Trip through the Union Stock Yards and Slaughter Houses* (Chicago: s.n., 1893), front matter. The earliest Union Stockyards guidebook known to the author appeared the year it was founded; see Jack Wing, *The Great Union Stockyards of Chicago: Their Railroad Connections, Bank and Exchange, the Hough House, the Water Supply, and General Features* (Chicago: Religio-philosophical Publishing Assoc., 1865). Birth and death dates for guidebook authors George Lambert and John O'Brien and are not available.

- 17 A majority of the tourist descriptions consulted for this study were published in the travel writing genre. Often these descriptions were embedded in larger narratives of visiting the World's Fair, Chicago, and/or the United States. For useful compilation of such accounts, see Pierce, *As Others See Chicago*.
- 18 Paul Bourget, *Outre-Mer Impressions of America* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1895), as reprinted in Pierce, *As Others See Chicago*, 387.
- 19 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (Autumn 1998): 581. For a fuller consideration of elevated and aerial viewing, see Jason Weems, *Barnstorming the Prairies: How Aerial Vision Shaped the Midwest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). Other foundational theorizations include Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1979); Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," *Critical Inquiry* 19, 3 (1993): 397–420; and James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
- 20 The Wood brothers founded a livestock trading company that bore their name. In 1904, the company was one of the largest livestock buyers in the Union Stockyards and had branch offices in smaller yards across the Midwest. Its publication was most likely intended for livestock traders, ranchers, businessmen, investors, and other yards stakeholders. Though well-illustrated and slickly produced, its statistical data was probably too dense for the average tourist or packing yards worker.
- 21 For background on the aesthetics of data presentation, see Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990); Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1983); and John Bender and Michael Marinan, *The Culture of the Diagram* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
- 22 The bibliography on the cultural and representational complexities of cartography is substantial. For a consideration by the present author in another context, see Weems, *Barnstorming the Prairies*. See also J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26, 2 (Spring 1989): 1–20; J. B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essay on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277–312; Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford, 1992); Jacques Bertin, *Semiology of Graphics: Diagrams, Networks, Maps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); and Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- 23 On the representation of large-scale violence and war, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003); and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
- 24 Lewis Carroll Wade, "Burnham and Root's Stockyards Connection," *Chicago History* 4 (1975), 142. Burnham and Root designed several other structures at The Yards, including the water tower from which figure 1 was taken.
- 25 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, repr. ed. (New York: Beacon Press, 1994), 160–61.
- 26 The key theorization of perspective as a socially symbolic form is Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* [1924], trans. Christopher Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- 27 Joseph Grand, *Illustrated History of the Union Stockyards: Sketchbook of Familiar Faces and Places at the Yards* (Chicago: Thos. Knapp, 1896), 58–61.
- 28 O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, 44–46. "Knocker" was shorthand for the worker who delivered a sledgehammer blow to the skull of a bovine to stun it so that it could be hoisted and bled.
- 29 Grand, *Illustrated History of the Union Stockyards*, 48–50.
- 30 Most packinghouses were dark because of limited natural and, at least during the period in question, artificial lighting. The stunning rooms were also kept purposefully dim. These conditions would have made photography difficult, with success contingent on the era's rudimentary flash technology. This is why foreground figures often appear to be somewhat garishly illuminated.

31 It is noteworthy that both Grand (1896) and O'Brien (1907) appear to use the same photograph of stunned beeves on the slaughter floor. This suggests that photography inside of the plants may have been tightly controlled and/or that most guidebook authors drew from a standard pool of images. It also demonstrates that some technologies changed slowly in the packinghouses.

32 Swift and Company, *Visitors Reference Book* [Chicago: s.n., 1903], not paginated.

33 O'Brien, *Through the Chicago Stockyards*, 16

34 The meat industry's comprehensive use of the animal body was a source of pride and fascination. The packers put almost all materials to use: flesh, hair, hide, bone, and offal became food, brushes, clothes, cosmetics, glue, and fertilizer (to name a few products). This was the case with all animals, and it is noteworthy that most guidebooks composed separate illustrated narratives for each of the three main livestock species handled in the plants—cattle, sheep, and hogs. Horses were traded at the stockyards for live resale; their slaughter was not a topic of the guides.

