

INTRODUCTION

A small black sign attached to the cage wall warns in bright yellow capital letters: KEEP BACK FIVE FEET! Inside the cage, canvas ropes hang a few feet off the ground, and brightly colored plastic toys meant for kids—balls, a child-sized playhouse—lie on the rocky dirt floor. The walls and ceiling of this outdoor cage are made up of thin metal bars that crisscross to form squares just big enough to slip slender fingers through. A solid wall separates the outdoor cage from an attached inner cage, and a small window—no more than a foot and a half square—about three feet above the ground allows passage between the two cages, controlled by a metal grate over the window that can lift and lock into an open position. Today, the grate is up. The cage’s resident, a young monkey, spies out the window from inside. When he sees us looking at him, his head disappears back into the dark.

“He’s really shy,” says Sherri Delaney, one of the monkey’s caregivers and founder of Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary, two hours north of Toronto, Canada.

You would not know it by his web presence. This monkey is one of the world’s most famous. Named Darwin, but more widely known as the Ikea Monkey, on a cold winter day in 2012 the at-the-time foot-tall, months-old Japanese macaque escaped his crate and his owner’s parked car outside a Toronto Ikea. Wearing a diaper and a miniature shearling coat, Darwin wandered the parking lot and attempted to enter the store. Eventually, Toronto animal services confiscated him in the lot, but not before a cluster of shop-

pers circled him, taking photos that launched him to momentary global fame.

In the next days, while Darwin's image circulated at lightning speed around the world, animal services delivered the caged monkey to Story Book. He quickly became the center of a storm of media attention, controversy, and legal action. Although the city of Toronto bans the ownership of primates as pets, Darwin's owner at the time, forty-three-year-old real estate lawyer Yasmin Nakhuda, claimed he was purchased in a Montréal borough, where he was captive-bred and where monkeys are legal pets. Nakhuda called herself Darwin's mom and posted YouTube videos of the two of them hanging out around her house, brushing their teeth and bathing together. In an effort to regain possession of Darwin, Nakhuda moved outside of Toronto to where she could legally own primates, and sued Story Book. She argued in court that Darwin was not her pet; he was her son.

But after hearing the case, Superior Court justice Mary Vallee denied Nakhuda's claim. The judge stated that "callous as it may seem, the monkey is a chattel . . . a piece of property" (Ontario Superior Court of Justice 2013). Nakhuda, the judge ruled, lost ownership of this particular piece of property when she lost possession of it. The judge's apparent ambivalence about Darwin's legal status as property, glimpsed in her words "callous as it may seem," belies the inescapability of this designation—all animals are property under Canadian law. But the ruling about ownership was less straightforward and hinged on a distinction between domesticated and wild animals as different kinds of property. If Darwin had been a domesticated animal, Nakhuda would not have lost ownership when she lost possession because domesticated animals are considered absolute property. Nonnative wild animals, in contrast, are property only when in their owner's possession.¹ As such, Nakhuda lost ownership of Darwin when he escaped his cage and her car.

So Darwin remained at Story Book, where he still lives today, by himself in his cage. Around twenty other primates of various species also live at the sanctuary, for the most part also individually caged. You can read about them on Story Book's website (Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary 2020). Boo and Gerdie, two rhesus macaques who are among the sanctuary's only residents to live as a twosome, were both born in 1996 and spent the first seventeen years of their lives as test subjects for neurological research at an unspecified lab in Ontario, until they arrived at Story Book in 2013. Many

other monkeys at Story Book were former pets, petting zoo or roadside zoo residents, or actors for film and television. Others have spent time in all of these roles. For example, a spider monkey called Mr. Jenkins was born in 2002 and as a baby was purchased as a pet. Shortly after, he was sold into film acting, where he reportedly did not perform adequately. He was then sold to a petting zoo to work in educational programs for children. He was too “unpredictable” for this work and was sent to an auction, where he failed to gain the desired price and so returned to the petting zoo before “retiring” at Story Book.

Stories like Mr. Jenkins’s are not unusual in the global exotic pet trade, where animals are frequently purchased as small infants and then become unwanted by or unmanageable for their owners after they grow and mature. Thousands of transactions like these—animals being purchased as exotic pets, animals being re-sold—are happening as I write these words, and thousands more as you read them. But while stories from the exotic pet trade occasionally make the news—when animals like Darwin escape, for example—much of this multibillion-dollar trade goes unremarked upon, under the radar of everyday people, media, governments, and academic study. In this book I try to shed light on this shadowy trade. Through participation in and observation of embodied multispecies encounters in the nooks and crannies of the global exotic pet trade, I investigate the often hidden processes through which exotic pets are produced and traded as lively capital.

Darwin himself has grown into an adult macaque—at least three or four times the size and strength of his younger self—and no longer wears clothes. A volunteer at the sanctuary describes him as mischievous and hopes that he will be introduced to two new Story Book residents, another pair of former scientific test subject macaques who arrived from a Canadian university lab in 2015. When I visited Darwin, I mostly spotted him out of the corner of my eye—a blurred gray shape flitting behind a cage wall; an arm reaching out of the dark window, hairless fingers curled around the ledge. Having outgrown the curiosity and fearlessness of his younger days, Darwin now seems to prefer to stay out of sight, at least to strangers.

Staying out of sight has become more difficult for wild animals. Report after report, study after study, headline after headline signal the dwindling amount of space left in the world for wild animals to inhabit. Habitat loss, coupled with other factors, among them the global exotic pet trade, have induced what James MacKinnon calls a “ten percent world,” a planet

with a fraction of the diversity and abundance it once had, a world of paltry salmon runs and dead-quiet forests. This is not a scientifically precise term—MacKinnon is a writer describing the decimation of nonhuman life within his lifetime. But scientists are busily studying defaunation, a term that refers not only to the extinction of species but also to the loss of populations and abundance. A grim picture is emerging. Vertebrate populations are undergoing a “biological annihilation,” declining by an average of 60 percent since 1970.² Systems biologists have generated a mind-boggling model of total animal biomass on earth, which shows that today, domesticated birds constitute 70 percent of all bird life, almost entirely broiler chickens. The picture is even more dire for mammals, of which only 4 percent are wild, and 60 percent are domesticated—with the remainder made up of humans.³ These numbers signify how defaunation is tethered to the ascent of commodified animal life, the vast majority in industrial livestock production, leading Tony Weis (2018) to coin the term “commodi-faunation.”⁴ For wild animals, too, the dramatic rise of exotic pet keeping and zoos over the past centuries and especially the last few decades would suggest that more wild animals than ever before live enclosed in cages, as Darwin does, where they have little option to go unseen. But this can be the case whether or not these animals are commodities.

