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# Introduction

*'I have sometimes thought to myself – and this is surely already the basis for a science fiction novel – that our imagination is so poor, or so egocentric, that if extraterrestrials were to visit earth, we think it is us that they want to contact.'* (Vinciane Despret<sup>1</sup>)

This quote illustrates how, we humans, often think and behave in a way that suggests we are the main character. This is a way of thinking that encourages human exceptionalism and is harmful to non-human beings.

In order to research this phenomenon of human exceptionalism I chose to focus on a specific space, the industrial slaughterhouse. The industrial slaughterhouse is optimized to kill as many animals as possible in the shortest amount of time. Its currency is efficiency, speed and control to supply demands and stimulate growth. In this climate, there is no space and time for reflection, doubts and grey areas. This makes the industrial slaughterhouse the perfect space to research and study the mechanisms and systems that enforce human/non-human hierarchies. The animal in the slaughterhouse gets abstracted and alienated as early on as possible. To do this, the killing part is compartmentalized and kept secluded from the rest of the slaughterhouse, because of this most of the workers never have to be in contact with the transition from live animal to dead animal. When you zoom out to a larger society, such as the Netherlands or Europe, and focus on a consumer's relation to supermarkets, it becomes clear that the animal gets abstracted and alienated in this space as well. The livestock and the procedures necessary to turn it into a product is kept at a distance. The image the supermarket and the killing industry wants you to see is one with abstracted graphic images and high focus on control, hygiene, and animal welfare.

'Awash in blood' consists of written texts about research on the slaughterhouse through fieldwork and different sources. It can be separated into three approaches. Firstly, a collection of data and mapping of the situation of the industrial slaughterhouse in the Netherlands. Secondly, analysing this through philosophical theory and lastly my perspective as an artist using this research as material.

Imagery is used in two ways in this research. In a booklet next to the written research, as a separate body of work that uses imagery from the industry and from me as a photographer. And in the written research itself, you'll find images as well. Some of these are illustrative some of these are introductory.

Donna Haraway pleads for a situated and embodied knowledge. In order not to exclude myself from the research and be transparent about the knowledge presented in it. I would like to position myself as artist and researcher. I grew up on the Dutch countryside of Utrecht surrounded by farm animals. As a result of my extensive research and first-hand experiences in this sector I don't buy animal products as contributing to this system in any way feels wrong. Through this research I have experienced the slaughterhouse as a space full of ambiguity and grey areas, but the dialogue surrounding it keeps treating it as black and white. Through this research I hope to make it grey again.

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<sup>1</sup> page 47

# Livestock



*Untitled, Anna de Vriend, 2019*

When I first started thinking about the word livestock, I assumed it was derived from English financial terms. Such as 'to have in stock' and 'stock market.' However, through Linda Kalof<sup>2</sup> I learned that it is the other way around. Financial terms are historically derived from cattle, as throughout human history to have cattle often meant to be wealthy. Both ways around however, the animal is valued mostly for its contribution to human society. Nowadays, cattle are intrinsically entangled with a globalized monetary system. In the meat industry, livestock is the first step in the production process.

## *Data*

The Netherlands is a country with roughly 17 million inhabitants and a 41.543 square meter surface. In this country, the meat is produced for one hundred million people in one hundred and forty different countries every day. Most of this meat comes from pigs and calves due to its equally flourishing dairy industry. A dairy cow needs to birth a calf every year in order to keep her lactation system working.

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<sup>2</sup> Kalof, Linda. *Looking at animals in human history*, 11. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007

Some female calves will be used as dairy cows themselves<sup>3</sup>, the rest of them are slaughtered for luxury products such as veal and leather. Every year, more than 18 million animals are slaughtered in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup>

More than 15 million of the animals that get slaughtered are pigs. In the book 'PIG 05049', Christien Meindertsma tracks where the meat, skin, bones, blood and guts of the pig end up.. The blood for example, gets filtered and refined to be used in the pharmaceutical industry for vaccines and pill caps, but also in cigarette filters and gelatine. An average pig has 65 liters of blood, since more than 15 million pigs are slaughtered every year, more than 9,75 billion liters of pig blood is shed. A portion ends up in products, but not all of it. A large amount of it is drained, filtered, and disposed of. Enough pig blood is shed every year to flood a city like Amsterdam.

The biggest meat processing company, not only in the Netherlands but also in Europe, is Vion food group. They have 22 slaughterhouses in the Netherlands and Germany, and sales support offices in locations all over Europe as well in Singapore and China. In 2017 they processed 15.683.000 pigs and 91.000 cows. They made a revenue of 5.1 billion euro's, transporting most of their products to Germany and the UK. At the moment there are 174 slaughterhouses in the Netherlands most of them located in Brabant and Gelderland, 8 of these belong to Vion and 4 to van Drie Group.

Van Drie Group is another big Dutch meat company focussing on veal. One of the slaughterhouses of Van Drie Group is Ekro.bv. This company is the biggest calf slaughter and processing company in Europe. It is located on an industrial terrain outside of Apeldoorn on the laan van Malkenschoten opposite of Vion Apeldoorn. A branch of the Vion empire (originally from Boxtel) mainly focussing on their Asian customers.<sup>5</sup> Ekro.bv was founded in 1952 and has been the biggest producer of calf products since 1988. At a 20 minutes walking distance from Ekro.bv you'll find ESA, another veal slaughterhouse. Which means that on one square kilometer in Apeldoorn, you'll find three slaughterhouses, one of which the biggest veal slaughterhouse in Europe. This square kilometer is located 5 kilometers from the city center of Apeldoorn.

### *Control and Media*

In the Netherlands, the control of food quality and safety is done by the NVWA (Dutch food and consumer product authority). They are responsible for the control of the quality of meat but also of the treatment of animals. There are European laws that are concerned with animal welfare at the time of the killing.<sup>6</sup> If a slaughterhouse is not in compliance with these rules they will be fined.

The company slogan of van Drie Group is 'controlled quality veal', this pinpoints the main selling point of Dutch meat. Control and supervision are something the Dutch meat industry is known for. The NVWA always has an animal welfare officer<sup>7</sup> present in the slaughterhouse keeping an eye on

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<sup>3</sup> Old dairy cows, who are then slaughtered, are called 'dubbeldoelkoe', which translates into 'twopurposecow'.