35 Several studies address meatpacking as an industry that fostered modernization at a large scale, the most relevant being William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 207–59 especially.

36 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–5.

37 The complicated relationship of photography to the representation of death is well studied. See, for example, Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* or Roland Barthes's classic rumination *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).

38 Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 6.

39 Grand, *Illustrated History of the Union Stockyards*, 226–27. Grand's narrative is unique in the extent to which it focuses on the storylines of individual personalities in The Yards, both human and beast. It is as if he was purposefully, albeit naïvely, compensating for The Yards' destructive and desubjectifying functions.

40 There are many fine histories of labor and immigration in relation to the stockyards. Those consulted include Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Wade, *Chicago's Pride*; Thomas Jablonsky, *Pride and Everyday Life in the Back of the Yards* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); James Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and the Industrial Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). It is important to note that in the early twentieth century strike actions had their own economies of scale.

41 During the early twentieth century, Chicago became one of the most heavily studied urban industrial spaces in the nation. This is because of the city's enormous concentration of heavy industry, influx of immigrant workers, and depressed conditions of working-class space and life. Another factor lies in the emergence of a substantial group of social thinkers and reformers, many of them centered at the University of Chicago and especially its Department of Sociology. Noteworthy figures included Jane Addams (founder of Hull House), George Mead, and John Dewey.

42 Charles Bushnell, *The Social Problem at the Chicago Stock Yards* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 85. Bushnell also published the first three chapters of the book as articles during 1901–1902 in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Of course, Sinclair's thinly fictionalized 1905 novel *The Jungle* remains the era's most powerful account of the social conditions at The Yards. Other contemporaneous social studies of the meatpacking district consulted here include Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, "Housing Conditions in Chicago, III: Back of the Yards," *American Journal of Sociology* 16 (Jan. 1911): 433–68; Louise Montgomery, *The American Girl in the Stockyards* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913); Floyd Barnard, "A Study of Industrial Diseases of the Stockyards" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1910); Ernest Talbert, *Opportunities in School and Industry for Children of the Stockyards District* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1912); J. C. Kennedy et al., *Wages and Family Budgets in the Chicago Stockyards District* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1914); and Charles Edward Russell, "The Greatest Trust in the World," *Everybody's Magazine*, published in three parts: vol. 12, no. 2, Feb. 1905, 147–56; vol. 12, no. 3, Mar. 1905, 291–300; and vol. 13, no. 3, Sept. 1905, 380–83.

43 The name “Back of the Yards” indicated the neighborhood’s geographic position at the south and west borders of Packing Town, in other words, behind the stockyards complex.

44 Bushnell, *Social Problem*, xii.

45 The map was published as an insert between pages 4 and 5. It consists of three symmetrical Mercator projections of the globe dated 1857, 1877, and 1900. Each is shaded to indicate the expanding geographical footprint of where the stockyards acquired its livestock and sold its finished products.

46 Bushnell, *Social Problem*, 22, 23. The illustrations discussed in this paragraph appear in rough sequence from pages 3 to 23.

47 *Ibid.*, 23.

48 Sinclair’s *The Jungle* offers the most thorough description of worker rights and labor protest (or lack thereof) at The Yards. For a more recent study, see Wade, *Chicago’s Pride*, 114–30 and 226–63, *passim*.

49 These images appear in Bushnell’s chapter on the stockyards community (*Social Problem*, 29–69).

50 The South Fork of the Chicago River was an industrial cesspool. Beginning in 1892, the city reverse engineered the entire Chicago River so that it no longer followed its natural flow into Lake Michigan. Instead, a series of canals and pumps redirected it into the Des Plaines River and across the prairies to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. This was done to protect the city’s water supply, which came from the lake. It is an example of industrial engineering on an extraordinary scale.

51 Lewis Hine studied sociology at the University of Chicago for a year in 1900. On Hine’s photography, see Kate Sampson-Willmann, *Lewis Hine as Social Critic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

52 Bushnell, *Social Problem*, xiv.

53 Bushnell, *Social Problem*. The map is a foldout located between pages 48 and 49. Hyde Park was included to provide a comparative sample of a less industrialized and wealthier community.

54 Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 13.