Darwin, like the other monkeys at Story Book, is no longer a commodity; he will no longer circulate in markets and will, barring the unforeseen, die at Story Book. But, as Justice Vallee’s decision makes clear, Darwin is still property, a “thing” or object that is owned. Darwin thus embodies a tension within the pet form—exotic or not. Pets are constructed and encountered as intimate companions; they are valued for their energy and creativity, their aliveness, even their sentience—although all within limits. Animals who are pets are viewed, in this sense, as beings: lively subjects who engage in their own world-making practices. At the same time, pets are legally and materially property, even commodities. They are in this sense treated as things or objects.⁵

Arguably, all propertyed and commodified animal life embodies this tension. Living commodities like farm animals are also sentient property. But their sentience is largely denied; it is not typically a valued or prerequisite quality of the commodity or property form. Within the pet form, however, sentience is not only admitted but valued. Expressions of animals’ personalities, will, responsiveness, and feelings are part of what make them beloved

companions and sellable commodities. Yet pets live subject to limits that attend their property status, including limits on movement, reproductive choice, and generally the extent to which they can express their will. Exotic pets are arguably especially controlled. Unlike domesticated pets like cats and dogs, who have adapted over time to life alongside humans, particularly in a manner that provides companionship, exotic pets are often wild-caught or only one or two generations captive. They are not adapted to captive life and are often unruly, even dangerous, and consequently subject to tight control and enclosure. As I document in this book, exotic pets are removed from their families and social groups, bought and sold as individuals, for example, at auctions, kept enclosed in cages, and controlled on leashes. The effect is that exotic pets are alive, but their lives are profoundly circumscribed—socially, spatially, ecologically, behaviorally—such that in most cases their pet lives are starkly divergent from their lives before capture, or from the lives of their uncaptive counterparts.

This tension between being valued as a lively subject and being controlled as a propertied object can be expressed in more economic terms. Part of what animates an exotic pet as a “useful” object and as property, and what propels an exotic pet through trade circuits and into markets as lively capital, a living “thing” with economic value that is realized when it is exchanged, is its very *not* thing-ness: its liveliness and sentience, its capacity to respond to and interact with humans, its ability to be *encountered* as a living being, as a companion. This tension expresses itself sharply in an animal like Darwin, whose sentience is at odds with his property status. His nearness to humans—his human-like hands, his familiar tiny coat and diaper—makes Darwin’s sentience undeniable, even within a conventional humanist frame. Perhaps more than most pets, he forces a confrontation with the tension they all embody. Darwin makes his own designation as “property” tremble; his anthropomorphic, “son”-like qualities strain his object status, prompting the judge’s tempering clause, the “callous as it may seem,” revealing a degree of anxiety around the construction of Darwin’s property status. This legal case exemplifies how a pet is a sentient, dynamic, emotional being who is *made thinglike* when it is made a commodity, made property, through markets, the law, the state, and other institutions and mechanisms.

This book sits in the middle of this tension and process of making thinglike. My primary concern is to track how animals are made thinglike, lively capital in the global exotic pet trade. The process of making lively

capital is related to but broader than commodification, which refers to the more specific process of making something a commodity, or an object that is exchanged. Not all forms of lively capital, exotic pets included, are commodities, strictly speaking—some, like Darwin, may even be prohibited from being bought and sold. But they are all capital in the sense that they are a stock of possessions generating value or potential future value.⁶ For exotic pets, this means they are also captive, living in enclosed spaces, and rendered dependent on their owners. And they are “useful” to these owners, generating what feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway (2008) calls “encounter value”: value produced through multispecies meetings, here between people and exotic animals, whether as companions, entertainment, or attractions for visitors, where they may form an important part of profit generation or economic exchanges and activities. Exotic animals do not necessarily generate encounter value as commodities, but often more akin to how unpaid or informal laborers form the economy, as I explain later. So while in this book I track the formation, reformation, and deformation of commodities, I am also interested in processes of enclosure and control that form the exotic pet but cannot be reduced to commodification. In general terms this means I am interested in how this economy works: How are animals captured? How are they exchanged? What embodied encounters and interactions form these actions and impel animals along trade circuits?

My second main concern is to capture the effects of this process of making lively capital in the exotic pet trade. This trade’s reach extends into nests in sky-high canopies in the world’s most remote forests; into equally high skyscraper apartments in the world’s biggest cities; into fenced suburban backyards, rural farms, and roadside petting zoos. It is a trade that transforms animals from free-ranging forest and desert residents to captive property in someone’s living room or backyard. What kind of life does this transformation produce for the exotic pet? I call this life “object life”: the life that is the target of and reinforced through commodification and maintenance of the exotic pet, a life that precedes commodification in all cases and succeeds it in most. This object life for an exotic pet is individual, encounterable, and controlled—and this has high costs. Captured animals are rendered dependent on human-provided shelter and sustenance, often including binding captured animals to the lives and deaths of a wider network of animals in industrial meat production. And the captured animals themselves suffer extremely high mortality rates, as well as stress, trauma,

and ill health. This exposes another iteration of the tension within the exotic pet form—that the processes of enclosure, individuation, and control that form the exotic pet as capital are driven by the pet’s value as a lively, encounterable being, yet these very processes diminish and often even end life for exotic pets.

Although animal being is constrained in the exotic pet trade, the process of making thinglike lively capital is never complete; it cannot be—this is why I use the term “thinglike” to describe an exotic pet, as opposed to “thing.” The only way for an animal to be fully reduced to a thing is through the complete extinguishment of life and being, and yet death also necessarily ends the exotic pet form, because being alive is a necessary characteristic of a pet. Dead pets might still circulate as different kinds of commodities or property, but liveliness and sentience are no longer the valued qualities driving this circulation. So all exotic pets retain sentience and a degree of life. And their lives exceed attempts to manage them, in all sorts of daily, mundane ways—by refusing to eat, defecating in unwanted places, making noise, self-harming, escaping. When alive, exotic pets continually reassert their creative sentience and remind us of their persistent *being*, as Darwin does. A third main goal in this book is to be attuned, as much as possible, to the animal being that is never fully extinguished.

My final aim in this book is to look beyond the exotic pet trade to capitalist socio-ecological relations more broadly, to shed light on how capitalism functions in relation to animals—how capitalist socio-ecological relations include and have effects for nonhuman animals, whether or not they are directly commodified. Within capitalism, human-animal relations have acquired particular forms and patterns. Capitalist socio-ecological relations are primarily characterized by widening inequality not only between humans but also between humans and nonhumans, who receive less and less of their share of global space and sustenance.⁷ In parallel to a siphoning off and funneling of surplus toward some humans, an intensification of domesticated animal life and an emaciation of wild animal life is underway, as alluded to earlier, producing MacKinnon’s “ten percent world,” or a world of what Weis (2018) describes as “ghosts and things.”

Human-animal relations under capitalism are thus unequal and characterized by rising domestication and declining wild life, with animals in both those groups experiencing escalating violence. Yet while animal studies has made important interventions in the social sciences and humanities,

it has not adequately grappled with capitalism as an organizing structure for human-animal relations. And theorists of capitalism and inequality, whose work is more important now than ever, have largely eschewed nonhumans. There are important exceptions across the social sciences and humanities, including work by Nicole Shukin, Donna Haraway, Tony Weis, Kathryn Gillespie, and Dinesh Wadiwel, among others—scholars who have for the most part focused on the largest segment of directly commodified animal life: industrially farmed animals. Looking to wild animals made lively capital complements this work in a broader project of developing an understanding of how capitalism drives ecological problems like extinction and biodiversity loss. A central starting point of this book is that these problems, in which the exotic pet trade is centrally implicated, stem in part from the making thinglike of animals, the denial of their being, that an animal like Darwin forces us to confront.