<sup>4</sup> This number does not include the fish industry, which is a research on itself.

<sup>5</sup> Many countries in Asia, especially Japan, have very high requirements for the production and quality control of the meat. To be able to export to these countries you need to conform to these requirements.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 2 article 3 of the COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, states: 'Animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.'

<sup>7</sup> To become an animal welfare officer you have to do a 16-hour training in which you will learn about animal behaviour the slaughter process and quality control.

quality and animal abuse. All slaughterhouses are always required to have a camera running pointed on crucial moments in the slaughter process.

In July 2018, research journalists Maaïke Kemper and Roland Strijker from RTLZ, a Dutch news channel, published an article about cases where slaughterhouses didn't comply with animal welfare rules and were fined by NVWA inspectors. The activist group and non-profit organization Animal-Rights spend a month making undercover footage of pigs being mistreated severely in a Belgian slaughterhouse. The meat of these pigs was also for sale in Dutch supermarkets, this sparked debate about whether this kind of animal abuse was happening in Dutch slaughterhouses as well.

As it turns out, it was (is) happening, as Kemper and Strijker found out. Several NVWA reports reported severe animal abuse, inspectors witnessed pigs that were alive during the process where dirt and hair are removed from their skin by submerging them in boiling hot water, suspended from their feet.

The NVWA came forward with an answer to several questions RTLZ was asking. They pointed out that the situation in Belgium and the Netherlands is different because in the Netherlands there is always an official supervisor present who can hand out fines and keeps an eye on everything. In Belgium this isn't the case, the abuse the animals were experiencing was filmed by an animal rights group, not by an official government supervisor. This is what the NVWA report states on the animal abuse witnessed by animal welfare officers: 'De NVWA heeft dit geconstateerd en is er ook tegen opgetreden. Daarin gaat ook de vergelijking met België mank. NVWA houdt in roodvleesslachthuizen wél permanent toezicht op dierenwelzijn, waar dat in België niet gebeurt.' (Rapport NVWA) They focus on the fact that the animal abuse in Belgium was reported by activists and in the Netherlands by government officials, claiming that you can't make a comparison between the two. However, the abuse was the same, in Belgium the slaughterhouse was closed, in the Netherlands they got a fine.

### *Fieldwork*

I have visited different slaughterhouses for my artistic practice and research. What I have observed is that a narrative of having control is implemented in as many aspects as possible but doesn't hide the chaos of what killing animals is. You can't gloss over the noise with a radio or over blood with a high-end drainage system. The noise of animals in distress and the smell of blood mixed with excrement can't be controlled and supervised by an animal welfare officer.

Uokro is a branch of the Ekro.bv slaughterhouse in Apeldoorn, it is located right next to the slaughterhouse and oversees the calf skins. Uokro was the first slaughterhouse adjacent area I visited. In their own company promotion film, you can see the infrastructure of ceiling rails and the pallets with stacked calf skins. This illustrates the efficiency with which they work, and the volume of calves being slaughtered and processed by Ekro.



Bedrijfs-/promofilm Uokro



Bedrijfs-/promofilm Uokro

*Stills 'bedrijfsfilm Uokro'*

What struck me most the first time I came into this space was a very loud radio. You couldn't talk to each other in a normal speaking voice due to the loud music blasting through this enormous factory hall. A year later I was able to visit the slaughterhouse where the calfskins came from. They just finished for the day and started cleaning. Everything was still covered in blood and was hosed down with a high-pressure cleaner. Our tour guide told us that they were working on changing the stunning system from a pin in the head of the calf to electric shocks. Apparently, this is more hygienic and faster. He didn't know if it was also less painful for the calf.

From there we followed the whole process from calf to supermarket packaging. What was notable was that the actual killing of the animal takes up a small area of a slaughterhouse. Most people working there never get in contact with this part. Inside the slaughterhouse, the killing is filtered for most of the employees.

New Atlas is a small halal slaughterhouse in Arnhem. It is located quite near the city centre. I was invited over on a Sunday when they don't slaughter animals but sell the meat. They allowed me to go wherever I wanted without supervision and was able to photograph everything. Experiencing a slaughterhouse without the animals or blood was fascinating and horrifying. The efficiency and mechanical approach towards the animals was very present. Following the same path a cow would have to take felt extremely unsafe, scary and confusing. The efficiency used to kill animals mechanically is an approach to killing animals that is anthropocentric. It does not mean that the animal is killed faster with less pain. It means that there is no time for consideration, reflection and most of all, the animal.

At Destefanis, a small family company in Italy I saw what a cow looked like that knew it was going to be killed. To say that we can't know what an animal feels is perhaps true, but empathy transcends species and you can see when an animal is in distress.<sup>8</sup> It was a female cow of around three years old, she was kept waiting for her turn to be slaughtered in front of the space where it would happen. First, they put a metal pin through her head before hoisting her up on her leg and cutting her throat open. Part of her blood was collected, part of her blood was drained. Then, she was disassembled, her head, her skin, her organs, her hoofs, and horns. Even in a space like this which is smaller and considered more 'animal-friendly', the approach to the killing is still mechanical, purely practical. The pictures you see at the beginning of each chapter are pictures of this cow.

More animals are killed in a year in the Netherlands than there are people living in this country. How is it possible for a big-scale killing practice like this to exist in such a small country? Through a mapping of the area, I found out that this is possible through the idea that 'someone is supervising it'. This someone can be the government, the NVWA, animal welfare officers or even the surveillance camera's that are supposedly always running. A narrative of control surrounding the industrial slaughterhouse is crucial for it to be able to exist. It gives a sense of safety to a practice that is inherently unsafe, abject and scary. Outside of the slaughterhouse the image of the control inside is clear, clean and abstract. Inside the slaughterhouse the attempt at control is present yet absent. It is present in the NVWA supervisor watching and making note on every move. It is absent in the smell, blood and sound of the animals.

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<sup>8</sup> D.F. Wallace p.60



# Slaughter



*Untitled, Anna de Vriend, 2019*

Slaughter is the second step in transforming an animal into a product. It is the most confronting and transformative step, crossing the border from alive to death. Reactions on the pictures I make in the slaughterhouse differ, but usually start with a sense of disgust.