This paradox between valuing liveliness and loving a pet as one's child, and owning one's pet as an object, is not limited to the exotic pet trade. The exotic pet trade is one site where the dynamics of the relationship between capitalism and animal life are especially potent and visible. The arguments and conclusions I develop are made with an eye beyond this trade to the operation of capitalism more broadly, especially as it concerns animal capital. So while some people may read this book with a distanced curiosity about the wacky world of exotic pet ownership, I want to use the apparent oddity of the exotic pet case to illuminate the strangeness of our more ordinary relationships with animals—mainly, the strangeness of a familiar idea that is basic to most of the world's political-economic operations: that an animal is a resource, a piece of property, a commodity. This idea is central to capitalism. Paralleling the work of feminists who describe how capitalism relies on and requires uneven gender difference under patriarchy, I develop an understanding of how capitalism similarly draws on and perpetuates anthropocentric modes of human-animal relations.⁸

To accomplish these aims I follow global exotic pet trade flows and markets as they unfold in real time, on the ground, in specific places. I draw on moments of observation and situate them in broader power relations and socioeconomic processes to figure out and then describe how the economy works, from the specific practices that create mobile commodities and then drive their circulation, to the broader ideologies and ethico-political norms that enable and govern the trade, as well as how it affects individual animals.

Through these observations, I build an understanding of the global exotic pet trade, a booming, world-transforming activity that has largely circulated under the radar of critical scholarship, even within the recent and welcome rise of animal studies. In my attempt to peer into the exploitative practices that underpin the production of the exotic pet, my work is one of many such “follow the thing” studies of recent years by geographers, political ecologists, and others. What is unique about this study is that the “thing” I am interested in is alive, and I take this as an important ethical, intellectual, and political difference from nonliving things.

In the next section I paint a preliminary picture of the global exotic pet trade, its history, regulatory dimensions, and its stakes, before introducing some of the key theoretical ideas I draw on and develop in the book. This theory is in subsequent chapters brought into conversation with several years of fieldwork tracking the exotic pet trade, which I describe at the end of this chapter, as well as how this fieldwork forms the chapters of the book.

The Global Exotic Pet Trade

Of all the forms that animal capital takes, an exotic pet is especially peculiar. Anything from a bird to an alligator, a turtle to a tiger, its defining characteristic is that it is out of place. Either an exotic pet was born elsewhere—beyond the arbitrary borders that form nation-states—or its recent ancestors were. It is also generally thought to be wild, or undomesticated, although domestication is itself not a clear-cut term or practice. Most experts will tell you that an animal is only domesticated after centuries, if not millennia, of selective breeding and proximity with humans.⁹ Exotic pets, in contrast, are often wild-caught or at most captive-bred, a designation that can be used for an animal after two generations of captivity, for the offspring of any captive-born parents. Although captive-bred animals are raised around and often reared by humans, their genetics, bodies, and behaviors have not yet been shaped by sustained domestication techniques. Exotic pets are, then, wild animals kept incongruously in spaces often thought of as the domestic domain: tigers in suburban backyards, snakes in condo bedrooms, birds in bungalow parlors.

Exotic pets may be incongruous, but they are more and more common, especially in wealthy countries. Legal and illegal trade in exotic pets has become big business over the last few decades. It is difficult to measure the size

of either trade: the legal trade goes unregulated and unmonitored in many countries, and the illegal trade is by definition clandestine. Experts estimate the legal global exotic pet trade is worth at least US\$5 billion, and the illegal global exotic pet trade is part of a broader illegal wildlife economy that is estimated to be worth US\$5 billion to US\$20 billion.¹⁰ What is certain is that at any given time, hundreds of thousands of animals are in circulation. Sacks of monkeys, boxes of reptiles and turtles, and crates of parrots are being smuggled across borders with false papers. Geckos and snakes strapped into the underwear of airplane passengers; a baby primate hidden in a fake pregnant stomach; and drugged baby leopards, bears, monkeys, and panthers crammed in suitcases—all are recorded instances of actual animal smuggling. Sensational stories like these belie the routine reality of millions of animals entering and leaving national borders legally. From ordinary household pets like parakeets, ornamental fish, and turtles to fierce kinkajous, diapered spider monkeys, and spectacular wild cats like Siberian tigers, millions of exotic pets now live legally, but largely unregulated, inside private residences around the world. More than twenty million exotic birds live as pets in the United States alone—America’s third most popular pet after cats and dogs—as well as more than nine million reptiles. More tigers are estimated to live in cages in the United States than live uncaptive worldwide.¹¹

The high number of privately owned exotic pets in the United States and worldwide is unprecedented, but the practice of exotic pet keeping has long roots—particularly extending back to the height of early empire building and colonialism. For thousands of years wild animals from around the world have been captured, collected, and displayed, animating assertions of and claims to power. In early empires like Greece, Egypt, and Rome, wild animals were frequently gifted to kings and other rulers; the more distant and unknown the animal, the more value and power it conveyed on display in the royal courts as a testament to monarchs’ might and reach.¹² Greeks and Romans kept exotic pets such as monkeys and birds, especially peacocks, and exhibited them in religious festival processions. Some animals, such as so-called war-elephants, were kept for military purposes but also likely doubled as show and hunting stock. The gladiatorial Roman games were an especially bloody spectacle in which imported live wild animals, including elephants and wild cats, with many from North Africa, were put to death before huge crowds.¹³

With the onset of European imperial expansion and the so-called Age of Exploration, global animal trade escalated. The trade at this time was pri-

marily tied to natural history collecting and the concentration of animals from the colonies into royal menageries and zoological gardens in Europe.¹⁴ Colonial expeditions caught and hunted live and dead animals in the colonies, amassing extensive collections for classification and study at the museums, botanical and royal gardens, libraries, universities, learned societies, and private storehouses that emerged in Europe during the colonial era. The knowledge that was produced in and through these collections parsed the world's regions and their inhabitants (plants, animals, people) in classificatory systems that reflected and fed a racialized humanism in which certain humans—white, European, male—were (re)produced as properly human subjects “naturally” dominant over all other forms of subordinate life, especially human and nonhuman life indigenous to the colonies. Exotic animal keeping during the colonial era was enrolled in these racist constructions of other places, people, and the nonhuman world.

Exotic animal keeping was also an opportunity to perform colonial power for audiences in colonial centers. In an imperial system that entailed domination over colonized territories, people, and animals, captive animals and colonized people were put on display in colonial centers, standing in for conquered distant territories, a demonstration of the “spoils of empire” and a testament to modern colonial power.¹⁵ What is now known as the Tower of London functioned during the 1200s through 1500s as the Tower Menagerie; over the centuries, it contained a procession of wild animals, including elephants, lions, kangaroos, and polar bears. In neighboring France the eighteenth-century royal menagerie in Versailles was constructed under Louis XIV's direction. It had a circular layout with a large pavilion in the center, around which was a walking path. Outside the path were enclosures and cages of exotic animals, bounded on three sides with walls but with only bars on the side facing the pavilion, leading Michel Foucault (1977) to speculate that the menagerie inspired Jeremy Bentham's famous panopticon prison design.

In the Victorian era, exotic animal keeping moved into private homes, bringing a wave of exotic animals into England. Owning an exotic animal became less exceptional and not restricted to monarchs. Aristocratic naturalists, painters, and officers also owned private menageries containing animals ranging from panthers to elephants to lions. The rise of private exotic pet keeping paralleled a growth in pet keeping in general at this time. American historian Harriet Ritvo accounts for this rise in her book *The Animal*

Estate. She ties the rise in pet keeping to a shift in Europeans' understanding of animals from agential and powerful to "objects of human manipulation" (Ritvo 1987, 2)—a shift led in large part by the same scientific methods of knowledge acquisition and application, born of the Enlightenment, that also drove flows of exotic animals into colonial centers as objects of scientific study. As Enlightenment ideas built among Europeans a sense of control and mastery over nature, feelings of fear toward the nonhuman world gave way to affection—expressed as "sentimental attachment" to individual pets (Ritvo 1987). Early forms of exotic pet keeping were in these ways a direct product of colonialism and the Enlightenment; exotic pets must be considered, like other forms of animal capital, "colonial subjects" whose existence is tied to the attempted displacement of Indigenous knowledges and emptying of Indigenous lands (Belcourt 2015).

Some of the captured animals who arrived in Europe eventually ended up in North America, especially the United States, which has long maintained a thriving zoo and aquarium trade. The industry there boomed at the turn of the nineteenth century, during which time US zoos grew in number from four in 1880 to more than a hundred by 1930 (Hanson 2004, 79). But by the second half of the nineteenth century, zoos constituted only half of the United States' lucrative wild animal business, as animals were also delivered into circuses, laboratories, and, increasingly, the pet trade. By the beginning of the twentieth century, demand also emerged from Hollywood.¹⁶ Just as today, many of the same animals circulated through these various arms of wild animal trade, moving from zoos to private ownership to film acting to circuses.

While the twentieth century marked a steady increase in private exotic animal ownership, live wild animal imports have especially spiked in North America since the 1990s. Escalation in exotic pet demand is attributed to a broader rise in international shipping and trade under economic globalization, as well as to the growing role played by the internet in facilitating endangered and rare species trade, leading conservationists to claim that the internet is one of the biggest threats to endangered species for the role it plays in fueling trade.¹⁷ Popular films and video games can also have a significant effect on the demand for particular species of wildlife.¹⁸

As a result, the scale, reach, and breadth of popularity of the global exotic pet trade are at record levels today. But the vast flows of animals move in patterns that largely still mimic the historic colonial trade flows I briefly

traced: animals are traded out of biodiversity-rich, capital-poor countries to nations wealthier in capital than biodiversity. Globally, wildlife export zones are primarily located in Asia, especially the Southeast, followed by South and Central America, Eastern Europe, and Africa.¹⁹ As for top importing countries, blame and attention are often directed toward China and other Asian countries—Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia. These nations frequently feature in news reports of large wildlife confiscations, especially as sources of demand for wildlife.²⁰ But by most estimates, it is the United States that has long held the top spot in imports of legal and illegal wildlife and wildlife products, partly due to the United States' enormous demand for ornamental fish in the aquarium trade.²¹ The United States is followed by the European Union as a top importer, as well as Japan and China, with several Middle Eastern countries also emerging as key markets.²²

The United States legally imports hundreds of millions of live animals each year, with around half of the individual specimens being fish for the aquarium trade. Tens of thousands of the imported animals are live mammals, hundreds of thousands are live birds, millions are live reptiles, and tens of millions are live amphibians. More than half of these live animal imports into the United States originated in Southeast Asia.²³ More than 90 percent of the imported animals are designated for the pet trade, and almost 80 percent are captured from wild populations (K. Smith et al. 2009; K. Smith et al. 2017). Although many of these wild-caught imports are likely fish, many species of which do not reproduce easily in captivity, a review study of internationally regulated species worldwide found that, surprisingly, 20 percent of birds and 10 percent of reptiles traded internationally for personal use were officially declared wild-caught or of wild parents, including some species whose international commercial trade is prohibited due to declining populations (Bush, Baker, and Macdonald 2014). Another review study reports that of animals traded legally and whose trade is monitored and regulated internationally, more are from captive populations than in decades past, but for reptiles, mammals, some bird species, and invertebrates, the majority of this internationally regulated legal trade is still in wild-caught animals (Harfoot et al. 2018). It is likely, too, that many wild-caught species are traded under falsified captive-bred papers (Nijman 2010).

Governing and keeping track of this geographically wide-ranging, complex, massive trade is challenging.²⁴ Exotic pet trade regulation can exist at every formal governance scale, from municipal to state/provincial, national,

and international. It is a complicated political sphere, and this plays out in ways that often disable effective monitoring and enforcement in the face of uncertain regulations and responsibilities. Regulations are also in flux at all scales, as will become clear in later chapters. At the international level, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) is the primary regulator of the exotic pet trade and wildlife trade more broadly. The convention, which came into effect in 1975, is an international agreement “to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival” (CITES 2013). Currently, 178 governments (“parties”) adhere voluntarily to its resolutions, which establish what species are legal to trade and in what amounts.

Meanwhile, at the national level, there is no coordinated strategy, legislative authority, or funding devoted to oversight of the live wildlife trade in either the United States or Canada.²⁵ In both countries, municipalities and provinces/states provide their own exotic animal regulation if they so choose—and they are so choosing, more and more often. As will be discussed in chapter 2, several US states and Canadian provinces, as well as innumerable municipalities, have recently established or are in the process of establishing stricter exotic pet trade and ownership regulations—including outright bans on owning and trading many species. The primary impetus for this burgeoning state and provincial regulation is human health and safety concerns. Exotic pets escape, attack people, and carry potentially serious zoonotic diseases.²⁶ Other sources of public alarm over exotic pets concern the introduction of “alien” species into local environments.²⁷ The charged debates surrounding these new regulations, as well as ambiguity around what specifically the new regulations are or will be, and how they will affect the industry, are all evidently engendering anxiety for economic players in the trade. They are also exacerbating tension between animal owners and traders and animal welfare advocates, which affected the degree to which I could access interviewees and research sites and carry out conversations, the tenor of these conversations and sites, and the actions and behaviors I observed.

In these debates around exotic pet bans, human and environmental health, and human safety and security concerns predominate. Little to no exotic pet regulation is motivated by or targeted to address the conditions of life for animals kept as exotic pets. Yet exotic pets, as subsequent chapters will show, are formed through a series of wrenching separations from their

homes, families, and societies, depriving them of the most basic life requirements. They experience widespread health, emotional, and psychological problems in captivity, especially if they are receiving inadequate care.

Local exotic pet regulation is not alone in ignoring these conditions by focusing nearly exclusively on human health and safety concerns. CITES, too, does not consider animal welfare. CITES, arguably circumscribed by its founding function—“to track and regulate trade”—is in my observation more of a trade organization than a conservation organization.²⁸ This mandate goes some way to explaining the enormous numbers of CITES-listed animals traded around the world: 11.6 billion individual live wild animals between 2012 and 2016 (Can, D’Cruze, and Macdonald 2019). There is little to no room within the CITES framework to consider ethical or animal welfare dimensions of trade, and no conversations about whether or not trade should even exist at all. Nondetriment findings, the mechanism that CITES uses to decide if a species trade should be restricted, account for whether or not the trade can be sustained at its current levels, not for the effect of trade on individual animals, even though it is increasingly acknowledged that animal welfare is compromised along all stages of the global exotic pet trade.²⁹ This puts CITES in step with a broader conservation community that is more concerned with sustaining aggregate populations than with the health and experience of individual animals.

The costs of the exotic pet trade are indeed glaring at the aggregate scale. The extraction of animals from the wild for the pet trade is widely acknowledged as a major drain on wild populations.³⁰ Animals have been exported so rapidly out of Southeast Asia to be pets in countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan that experts have coined the term “empty forest syndrome” to refer to the concomitant loss in biodiversity.³¹ The steep rates of extraction of animals from wild populations stem not only from high demand but also from extreme mortality rates within the trade. For every ten birds or reptiles who are captured, as few as three make it to the pet shop. For fish, the mortality rate between capture and purchase is even higher, as much as 80 percent. The chance of a new exotic pet living through its first year after purchase is just over 20 percent. This can drive a perpetual motion machine of demand. And mortality rates also extend beyond trapped animals. For example, the capture of birds as chicks, a process I will describe in the next chapter, often destroys nests and kills breeding adults. For each animal captured, then, several others often die.³²

The worldwide expansion of the exotic pet trade that I have just outlined is thus deeply implicated in the global reordering of life I have already described, and which serves as the chief context for this book. The global exotic pet trade has especially driven the decline in wild animal abundance—what I earlier referred to as a process called defaunation. The defaunation tragedy is a story, then, not only of extinction and endangered animals but also of a more general loss of wild animal life—a story of emptied forests, of “ghosts and things” (Weis 2018). The exotic pet trade is a key, if proximate, driver of the diminishment of animal life at this aggregate scale as well as for individual animals, by engendering both mortality and confinement.