Why is the slaughterhouse a confronting space? The situations described in the last chapter are confronting and provoking but what is it exactly that triggers this reaction. Through the writings of Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille I will answer this question.

The etymology of the word abjection starts in the Latin *ab* (off, away from) and *iacere* (to throw) meaning to throw away or cast off. Later it integrated into the French language and referred to an 'abject situation' for instance, to be in a low state, humble and even groveling. In Middle English around 1510, to be abject was to be an outcast and degraded. In Julia Kristeva's book 'powers of horror' abjection still has to do with 'otherness'.

She writes: *'The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire.....The abject has only one quality of the object -- that of being opposed to I.'* (Kristeva, p1) The abject is something that is 'inside', part of you, it is not an object 'outside' of you. However, they are both something 'other', alienating. Abjection has to do with the transgressing of boundaries. Vomit is abject, it is something bodily, transgressing the boundary from inside to outside, from the food you ate to a digestive process gone wrong. Suddenly the matter that was inside and part of you is now outside and alien, disgusting. The slaughterhouse is an abject space, the feeling of disgust when smelling blood and excrement or seeing the organs fall out of a body are an indicator of this. The space becomes more abject the more you identify with the corpse hanging from the rails.

Kristeva writes about the corpse, not signified by God or science, meaning, the corpse without an explanation, logic or spirituality. This corpse without God or science confronts a border, you as alive but inescapably dying, now or in the future. Kristeva about the corpse: *'It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.'* (Kristeva p4) The abjection of a corpse is something you want to reject and ignore but can't. Because it is not an object, something you can turn away from, it is a confrontation with one's own mortality. Thus, the more you identify with the corpse on the rails, the more abject it gets. It is crucial for the infrastructure of a slaughterhouse to eliminate this identification. It is designed in a way that the dead animal gets abstracted as fast as possible. They remove the skin, hooves and head first. Leaving a skinless, headless, legless carcass to navigate through the rest of the slaughterhouse.

The disgust we feel by decay, blood, excrement, all part of the slaughterhouse is not (only) about uncleanness, something dangerous for your health. It is about the threatening of borders, the confrontation with identity, system, and order. The realization that the borders that are created to make sense of the world and protect your idea of self, your identity (I am a human woman born in the Netherlands), that these borders might be more fluid and indistinguishable. To make a slaughterhouse efficient you must battle this abjection. This can be done by the reinforcement of borders. The border between animal and human, alive/dead. The human the butcher (alive), the animal the butchered(dead), this is a line that can't be crossed, made unclear or blurry.

As soon as a cow is stunned and killed it transforms from livestock into 'cuts. An arm becomes a shank and the lumbar region becomes a sirloin. The dissassemblage (Despret p80) of a cow's anatomy from biology to economy begins with crossing the border from alive to death. Livestock has a face, a milk gland, knees and hooves, the carcass has flanks, steaks, sirloins, and ribs. Changing the terms, you use for an animal before and after you kill it reinforces the boundary between alive and dead.

Bataille's ideas on why we need systems and laws are particularly interesting for the position of the slaughterhouse. Bataille sees the human as different from everything else on this world because it has goals, does labour and makes long-term projects.<sup>9</sup> Laws, rules and codes of conduct are all made to preserve the labourer and protect its way of living. Therefore, everything that threatens this way of life, is shunned as taboo.

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<sup>9</sup> The French sociologist and zootechnician Jocelyn Porcher did extensive research on labour animals and their relationship with humans, rather than passively undergoing labour they often work with. They have agency in the situation, you could consider this a project or a goal.



The main taboo threatening the 'goal' or the labourer, is death, the inevitability of death makes every endeavour as a living person arbitrary and without purpose. Not acting on your first desires, discipline and prohibitions in order to achieve a long-term project becomes radically meaningless in the face of death. Frank van de Veire writes about Bataille: 'De dood stelt een grens aan het vermogen van de mens om zijn leven te zien als een project waarin elk doel weer het middel kan worden voor een ander doel.' (vande Veire p196) What he writes is that a human wants to work towards a goal that inspires another goal that makes its life into a project and the human into a labourer. However, in the face of death, the goals and projects a person works towards, become meaningless. They stand in the way of immediate pleasure and reckless behaviour which is what would happen if a person becomes very aware of its own mortality. Why wait? Why be careful? If you are going to die anyway. According to Bataille this is what systems in society try to oppress because how can you build a functioning, prosperous society with people who are very aware of their own mortality.

This ties in with the position of the slaughterhouse and the 'control' surrounding it. Again, the distinction between a human corpse and an animal corpse becomes crucial. If an animal isn't on the same level as a human, it doesn't confront you with your own mortality. Relatability, compassion, and empathy are all elements that can't be applied to livestock. As a butcher working in a slaughterhouse you must consider the carcasses as inferior, if you would be surrounded with carcasses of beings you would consider your kin, then you would be confronted with carcasses that could be your own. Your own death becomes tangible in a way that would make your labour as a butcher pointless. His or her labour would become pointless in the realization of his/her own death and all the things he/she wants to be doing instead of things that he/she is doing.

The carcass or corpse shows you boundaries and systems that you might not be aware of. In order to be able to function in a space filled with carcasses, you must disassociate yourself from these carcasses. This disassociation in the slaughterhouse reinforces certain boundaries and hierarchies such as animal/human, life/death. For (industrial) slaughterhouses to be able to exist, these boundaries have to exist. In the Italian slaughterhouse, I was able to photograph everything, I noticed I was disassociating myself from the process by using my camera. It was something to put between myself and the animal. I needed a barrier to be in this place even if it was only two hours. If you interact with this practice and space every day you must internalize this disassociation to be able to function in it.

Why is the slaughterhouse confronting? The writings of Kristeva and Bataille helped me answer this question and conclude that the confrontation is about borders, human/non-human, alive/dead. Experiencing these borders is confronting since it becomes clear they are constructed for self-protection; they are not 'real'. To make a space like the industrial slaughterhouse function you must reinforce these borders, inside the slaughterhouse as well as outside of it.