The contemporary exotic pet trade also reflects a broader capitalist political economy that is my interest. In this book I track a particular set of capitalist interspecies relations—those that form and are embodied by the exotic pet—to understand how precisely capitalism shapes or constrains nonhuman life. The global exotic pet trade exerts lethal and violent effects for animals but is largely perceived as trade motivated by *love* for animals. Darwin, the “Ikea monkey,” experienced extreme trauma in the process of becoming commodified and kept captive, but Yasmin Nakhuda refers to him as her son. This is a common refrain among pet owners. How is this seemingly paradoxical entanglement of love and violence justified? This is a key question of this book, one answerable through consideration of how the exotic pet is fetishized not just as a commodity but also as an animal.

Beyond Commodity Fetishism:

Animal Fetishism and the Doubly Fetishized Exotic Pet

Animals are not born, but made commodities. In this, they are not exceptional.

No commodity magically sprouts into fully formed being. It has to be crafted in a place or several places, by a person or many people, according to specific laws, ideas, norms, and political-economic forces—all of which are connected in dynamic, crisscrossing networks. The book, computer, or sheets of paper off of which you are reading these words, the desk or table on which these objects rest—none of them simply fell out of the sky. They were all fabricated through processes that cannot be separated from the social relations of which they are a part. Equally, none of these objects is automatically or inherently a commodity—something that can be bought

and sold. Particular socioeconomic relations and legal designations uphold their status as commodities—property law, trade agreements, market processes, and so on.

Karl Marx observed this more than 150 years ago. When he insisted that social relations underlie all commodities, he was referring to social relations of human labor. He argued that when objects enter into exchange, and come to be seen as equivalent to each other, or to a money price, the social relations of labor that actually made those objects become obscured. Through exchange, commodities come to be treated as if they have a “life of their own,” he says, when they are actually created at every stage through these social relations of labor.³³ For Marx, the origin of value is also obscured through capitalist exchange. Value appears to inhere in the object itself—this object with a life of its own. But value, for Marx, is actually produced through uneven labor relations in which workers are paid less than their labor is worth. Marx referred to this erasure of labor relations as “commodity fetishism”: the concealment of “the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects” (Marx 1976, 168–169). The social relations at the heart of the production process—who labors for how much pay, who works for whom, in what conditions—are mistaken as economic relations among objects, becoming a mere question of how valuable a specific commodity is when compared with another commodity.

Generations of commodity scholars have taken on the task of recovering these obscured relations, of defetishizing commodities, for the most part working with this fairly strict Marxian version of the fetish. Their work focuses on a specific segment of social relations of commodity production that the fetish conceals: human labor relations—namely, class. They defetishize by conducting commodity chain analyses, or tracing commodity “biographies,” or following the “lives of things.”³⁴ The objective of these studies—of cut flowers, of furniture, of fruit—is to demonstrate how the “lives of things” do not belong to them intrinsically, but rather are the result of particular socio-ecological arrangements. In this contemporary literature, then, commodities are generally understood to be made by rearranging relationships. These relationships are spatial, energetic, social, ecological—loggers fell trees, timber is milled into boards, woodworkers build chairs and tables. These relationships fall away when the table appears alone in exchange, when it appears as if it is in a relationship with other commodities (e.g., money), as if value is

attached to its physical form. The commodity is thus alienated from the relations that exist around it, allowing the commodity to seem like an independent, mobile, immutable object that exists on its own—as if it had a life of its own—and as if it has value and properties inherent to it.

My project in this book is inspired by and in conversation with these Marxist politics and analysis, and by this key political point that we should not treat commodities as if they have lives of their own, when they were actually produced by laborers and through uneven social relations of labor that generate surplus value, or profit. But I also nudge past this argument because it presupposes that commodities are *not* alive. And theorists of commodities have similarly largely rendered commodities mute and inert in a manner mimetic of their treatment under capitalism.³⁵ This is unhelpful especially when trying to understand the economies that traffic in “things” that are alive. Think of a rodeo bull, a circus elephant, a pet snake, or the crickets sold to feed that snake. These living commodities may be unexceptional in being made (not born) commodities, but they are unusual in other ways. Unlike other commodities, animals are actually born. They do have lives of their own—lives that cannot be reduced to their commodity biography, lives that are not produced only, or at all, through human labor. These lives are also or even instead produced through animals’ own labors, families, societies, emotional connections, and the complicated ecosystemic networks of which they are a part.

Since these lively commodities are my interest here, and my political project is to recover the processes by which an animal is made thinglike, my departure point is in a way the reverse of Marx’s. Where Marx was interested in how commodities come to appear as if they have lives of their own, my overarching questions in this book are, How do living things, including some commodities, come to appear as if they do *not* have lives of their own? Through what mechanisms are their lives made not their own? I develop the concept of animal fetishism to refer to this denial of a life-of-one’s-own, as I explain later. My argument is that exotic pets and animal capital are subject to a double fetishism, which extinguishes two sets of relations—although never completely: a commodity fetishism that, through exchange, erases the socio-ecological relations of commodity production; and a second fetishism of the animal, an erasure of the socio-ecological relations and networks that produce living commodities as living, social beings in the first place.

Nicole Shukin (2009) first sparked my interest in considering fetishism and animal capital alongside each other. She describes the fetishistic quality of both “animal” and “capital”—the former which functions as a naturalizing “generic universal” in Western modernity (as others like Derrida have shown), and the latter which is treated as having intrinsic properties as opposed to being produced through specific historical social formations, such as class (as Marx describes). In animal capital, these two fetishisms form what Shukin (2009, 18–19) describes as a “redoubled” or “tautologous species of fetishism,” a “metafetishism.” Like Shukin, I track this powerful formation. I empirically investigate the embodied ways that both fetishisms are enacted on the ground, for particular animals, and how this shapes the way they can live. To do so, I engage in a commodity chain methodology (as I explain in the next section), but I also go beyond a strictly commodity focus and direct much of my attention to animal fetishism and how it is enacted. Animal fetishism cannot be explained only through commodity fetishism; exotic pets are still subject to animal fetishism (i.e., are made “thinglike”) even if they are not commodities, and the relations that are hidden by the fetishism include the socio-ecological relations of animal being, the relations that produce the animal as a world-making subject—not just the human social relations that produce the commodity.

How, then, is animal fetishism enacted, if not through commodification? I suggest animal fetishism is enacted spatially and bodily, in particular through enclosure; and it is enacted discursively, through the assigning of a use value that comes to mask animals’ own use values and their own life-making practices. The latter is particularly distinct from commodity fetishism, which in Marx’s formulation is enacted through exchange and the assigning of exchange value. In what follows I develop this argument more fully. To do so I first explain the importance of moving beyond a commodity focus in work on animal capital. Here, I draw on the work of feminist political economists who show how unpriced work is functional to capitalism, an insight I—and others—suggest is crucial to understand the role of uncommodified natures in capitalism. These ideas help me build my argument that exotic pets are lively capital or capitalist natures even when they are not commodified directly. Second, I turn to feminist and postcolonial scholar Sara Ahmed’s more expansive conception of fetishism to construct my notion of animal fetishism, which allows me to consider how exotic pets are subject to a fetishism not only of their commodity form but also of their animal being.

A key starting argument of this book is that nonhuman life is subject to human domination and control, and is potentially productive for capitalist economies, even if it is not commodified directly. This is a different starting point than the one with which I began my research into the exotic pet trade. At first, I was interested centrally—even resolutely—in the exotic pet as a commodity, and in the commodification processes that form exotic pets. But fieldwork and new (to me) readings in feminist political economy changed my mind, revealing the limits of my initial commodity focus. In the field, I was repeatedly confronted by animals like Darwin, who are no longer commodities but who still live much like commodities do. Darwin's enclosure and his forced dependency on humans—spatial and social processes in which I am centrally interested—cannot be reduced to commodification. This does not mean that animals like Darwin are somehow outside of capitalist social relations, either. While the Story Book sanctuary, where Darwin lives, is a non-profit organization, it is tied up in all kinds of ways with money flows: donations, purchases of food and equipment to support Darwin and the other animals, and so on. In some cases, animals like Darwin are an actively productive aspect of profitable enterprises even though they are not commodities—for example, animals that cannot be bought and sold because of regulatory prohibitions but are grandfathered into ownership arrangements and are featured in for-profit roadside or petting zoos. It is for this reason that I refer to Darwin and other noncommodified exotic pets as lively capital—a living stock of objects from which value, especially encounter value, is (or could be) generated.

Feminist political economists have long made arguments along relatively similar lines, although in a different context. Early socialist feminist arguments in the 1960s and 1970s urged political economists to consider the largely unpaid work of social reproduction—the daily labors required to reproduce individual and collective human life, including child-rearing, household chores, and the maintenance of social bonds—as fundamental to the operation of capitalism.³⁶ Feminists critique how this reproductive work is devalued and naturalized as women's work, conceived of as work that is performed out of an innate biological drive and capacity, rather than free labor necessary for capital accumulation and delegated to women within exploitative patriarchal relations. In this way, feminist political economists show how patriarchy—a particular organization of social relations in which men assume positions of dominance over women—is useful for capitalism,

even as it cannot be reduced to its function under capitalism, given that it does not just benefit capitalists or the owners of the means of production, but also benefits men. This also allows feminists to undertake a more nuanced analysis of something like commodification—of labor, for example. In some cases, as feminist political theorist Nancy Fraser (2014) points out, commodification can be emancipatory—for example, when women are able to sell their own work as a commodity, for a wage, rather than do it for free. Similarly, what precedes commodification should not be romanticized, as social processes that are not commodified—that is, unpaid work—can still be shot through with uneven power relations, such as patriarchy.

These arguments prove insightful for understanding the realm of the nonhuman and its relationship to humans and capitalism. Nonhuman nature is also often unpriced and does not labor for a wage. Yet it is still useful for capitalism in all kinds of ways—as even the stunted language and common conception of ecosystem services seeks to acknowledge. This is not to say that nature and women are equivalent within capitalism; this would dangerously slip back into a discourse about women as “closer to nature” that naturalizes women’s role as social reproductive workers. But much of humans’ social reproductive work and nature’s work can be said to occupy similar structural positions within capitalist social relations—both are “super-exploited,” to borrow Maria Mies’s (1986, 48) term: they produce materials and energies for “the general production of life, or subsistence production,” and this subsistence production is appropriated by capitalists; it “constitutes the perennial basis upon which ‘capitalist productive labour’ can be built up and exploited.” The appropriation of this general production of life is referred to as “super-exploitation” because, unlike wage exploitation, it is not even compensated by a wage. Similar to how patriarchy positions women as devalued social reproductive workers, power relations between humans and animals, what we can think of broadly as anthropocentrism, position animals in devalued but useful positions within capitalist socio-ecological relations—even, again, when these animals are not directly commodified.

Accordingly, in this book I adopt and adapt feminist political economists’ powerful concept of social reproduction: the everyday work of caring for others and oneself, of building and maintaining social bonds, that reproduces individual and collective human life. Here, I project this concept into the world beyond humans, and refer to *socio-ecological* reproduction and

socio-ecological reproductive networks. Like the feminist political economists whose ideas I borrow, I do not mean reproduction in a strictly biological sense, as in the reproduction of species or even populations; rather, I mean the daily work and complex networks through which animals reproduce themselves and their communities. This work is, like social reproduction, useful to capitalism even if it is often not directly commodified. And both this work and the capacities it enables are disrupted through enclosure and animals' entry into exotic pet trade circuits.

The preceding insights direct attention beyond the commodity form—to processes that precede and succeed the living animal commodity. When it comes to the exotic pet trade, what comes into view with this more expansive lens? I argue that commodification in the exotic pet trade requires animal fetishism prior to the act of commodification. Before being commodified, animals must be made “thinglike”—alienated, individuated, controlled (chapter 1). Animal fetishism, or the designation of an animal as thinglike—the denial of its complex life history—is a condition of possibility for commodification of the animal. What this suggests more broadly is that anthropocentrism is a key logic and structure within capitalism. Capitalism did not invent anthropocentrism, but capitalism taps into it, channels it into a site for accumulation on multiple fronts. Anthropocentrism is incredibly useful for capitalism, making available a pool of devalued living “things” that can provide cheap or even free work, energy, material inputs, commodities, and waste absorption. In turn, I suggest capitalism deepens and extends anthropocentrism. In particular, in this book I argue that the act of commodification propels and intensifies animal fetishism (chapter 2); commodification heightens the extent to which animals appear as if they have no lives of their own. The two fetishisms thus entangle. The exotic pet is *doubly* fetishized: as animal and as commodity. But, importantly, the commodity form can end and animal fetishism remains in place (chapter 3). This state of being “thinglike” cannot therefore be reduced to commodification—it both precedes and in most cases persists after commodification in the exotic pet trade.

As I suggested earlier, the process of being made a thing is also never complete. An animal can never be fully reduced to a thing while it is alive; its life will always exceed the state of a “thing.” An animal's life is also a quality necessary for the exotic pet commodity form or its possibility. We arrive again at the tension inherent in the exotic pet and many other forms of ani-

mal capital—commodification depends on the life of the animal but also depends on making the animal thinglike, which impinges on, constrains, and threatens that life. In the exotic pet trade a balance is sought in which animals are made just thinglike enough to control but not to kill. So although a living animal cannot be made completely into a thing, the attempt to make an animal thinglike is dangerous; the life that is made thinglike persists but is stretched so thin it barely resembles itself. The high costs of this will become clear over the course of the book.