# Blood Processing



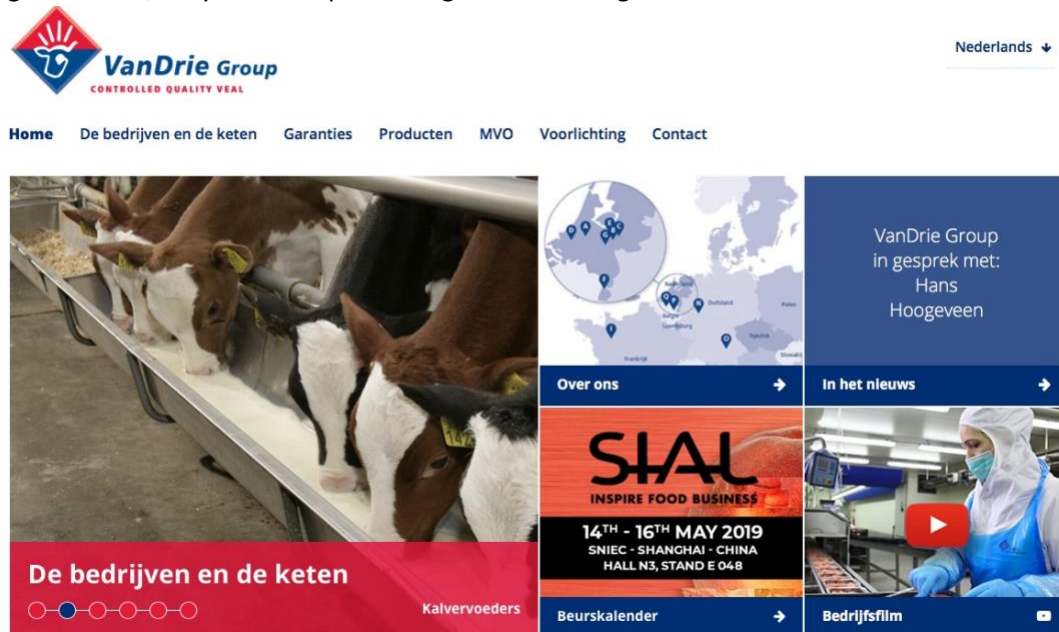
Untitled, Anna de Vriend, 2019

*'When dead, humans are bodies, corpses; animals are carcasses or cadavers, if they are not destined for consumption. The human cadaver exists, of course, but this designation covers specific situations. In the most general terms, if I go by the news or crime novels, for example, cadavers designate transitory states still 'awaiting' resolution.'* (Despret 83)

Despret remarks on the different words we use for different deaths. This is a method to put these deaths in different categories. The animal as carcass, cadaver, the human as a corpse or deceased individual. Using different words for the same phenomenon in different species pulls them apart and classifies them as different. Despret mentions that dead animals we use for consumption aren't even carcasses anymore, they become kilo's and pounds. It is hard to imagine the numbers of deceased people being signified by how many kilo's of dead meat they are. We don't think twice about signifying animals in that way.

This chapter proposes a different way of thinking about the slaughterhouse and the deceased non-humans in this context. Using artistic tactics to imagine, based upon a theoretical basis of new materialist thinkers. The chapter is called blood processing, in the process of slaughtering, the animal eventually dies while bleeding out. The picture above was taken just after the artery of the cow in the Italian slaughterhouse was sliced open in order to bleed it out. You can see how part of it is collected in a crate and how part of it ends up on the floor and is eventually drained.

The animal is stunned, but still alive when it is hung upside down and cut. The blood is important in the killing of the animal but often forgotten and hidden by the multinational slaughterhouse who is killing it. Instead, they focus on presenting a certain image to the outside world.



Website 'van drie group'

But what does the blood actually mean in the slaughterhouse? And how to imagine the slaughterhouse through this blood?

Blood is non-binary, fluid and non-conforming to species, hierarchy or gender. If blood is defined as a liquid that carries life and is in constant motion within an organism, then almost everything on this earth is bloody. The slaughterhouse that is bloody, imagined through blood, is a place where human and non-human are on equal footing, simply because the distinction is not there. This doesn't mean that individuals don't exist, but that individuals are not defined by a category. There is no hierarchy between species or beings. Of course, it makes sense to question if the act of slaughtering is possible in a space with this mentality. However, imagining a space like this is crucial. To invent different systems, imagining them different is a first step. Donna Haraway refers to this as storytelling. Through storytelling, unique knowledge is created and transmitted, knowledge through imagining.

The industrial slaughterhouse is a space that is not made to be sustainable, it is harmful to human and non-human lives. To be able to develop beyond such a system, it should be imagined as radically different than the industrialized slaughterhouse. Allowing time and space for discussion, reflection, and emotion is a way to do this. Death is always present in the slaughterhouse and instead of censoring or ignoring it, it can be used to think with. How do we deal with death, loss and, grief? Despret notes that a way to transform the way we deal with non-humans is to let ourselves be vulnerable. To allow for bonding and exchange to happen which makes vulnerable for loss and grieve. *'This vulnerability emerges from active involvement in a responsible relation, a relation through which every being learns to respond and from which he learns to respond: it is through the grief one undergoes that life comes to matter; it is by accepting this grief that it counts.'* (Despret 87) She gives an example of the vulnerability of small farmers who give their animals names and hang pictures on the wall of the ones they lost. They allow themselves to bond with them, making every decision regarding their animals an important and difficult one. This bond with their companion species makes industrialized farming and killing impossible.

Rosi Braidotti has an interesting and unconventional attitude towards death. She writes: *'The proximity of death suspends life, not into transcendence, but rather into the radical immanence of 'just a life', here and now, for as long as we can and as much as we can take.'* (Braidotti 21) Life itself doesn't end with the death of an individual, thinking about your own death as the ending of 'just a life' and not 'the end, period' puts death into perspective. Therefore, the death of another living being can be grievable but at the same time an immanent material to work with, not a transcendent entity floating above our heads. This is also a way of challenging the abjection of the corpse, the carcass. Abjection of the carcass is about the confrontation with your own mortality, if your own mortality becomes an immanent material to work with it becomes more manageable of a confrontation. And the abjection of the corpse becomes immanent as well, not in a way that hides it but in a way that you can work with it.