But how precisely is an animal *made* thinglike? I argue that the overarching mechanism is through animal fetishism, which operates in conjunction with but cannot be reduced to commodity fetishism. We need a broad conception of fetishism to proceed, where to fetishize is essentially to mistake a social process for a thing, and where the political implications of fetishism are at the fore. Haraway (1997) provides an open entry point with her suggestion that fetishism can be considered to be operating any time the seemingly inert, ahistorical, or apolitical nature of an object or thing hides power's operation. Haraway is here already urging us beyond the commodity in our consideration of fetishism. Ahmed is a key thinker as we do so. She argues that not only commodities are fetishized, and not only social relations of labor are erased when fetishism is in place. For Ahmed, objects (2006) or figures (2000), such as the figure of the stranger, are also fetishized, meaning they are abstracted from the encounters, relations, and processes that produced them. Fetishized objects and figures, like commodities, are assumed to contain their signification, or value, within themselves, as part of their nature, "within the singularity of [their] form" (Ahmed 2000, 143). This is accomplished through an erasure of relations, a cutting off from complex histories, a "radical forgetting of the histories of labour and production that allow . . . a body to appear in the present" (Ahmed 2006, 53–54) as if it is a simple object.³⁷

To fetishize something—object, commodity, animal—is then at base a failure to "account for [the object's] conditions of arrival, which are not simply given" (Ahmed 2006, 41). Ahmed is asking us to undertake a kind of historicization that is thick and specific. It is thick in the sense that it means not only to consider the past, or the question of events that deliver the present, but also to identify the social and political-economic formations that form the "conditions of arrival" of the present. It is specific in that it must be pursued in relation to specific figures, forms, objects: for her,

the stranger, but we can equally consider the animal—in this book, the exotic pet. Combining the thick and specific, Ahmed’s mode of historicization entails relentlessly digging under ostensibly self-evident, pregiven forms. It means considering “the history of ‘what appears’ and how it is shaped by histories of work” (43). For my purposes here, in relation to the exotic pet form, these histories of work include, most crucially, the socio-ecological reproductive work of multispecies collectives, sometimes but not always including humans.

Accordingly, in this book I do not take the exotic pet as a pregiven form, as a commodity or a bit of capital that contains its value in itself, inherent in its form. Instead, I aim to recover the exotic pet’s “histories of arrival” and histories of production within the exotic pet trade to uncover how the exotic pet is made—not just as commodity but as thinglike: a living object that is not necessarily bought and sold but is nonetheless property, individuated, severed from its relations of being and world-making. An essential first step in doing this recovery of “histories of work” and the “history of what appears” is to orient the analysis not only to the productive or reproductive work of humans but also to the work of socio-ecological (re)production of animal life: the energies, relations, and metabolic exchanges that bring an animal life into existence and sustain it—the general production of animal life, to spin off of Mies. The animal is fetishized precisely through a forgetting of and severing from this production and the relations that underpin it. Animal fetishism thus involves the *cutting off of the animal from the complex history of its own being*. It operates not by conjuring a “life of its own” for inert objects but instead by denying a life of its own to the animal, rendering it a passive “resource” and covering over the intricate socio-ecological relationships that produce this life.

How is animal fetishism enacted? How is animal being erased, denied, forgotten? How are animals “cut off” from or dispossessed of their own histories of being and networks of world-making? I suggest that in the exotic pet trade this occurs in two main ways, which are discussed across the book. First, animal fetishism is enacted through spatial and bodily mechanisms, namely, enclosure, which is an act of animal dispossession in which animal being is individuated and alienated and the animal is placed in a state of forced dependency on humans, unable to provide for itself. Both commodity fetishism and animal fetishism are deeply spatial, depending on the movement of things across and between spaces in a way that obscures pro-

duction. Enclosure—or captivity—in particular is a key spatial mode of individuating and controlling animals, and enabling their circulation across borders, through auction houses, into houses and yards on different continents. Second, animal fetishism is mobilized discursively, specifically, I suggest, through the designation of usefulness, or the assigning of use value. Different from commodity fetishism, which Marx suggests sets in at the moment of exchange, animal fetishism occurs in part with the designation of an animal's usefulness to humans. Jacques Derrida's and Ahmed's critiques of Marx are helpful here. Derrida (2006, 188) critiques Marx for his lack of interest in use value, for implying that "use-value has nothing mysterious at all." Derrida points to how use value is "always very human, at bottom"; it is always related to "men's [sic] needs"; it is, in a word Derrida does not use, anthropocentric.³⁸ Building from Derrida's short critique, I want to suggest that the properties of exotic pets that are seen as "useful" or as having use value—their encounterability, controllability, individuality—are not inherent in them, are framed in relation to human usefulness, and are part of forming animal fetishism, or the treatment of animals as thinglike.

There are two reasons I specifically refer to this as animal *fetishism*. First, I want to invoke commodity fetishism alongside animal fetishism, as they combine with each other potently in the exotic pet. Commodification can intensify more long-standing racialized, gendered, and colonial practices and relations. Commodification compounds animal fetishism in this way. It extends and deepens the manner and degree to which animals are made thinglike. It is important, then, that we hold the two fetishisms together but without collapsing them. The importance is analytical, demanding an examination of both the commodity and object form—of commodification and objectification. But the importance is also political. The dual fetishism of the exotic pet suggests that a politics in response must resist commodification but also something more.

This leads to the second reason I use the term "fetishism," which is to construct and offer a relevant political response. The point of identifying and describing fetishism is to defetishize, to see what the fetishism covers over—and this is a distinctly political project. Commodity fetishism led Marx to a particular politics: broadly, alerting commodity producers to their shared exploitation within capitalist social relations, leading to worker collectivization and ultimately revolution. To what politics does an acknowledgment of animal fetishism lead? It leads to a politics that is more modest

than worker revolution, but is still largely novel in that it is distinct from existing dominant political responses to the exotic pet trade, including animal rights, animal welfare, and conservation. Animal fetishism leads, I suggest, to a politics against enclosure and against anthropocentric framings of use value—the mechanisms of animal fetishism I identify. It leads to what I call a wild life politics, where wildness is understood to be a condition of relational autonomy that allows animals to live lives of their own, as world-making beings. A step in this direction is to shrivel the market for exotic pets. The exotic pet trade is a demand-driven economy, yet demand management responses to the trade are scarce. As part of a broader politics of wild life, I join others in advocating for efforts to reduce demand for exotic pets.³⁹

Following Multispecies Encounters and Their Conditions of Possibility

The global exotic pet trade is an incredibly diffuse and decentralized economy, a complicated swirl of captive animals crisscrossing the globe. There are no major corporations, no headquarters, no CEOs, no unions. Trade flows are dispersed, often clandestine. Tracking an economy like this is challenging. It is difficult to know where and when to jump into these flows as a researcher. In this research project's early stages, my intention was to trace the commodity chain—production, transportation, exchange, disposal—of one or more specific species: I had a long list, topped by scarlet macaws, dolphins, and/or orangutans after meeting with Canada's TRAFFIC national representative, who helped me draft a list of species for which significant research gaps existed (there are many). But I realized that focusing on specific species would be limiting and frustrating in the field. I envisioned being at a wildlife trade market and being able to focus only on a single species, having to ignore the multitude of other animals being bought and sold. So instead I decided to focus on the flows of multiple species in and out of specific bounded space-times—nodes—where the otherwise diffuse trade comes together, even if only momentarily; as a geographer, this seemed apt, and still does. I refer to this approach as “multispecies” in part as a simple recognition that my research is concerned with many different species of animals. Of course multispecies is also a signal to the multispecies ethnographies currently emerging from social science and humanities disciplines.⁴⁰

A multispecies research approach is one that pays attention not only to multiple species but also to how they shape one another.

In this sense, my research is multispecies in that it is concerned with encounters between humans and exotic pets. The encounter is in a way my scale and unit of analysis—over the years for this project I studied, tracked, and observed innumerable encounters between humans and exotic pets, and I entered into my own encounters. But I also strive, as Ahmed encourages, to situate those encounters in more general political-economic, socio-ecological conditions that make those encounters possible—that lubricate them, drive them. I do this situating work out of a broader commitment to picking apart animal fetishism, to recovering exotic pets' histories of arrival to the encounter. Considering the histories of arrival to an encounter means never taking the encounter as a single, timeless moment or interaction, but instead always inquiring into how the parties locked in encounter got there. As Ahmed (2000, 144–145) writes: “We need to complicate the very notion of the face to face by discussing the temporal and spatial dislocations that are implicated in the very possibility of being faced by this other. Certainly, this is partly about locating the encounter in time and space: *what are the conditions of possibility for us meeting here and now?*” This is precisely the question I ask about the encounters I observed and participated in as part of the research for this book.

The majority of the encounters I track here took place between 2010 and 2013 in three prominent nodes within the exotic pet trade's circuits: capture in biosphere reserves in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize (chapter 1); exchange at exotic animal auctions across the United States (chapter 2); and the attempted rehabilitation of former exotic pets at a wildlife facility in Guatemala called ARCAS (chapter 3). I complemented this more sustained research with smaller fieldwork trips in various places in Canada and in Geneva, Switzerland, to visit exotic pet sanctuaries and attend a CITES meeting, respectively. In each of these sites, I used a different combination of methods. I conducted more than forty interviews—ranging from semistructured to unstructured—in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. Most of these were expert interviews with people who have advanced knowledge of the exotic pet trade—with people engaged directly or indirectly with the exotic pet trade and its regulation, including regulators and trade enforcement and government officials; nongovernmental organization (NGO) and university scientists and researchers; veterinarians; peo-

ple who own exotic animals; exotic animal auction attendees, participants, and owners; exotic animal sanctuary owners and volunteers; and wildlife rehabilitation owners and volunteers. I also employed both participant observation and spectator observation. For the latter, I worked as a wildlife rehabilitation volunteer at ARCAS; this research forms the basis of chapter 3. My spectator observation (a term coined by Jan Penrose to describe her research at US rodeos) occurred primarily at exotic animal auctions across the United States; this research features in chapter 2. This observation research allowed me to immerse myself in the action and to experience events in a multisensory fashion, and to derive a sense of my animal research subjects' situatedness within broader networks.

What did my attention to encounters and their situatedness mean for my research practices in the field? It meant that I sought to attend to the interactions between beings, and how these interactions combined to generate performances or effects. This included being attentive to my own interactions, most critically with the animals with whom I worked the most closely, such as at the wildlife rehabilitation center. It meant I conducted extended observation of animals' locations, living conditions, and movement through space. It also meant that I attempted to foreground nonhuman animals' experiences, insofar as this is possible given the challenges of communication across species. I did not consider animals as "good to think with" (as Lévi-Strauss famously commented) or as mirrors for reflecting back some truth about human existence.⁴¹ Instead, in my research practice I tried to foreground animals as subjects in their own right, beings with their own outlooks, motivations, feelings, and affairs, beings who, while intimately entangled with each other and human beings, are—or can be—creatively independent, who are not just looked upon but also look back. Often, though, the animals in my company were incredibly controlled and constrained in their capacity for movement and expression—in cages so small their bodies could only be scrunched, or their bodies actually modified so that they could not bite or fly. These spatial and behavioral controls made gaining a sense of the animal difficult. The constraints also meant that I myself was enrolled in the uneven power dynamics of my research contact zones.

The book itself unfolds as an adapted "following the thing"—in this case, following the making, remaking, and attempted unmaking of a thing-like bit of lively capital: the exotic pet. The following three chapters build from the research I have just described to track how animal fetishism is

enacted, how it interacts with commodity fetishism, and how attempts are made—and could be made—to undo it. Chapter 1 examines how wild animals are captured for the pet trade, focused on parrots, especially macaws, and monkeys, especially spider monkeys, who are captured in and around biosphere reserves in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. I describe capture as a onetime act that severs the animal from its socio-ecological reproductive networks, makes the animal dependent on a system of human-provided supports, and produces the animal as lively capital: individual, controllable, and encounterable. I thus interpret capture as a mode of bodily enclosure that dispossesses the animal of the ability to provide for itself and its community. Animal fetishism is, I argue, materially enacted through this capture, after which point the enclosed animal can appear as if it does not have a life of its own, cut off from the complex history of its own being. The conditions for commodification are, too, put in place through capture.

Chapter 2 picks up where chapter 1 leaves off, with commodification. Based on observations of repeated exchanges of animals at exotic animal auctions across the United States, I argue that the auction process performs lively capital anew, as individual, encounterable, and controllable. Animal fetishism and commodity fetishism intersect potently here, at the auction. Animals appear only in relation to their human use value (animal fetishism) and exchange value (commodity fetishism). In exchange, as commodities on the auction block, exotic pets' commodity histories are erased—who trapped them in the forest, whose labor brought them across the border to market, and so on. In this way exotic pet commodities are like other commodities whose value appears to be a property of their physicality rather than a property of the social relations of labor that produced them. But unlike other commodities, as I have been suggesting, the animals in exchange are not only products of a commodity history; they are also products of the history of their own being. But on the auction block, animals appear divested from the socio-ecological relations that gave birth to and supported them, and to which they contributed.

In chapter 3, I examine the attempt to undo exotic pets as lively capital, to rebuild lives of their own, in a rehabilitation facility, ARCAS, in northern Guatemala. The chapter documents the extraordinary amount of material inputs and energies required to sustain animals who are dependent on humans, and the immense challenge of attempting to rebuild their capacities to provide for themselves. I also show how although ARCAS's animals are no

longer commodities, their enclosure persists, and so does a degree of animal fetishism.

For this reason, in the final chapter, I conclude by highlighting the necessary centrality of an antienclosure dimension to any political response that meaningfully resists the global exotic pet trade and the wider reordering of life in which domesticated, confined natures are ascendant and wild natures are deteriorating. I suggest the need for a wild life politics in which animals live as relationally autonomous beings whose own use values are respected and who live unenclosed lives in which they can work for themselves and their communities. This is an admittedly broad and far-reaching destination—so I suggest that demand management is an intermediary step in this direction, to at least contract the demand-driven market for exotic pets, so that fewer animals enter trade circuits. Some jurisdictions are curbing demand through bans on exotic pet ownership, but for the most part, demand management is underfunded at the national and international levels.⁴²

How is an animal made to appear as if it does not have a life of its own? How are animals made thinglike, made lively capital, in the exotic pet trade? These are the overarching questions that I set out to answer in the following chapters, which track the making, remaking, and attempted unmaking of the exotic pet through capture, exchange, and rehabilitation, respectively. I engage in this analysis to draw attention to an understudied economy and its embodied effects, and to understand the operation of animal fetishism, or the denial of animal being, within the exotic pet trade and beyond. In so doing, I offer an analysis of capitalism that goes beyond wages, profit, commodity fetishism, and humans to examine one of its lesser-acknowledged conditions of possibility: the objectification of animals, the denial of animal being, and how this is achieved through the mechanism of animal fetishism, a cutting of the animal from its complex histories—even in an economy animated by a “love” for animals. Animal fetishism extends far beyond the exotic pet trade. Think of the adage loved by animal advocates, that if slaughterhouses had glass walls the whole world would be vegetarian. This assumption is based on the idea that defetishizing the commodity is enough, showing the violent relations underpinning meat or exotic pet production is enough. But what if those violent relations involve beings who are already

devalued, who appear as “things”? It does not matter if walls are glass and violence is exposed if the “thing” being violated is not considered a being with a life of its own. The ultimate aim of this book is to challenge this notion, to suggest that animals like Darwin do have lives of their own, and that this should be the basis of a political response to the exotic pet trade as well as the reordering of life on earth of which it is a part.