Blood is very visible inside the slaughterhouse and very invisible outside of the slaughterhouse. It is filtered away to protect consumers from confrontation. Imagining a slaughterhouse through the blood means making it visible, transparent. Something that is visible is something you can talk and think about. A blood-oriented slaughterhouse is one with windows, perhaps a visitor's centre, space for education and thinking-with. A place with an identity that doesn't hide behind smart marketing techniques.

The bloody slaughterhouse fits in a world Donna Haraway imagines and describes as the Cthulucene. *"My" Cthulucene, even burdened with its problematic Greek-ish rootlets, entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman and human-as-humus.* (Haraway 101) She describes the Cthulucene as a world where infinite beings and life forms connect in an infinite number of ways, endlessly complicated but immanent. Her slogan for the Cthulucene is 'make kin, not babies'. Kin traditionally refers to family and relations, Haraway wants us to imagine kin as bonds we have to recognize and acquire amongst all creatures. To make and invent your own blood relatives other than the need of having to produce your own off-spring and continue a literal bloodline. Kin is to be found in the slaughterhouse as well, we simply must discover and recognize them.

Imagining the slaughterhouse through the blood transforms the industrial slaughterhouse into a blood-oriented space. Blood-oriented thinking inside and outside of the slaughterhouse is about recognising kin, making vulnerable and transparency. It is a challenge to the industrial slaughterhouse to evolve transform and imagine beyond its current system. Blood doesn't recognize the categories and hierarchies the industrial slaughterhouse is built upon.



## Viscera handling



*Untitled, Anna de Vriend, 2019*

Viscera are an organism's internal organs, they get removed and used for multiple purposes, amongst other things they get processed into pet food. For this chapter I infiltrated the internal organs of a multi-national meat processing and slaughter company. I was able to record the conversation I had with the CEO of this company and the head cleaner. This is the transcription of what I recorded, the writing in cursive are notes I added later.

**Artist:** [00:00:00] Heey.

**Ceo:** [00:00:00] I'm gonna make a first intervention.

**Artist:** [00:00:00] Uh oh.

**Ceo:** [00:00:00] You are going to need an over suit, I don't think you already know this.

**Cleaner:**[00:00:00] Is this new? I already gave them a coat.

**Ceo:**[00:00:00] First take off the boots, here you have some paper pants. To protect your own clothes, but recently we also got them for, uhhm, yeah, protection. And one size fits all. *I want to point out in this section of the conversation that the head cleaner of the company was by far the most 'dirty' and non-conforming to the regulations of hygiene. He wore overalls that were clearly not washed in a few days and had long hair in a ponytail without a hairnet. The rest of the employees were covered head to toe in paper and plastic that was thrown away and replaced every time they left their post and returned. When they smoked a cigarette or visited the cafeteria, they had to replace everything they wore. The head cleaner did not agree with this wasteful attitude and did not partake in it. Which raises the question why this protocol was implemented. To reduce risk of contamination or to give employees a sense of cleanliness and a literal different layer inside and outside.*

**Artist:**[00:00:30] Cool, these are new? Or?

**Ceo:**[00:00:30] No we have been using them for a while but the cleaner isn't usually the person who gives tours.

**Cleaner:**[00:00:30] No.

**Ceo:**[00:00:30] And who takes them in tow.

**Artist:**[00:00:30] Do you give a lot of tours here?

**Ceo:**[00:00:30] Yes, we get a lot of visitors?

**Artist:**[00:00:30] Really?

**Ceo:**[00:00:30] Yes, we are considered a visitors location for the group, *A visitors location?* I think that by now you have been acquainted with the van Drie Group? Naturally we are in the middle of the country, also close to de Veluwe where the livestock farms are, and the fodder factories. Also, we can show all the veal products that the group produces, we also have hides. *This gives a good indication of geography and location. Slaughterhouses like to group together near farms and fodder factories to reduce transportation costs. Meaning there are several slaughterhouse 'hotspots' in the Netherlands, this one is in Apeldoorn.*

**Artist:**[00:01:21] Alright, and these are usually buyers who come to visit?

**Ceo:**[00:01:30] Yes customers come by of course, worldwide we have customers in sixty-six countries at the moment. Recently China as well, so that is going well. But also a lot of country inspections, the European Union are all under the same regulations but countries who are not part of that, like China and America, uuuhm would you like some coffee before you enter?



**Ceo:**[00:02:09] Milk or sugar?

**Artist:**[00:02:14] Oh no, thank you, black is fine.

**Ceo:**[00:02:15] So anyway, a lot of country inspections who come to check everything from front to back.

**Artist:**[00:02:15] From the EU?

**Ceo:**[00:02:37] Yes from the EU, we have to comply to EU-rules, but if another country comes to visit then there are usually some additional requirements, which they want to see back in the structure and we have to show them.

**Artist:**[00:02:43] Of course.

**Cleaner:**[00:02:44] These are sometimes multiple day visits.

**Artist:**[00:02:49] I've heard Asia has strict requirements.

**Ceo:**[00:02:49] Yes Asia has more additional requirements, we have to comply to these now as well because we do business with China. America has high, I think the highest standard. If you comply with the EU standard then most Asian countries trust the basic structure, at most they want you to tick off a few extra check marks, these are the additional requirements. These can be that a country requires that you only use calves from the Netherlands, so not from Poland, Germany or Lithuania for example.

**Artist:**[00:03:45] Is this because of animal welfare? Or a different reason to only use animals from the Netherlands?

**Ceo:**[00:03:51] No it usually has to do with a certain mentality, they want to do business with the Netherlands so with only Dutch products, we see the Netherlands as part of the EU. We do business with the whole EU we all have the same regulations so Europe is the home market, not the Netherlands. But you just returned to the Netherlands, you were in Italy? For photography? *Animal welfare is a strange concept in this context, researching on the internet it is something you come across constantly in relation to slaughtering. In this conversation however it became very clear that it is exactly that, something to ease the mind of a critical internet researcher, not something that is actually on the mind of a slaughterhouse CEO.*

**Artist:**[00:04:30] Yes I just returned from Italy from a residency, a residency is an opportunity to go to another art institution for a certain period to make work. It was interesting, I went to slaughterhouses there as well.

**Ceo:**[00:04:48] Did you visit other slaughterhouses in the Netherlands?

**Artist:**[00:04:50] Yeah I went to the hide company here.

**Ceo:**[00:04:52] Our hide company? You've already visited them?

**Artist:**[00:05:33] Yeah, that was a year ago or something.

**Ceo:**[00:05:34] This was with Rein, probably? Or Marcel?

**Artist:**[00:05:35] I am not sure anymore, I think Marcel. I was allowed to take a hide for a work.

**Ceo:**[00:05:36] Really? (laughter)

**Cleaner:**[00:05:36] They don't like handing out.

**Ceo:**[00:05:36] We always have to fight for it, (laughter)

**Artist:**[00:05:37] Really? Maybe I was there at the right moment (laughs). But, uhmm, I also went to a halal slaughterhouse in Arnhem.

**Ceo:**[00:05:38] What triggers you to slaughterhouses?

**Artist:**[00:05:56] I am doing artistic research through mapping amongst other things, about what there is in the Netherlands when it comes to slaughterhouses. This is interesting to me because it lives under the radar but can also be very open, for example that you invited me here and I am allowed to take pictures. But then again when you go into media coverage about what happens in slaughterhouse it is very grim. Like the story the other day from RTLZ about the pigs that were being burned alive in Belgium and in the Netherlands, but if you look into the reports on that, the percentages were very low. But it did happen, so this becomes a grey area of mystery about what happens behind the walls of a slaughterhouse. *Navigating through these spaces is quite difficult, you want to be as open as possible but don't rub them the wrong way since you need their hospitality. I found that it helps to be an art student, something that feels far away and maybe not too serious to them.*

**Ceo:**[00:07:00] I recognize what you describe, on the one hand we are very open, on the other hand we have to be very modest about how we present ourselves in the market because... well.. shame is the wrong word but I do think most people have a certain image around the processing and slaughtering of livestock and that image isn't always positive. When I go to a birthday party and I tell I am ceo of a meat processing company where we also slaughter then half of the people turn around thinking uhm.. i'd rather not talk about that, because they think thats scary or creepy. When I actually, I think both of us have to deal with this me and the cleaner, because we make beautiful products. Animals have to die before we can make meat of them, we realize that. But if you look how our people make a beautiful product out of it then I think you are allowed to show that a bit more. However, often the negative part of it is what comes out and then it is very difficult to get the positive side through that. *A CEO of a slaughterhouse also has to deal with its own visibility or*

*supposed image, although he is passionate and proud of the work he does it is often not appreciated if he expresses this.*

**Artist:**[00:08:31] What you just told about the birthday party, I recognize that as well when I tell people about my work and research, haha. But these are often people who are really happy that meat is available to them, so there is some hypocrisy in this.

**Ceo:**[00:09:03] Absolutely, people often have a certain image as if we're cowboys although everyone who works here also have to work and support a family. And what is it about waste in your project?

**Artist:**[00:09:10] Aah, yeah thats because I was allowed to take hides that weren't good enough for the market in Italy. They told me that because calf leather is such a luxury product the standard is very high, and small imperfections devalues a hide a lot. Of course this is very interesting for me as an artist, the hides are a beautiful material to work with, the imperfections make it all the more valuable for me.

**Ceo:**[00:09:43] Especially if it is not perfect, this tells something about the life of this animal. *This sudden artistic perspective surprised me, I am not sure if it was another way to sell his product or if he is actually interested in the life of this animal before it enters his slaughterhouse.*

**Artist:**[00:09:43] Something else that is important to tell you before I go in is that I am not interested in confirming the standard horror image of a slaughterhouse through my images.

**Ceo:**[00:10:07] Thats often what you already find, if you look at that story by RTL what you said about the pigs. Those images are real, that really happened, of course you never want it to but it happens. Can is ask? And if you don't want to answer that is fine, but which company did you visit there? *The contrast in this part of the conversation between what is considered sensitive information is interesting. First casually mentioning that something awful that occurred several times in a slaughterhouse (that is under the same umbrella company as this one I later heard from the cleaner) actually happened, too bad. Before asking to what slaughterhouses I already went in a way that suggests this is top secret information.*

**Artist:**[00:10:49] In Italy? That was a very small family company.

**Ceo:**[00:10:55] Also veal? Or beef, or?

**Artist:**[00:10:55] That was mostly beef.

**Ceo:**[00:10:58] In combination with veal I think?

**Artist:**[00:10:59] Yes, in combination with veal, but they were very small, they slaughtered three animals per week.

**Ceo:**[00:11:06] Aah, local slaughtering.

**Artist:**[00:11:06] Yeah very local, I also tried to go to a bigger slaughterhouse near Turin. They slaughtered for Eataly.

**Ceo:**[00:11:06] But uhmm, over here you are going to see the industrial slaughter process. Because you also asked for waste material, this is not allowed they are very strictly separated, it seems a bit exaggerated sometimes, but we have to comply to the regulations of a category stream as it is called. But in terms of photography go ahead, there is space here and it is nice the cleaner has time for you, he is very artistic as well.

**Artist:**[00:12:01] Really?

**Cleaner:**[00:12:01] Yes but with animals that are alive (laughs loudly).

**Ceo:**[00:12:38] Yes he loves animals. *You can imagine my surprise. Later I learned that the cleaner owned several exotic animals in his apartment in the centre of Apeldoorn. It became clear to me that calves weren't considered animals, or at least not animals in the same category as his exotic ones. Therefore, they deserved a radically different treatment.*

**Artist:**[00:12:38] How did you end up here then?

**Cleaner:**[00:12:38] I was in school and I had a job on the side here and I didn't like the school. Then my father said I had to go to a different school or work full time and I decided to work. I never regretted it.

**Ceo:**[00:12:38] We started in the same way, both cleaning.

**Cleaner:**[00:12:53] And stuck around.

**Ceo:**[00:12:53] And stuck around indeed, I have been working here for 18 years, him even longer.

**Artist:**[00:13:22] How old is this company?

**Ceo:**[00:13:22] This slaughterhouse? I think from 1952, the original one. That was in the city centre.

**Cleaner:**[00:13:27] Was that already this company?

**Ceo:**[00:13:28] No not really, that is how a lot of slaughterhouses in the Netherlands begun, often local as a municipal slaughterhouse. And then later they branched out into industrial slaughterhouses. Previously almost all places had their own emergency slaughter place for the local livestock farmers and butchers. My father was an emergency butcher, my grandfather as well by the way. My grandpa was livestock obstetrician, so during the lactation period he helped the livestock give birth and during the winter months when there wasn't any work in that he was a butcher. He went to farms to butcher the livestock for the family. *This is quite poetic, his grandfather was literally someone with power over life and death, working with this responsibility daily with his own two hands, undoubtedly combined with a sober down to earth farmers mentality. He has probably killed cows that he had helped give birth earlier that year.*

**Artist:**[00:14:18] And then this system got centralized?

**Ceo:**[00:14:24] Yes, later the villages, and cities as well started making their local municipal slaughterhouses, where they did emergency slaughtering for instance if a cow breaks a leg and becomes too much effort. This is where my father worked, he wasn't allowed anymore to slaughter at local farms and homes that gave too much nuisance.

**Artist:**[00:14:51] And this was in the city centre. *From local farms to the city centre because of nuisance?*

**Ceo:**[00:14:53] Yeah, it often was.

**Cleaner:**[00:14:55] I miss that, I could walk to my work.

**Ceo:**[00:14:55] I remember that in this slaughterhouse they slaughtered ten cows and around twenty to thirty pigs a week and my father did this all by himself.

**Artist:**[00:15:16] Wow, working hard.

**Ceo:**[00:15:16] Yeah, and he worked in shifts and then if something happened in the middle of the night and he had to slaughter an animal he had to get up out of his bed. I was there during the whole process it turned into an industrial slaughterhouse and how the old building got demolished. It was too small to compete with the industrialization of the market; a lot of small companies couldn't compete.

**Artist:**[00:15:56] And how did this happens? Did the demand grow?

**Ceo:**[00:15:56] Yes the demand grew for sure, there still is a high demand for meat. Not only in the Netherlands but worldwide. And the Netherlands is a producing country, we also have a big dairy industry and a by-product of milk is a calf. This sounds a bit disrespectful, but a dairy cow has to give birth every year in order to keep producing milk, and half of these are little bulls and the other half becomes part of this dairy industry as well. Eventually these get slaughtered as well, there is a lot of meat in the dairy industry. And how did this grow, you ask? What happened was that supermarkets started to replace local butchers and they wanted a big variety to offer the customer as well as a big stock. And this asked for standardised production and for this you need big companies who can work with standardised quality systems and produce a lot to keep the costs under control. Because it isn't necessarily profitable, you really have to keep an eye on the money. This requires dilution effects in your board and produce a lot. And not all small slaughterhouses were able to do this, you need a quality supervisor, executives, someone who puts everything on record. There was a huge turning point with the introduction of the HACCP in companies, this really gave an impulse to the quality thinking within the company. This is an American model, the HACCP, I think it's even from space travel. *The HACCP is the control system used for the food industry to ensure food safety. What is interesting about this is, how bigger the factory producing meat how bigger the risks for contamination. The scenario the CEO illustrates here is one of capitalism at its finest. Controlling and supervising your factory up to HACCP standards costs a lot of money so in order to make your*

*company profitable you must produce a lot, however, the more you produce the more your company will grow and the more controlling and supervising you need etcetera. It is a system that is designed to make companies keep growing and growing, not allowing the time to reflect upon the consequences of this growth.*

**Artist:**[00:17:30] Really?

**Ceo:**[00:17:30] Yes because when you send a manned flight into space and you want them to return alive you have to test everything to the maximum. You need to have a clear view of what the risks are and how to control them. Later this system got translated into the food industry. Anyways, you go and make some pictures, the cleaner will look at them to check. *The CEO trusted me enough that I could take pictures, if he got to check them.*

**Artist:**[00:18:33] About that, I have a digital camera and an analogue camera.

**Ceo:**[00:18:34] With film?

**Artist:**[00:18:35] Yeah with film, I can send you the negatives when I have them.

**Ceo:**[00:18:37] Perfect.

This conversation shows how people who work in the industry think and talk about this industry. Seeing it as a career you can be proud of without a sense of doubt about it. However, it also showcases them as 'just people', not monsters. This illustrates how it doesn't make sense to think in black and white terms such as good and bad.



## Cutting



*Aux abattoirs de La Villette, — Photo, Eli Lotar.*

*Aux abattoirs de la villette, eli lotar, 1929*



*Untitled, Anna de Vriend, 2019*

For this chapter, I chose to use two pictures side by side. On the left, a picture by Eli Lotar from his series 'Aux abattoirs de la Villette' made in 1929. On the right, a picture I made in the slaughterhouse in Italy from the Destefanis family in 2019. Eli Lotar was friends with Bataille and he made these pictures for Bataille's surrealist magazine 'documents' to accompany an article written by Bataille about the abattoir. The series 'Aux abattoirs de la Villette' became Lotar's most well-known work. The abjection of the slaughterhouse combined with surrealist influences makes for bizarre and provoking photographs. This picture of the cow legs neatly put in a row against a wall. It triggers the imagination, put in clusters of four they stand there as if the cow they belonged too simply took off his hooves after a long day of standing in a field. This is obviously not what happened, the hooves were cut off because they are not part of the carcass meant for meat. I encountered the same phenomenon in the slaughterhouse in Italy, in this case, the hooves are not neatly aligned in pairs of four. They are carelessly thrown in a crate along with other parts of the animal that can't be part of the carcass, such as the horns and tail. This picture also has a certain surrealist quality, there are only three hooves and one horn.

The animal in the slaughterhouse gets cut into pieces until you no longer recognise any of the animal that was once in there. To help that process they are packaged in sterile plastic containers and given different names. In the chapter 'slaughter' I talked about Catherine Remy's 'dissassemblage', how an animal gets disassembled and transformed in the slaughterhouse to extract as much of the animal before it ends up in a supermarket. This last chapter I want to use to focus on some artworks. Art can disassemble as well but in a different way, rather than extracting something to make it disappear it can extract to make it extra visible. The artworks I chose work with subjects relevant to this research and take different artistic approaches to this.

The first project I chose is 'Ape Law' and is part of a bigger project called 'Ecocide' by interdisciplinary collective Forensic Architecture. In Ecocide the collective tries to make a rainforest in Indonesia a

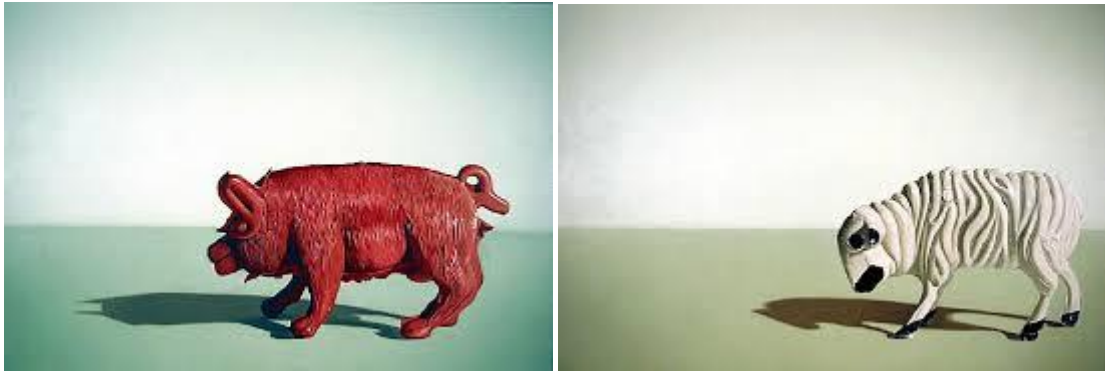
legal person. This would have big consequences since it would make deforestation equal to genocide according to the law. 'Ape Law'<sup>17</sup> focusses on the case of Sandra the Orangutan who lost her home due to deforestation and was mistreated in her new home. She lives in Argentina and in 2014 the animal-rights group AFADA won a court case about giving her non-human rights. She is considered the first legal non-human person in Argentina. Forensic Architecture shines a light on this bizarre phenomenon that non-human beings need to win a court case before they are considered legal persons and deserve basic 'human' rights. The only way they can win this court case is if human beings fight for them which shows how they are not considered to have any agency themselves. It is dangerous to challenge anthropocentrism for spaces like the industrial slaughterhouse. If an ape can be considered a non-human person with full rights, then it becomes easier to imagine other animals to get non-human rights as well, such as cows, chickens, and pigs.



Stills, *Forensic Architecture*, 2016

Yvette Watt is an artist as well as a researcher in Human-Animal Studies. Her work revolves around how animals are depicted in art(history) and pop-culture. Often objectified and used as a metaphor for human emotions or states of being. Her series *Model Animals and Dumb Animals* focusses on the relationship between farm animal and human. Which is very close, we eat them, and very distant, we don't encounter them. For this work she used small scale models of farm animals, these models refer to the objectification of animals in imagery and real-life. Often not very accurate and cheaply made they are only meant to give a basic notion what the animal is, they are abstracted to an essence which is non-complex. She photographed them and made large scale paintings of these pictures, mimicking the distance there is to these animals through the alienating effect of large-scaling something small.

Challenging the assumptions and perception of the farm animal is a very powerful act. These animals are historically seen as dumb, dirty and lazy amongst other things. Again, a mechanism which allows us to create a distance and see them as a commodity. To challenge this view is to challenge the industrial slaughterhouse.



*Model Animals and Dumb Animals, Yvette Watt, 2004*

The artist uses different tactics than a scientist or a scholar would use. Often working with the ungraspable, making the answer less important than the many questions that arise. In other words, it has the power to make the black and white, grey. Artists can problematize areas and phenomena that are supposedly clear as day, cows are dumb and pigs are lazy. My practice as an artist/researcher is to discover the many facets of the industrialized slaughterhouse and problematize it. My material are the experiences, conversations and images I collect during fieldwork. Through artistic tactics I use them to mimic the systems and mentalities of the industrial slaughterhouse in a different context, creating an abject space for the viewer.

# Summary

The meat industry is global and almost completely industrial. Although it is such a big industry, it is easy to forget about it. The industry tends to live in the shadows, they project absolute control and high-quality standards to the outside world. Through media coverage and political debates, the general public encounters the industrial slaughterhouse through a different route, whilst it simultaneously reinforces a certain mysterious cloud around the whole subject. This helps the slaughterhouse make its own narrative, the idea that everything that happens in this space is controlled and supervised helps it to remain untouched. The slaughterhouse that is supervised by animal welfare officers can't be that bad, at least the killing happens efficiently and fast.

Julia Kristeva writes about abjection and how it confronts with constructed borders that are considered to be rigid but that might be more fluid. This abjection is experienced in the slaughterhouse, where binaries like human/non-human and alive/death have to be reinforced for it to function. This is done by systems which are aimed to take away or distract from doubt and reflection concerning hierarchies and categorization. Bataille writes about these systems that keeps binaries and categories in place, he states that these exist because if there is confrontation with one's own mortality, long-term projects and goals become pointless.

The bloody slaughterhouse is an imagined space where these hierarchies and binaries do not exist. Drawn from the principle that blood doesn't have boundaries and that all life on earth is bloody and equal. Blood in the industrial slaughterhouse is kept secret and hidden from the public eye, this imaginary slaughterhouse doesn't hide the blood but uses it to open up, talk and think. It takes responsibility for what it does, not shying away from connection and thus making vulnerable for grieve.

I visited a big slaughterhouse and had a conversation with the ceo, I transcribed it and used it for the chapter 'Viscera handling'. Letting him speak for himself he confirms some theories I mention in previous chapters, like the facade of control that must be kept strong. And the reducing of an animal to its worth in numbers. I accompany this conversation with some notes, bringing details into attention that I find important.

I navigate through the grey and ambiguous space of a slaughterhouse as an artist. This is a specific point of view which helps in seeing the attempts made to block this ambiguity and greyness. Other artists navigate through these spaces as well. Forensic Architecture through the surrealist situation of a specific non-human, Sandra the ape, in a human-centred construct, the law. And Yvette Watt explores how humans depict animals and what this says about the human perspective on these animals.

To conclude this research, the mechanical and industrialized way we handle non-humans in a slaughterhouse setting (and outside of it) unjustly objectifies the animal to what it's value is for humans. The narrative of control necessary to make this system work is a façade to protect from a confrontation with the abject and the reflection this would entail.

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