

Rosemary-Claire Collard, *Animal Traffic: Lively Capital in the Global Exotic Pet Trade*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781478010920 (paper); ISBN: 9781478009894 (cloth); ISBN: 9781478012467 (ebook)

A pair of scarlet macaws soar high above the forest canopy; a spider monkey with a missing eye is auctioned off to a breeder; a baby monkey is smuggled in a prosthetic pregnancy belly and seized at airport security; a giraffe too tall to fit inside the auction hall is sold for \$32,000; a half-dead heron is force-fed at a rehabilitation center – these are just a few of the animals we encounter through Rosemary-Claire Collard’s research on the exotic pet trade for *Animal Traffic: Lively Capital in the Global Exotic Pet Trade*.

We follow Collard on her travels from her home in British Columbia to sites of animal capture in bioreserves in Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala, to exotic animal auction yards across the United States, to a wildlife rehabilitation center in Guatemala, and back home again. The book traces three primary sites and processes through which we can understand the geography of the making, remaking, and attempted unmaking of the animal as lively capital in general, and as a lively commodity in particular. These shifting relations occur in the violent severing of animals from their social and ecological networks as the first stage in crafting the animal as commodity (Chapter 1); the exchange of animals in commodity circuits, like auctions and other markets, that solidify, make fluid, and solidify again the animal as lively capital (Chapter 2); and the practices unfolding at rehabilitation centers where humans attempt to de-commodify the animal through practices often bordering on violence that cause animals to fear humans and hopefully make it possible for them to return to a wild life (Chapter 3).

In Collard’s (2014) and Collard and Dempsey’s (2013) groundbreaking earlier work on the *lively commodity*, they identified how *liveliness* (and not just being alive) is central to the making and unmaking of animals as commodities. In her book, Collard extends this framing to

theorize the process and consequences of *lively capital* more broadly and the challenges of creating conditions where animals can engage in relational autonomy to craft lives of their own. Commodification is part of the making of animal capital, but there are other qualities in an animal's life, enclosure, and circulation that maintain their status as capital, even when they may not be actively commodified. The animal as lively capital, then, can also be understood as “a living stock of objects from which value, especially encounter value, is (or could be) generated”, and in which liveliness circulates to sustain these formulations of value (p.20).

There's something about shedding light on the capital generated in the “shadowy trade” of exotic pets – light trained on charismatic and extraordinary species (like the scarlet macaw or the spider monkey) – that can help us to understand perhaps more familiar or ordinary forms of animal capital – a dog, a cat, a pig, or a chicken bought, sold, and assigned value as “pet” or “food”. The making of exotic pets as capital might feel more distant from many people's everyday practices of consumption in the sense that many consumers do not own exotic pets. However, the anthropocentric and capital-driven logics that render the wild-animal-turned-exotic-pet a form of animal capital in the first place operate on a much wider scale in other forms of animal use – for instance, in the commodification, instrumentalization, and consumption of farmed animals, in which many more consumers are implicated – and this requires a hard look at the deeply engrained anthropocentric violence that underwrites human-animal relations under capitalism.

There are so many things to say and think about in relation to this book, which is a testament to the richness of Collard's research and the brilliance of her analysis, and readers will find much to appreciate in her treatment of capitalist natures and the politics and ethics of anthropocentrism and its effects. What I am most struck by at this moment is the perhaps subtler undercurrent of death in Collard's story of the exotic pet trade, and what this helps to illuminate about the entanglements of death and capital through an analysis of animal *life* and *liveliness*.

Death looms behind lively capital – lifeworlds in which animals circulate are underwritten by and embedded in deathworlds ordered around violence (Gillespie 2021). The first node in the commodity circuit for the exotic pet trade is capture, and capture is bounded to death. “Capture is an act of severing, a sudden, explosive rupture, an abrupt, dramatic cleaving off of the animal from their socio-ecological reproductive networks: the kin and ecologies that support them and to which they contribute” (p.35-36). Capture is the moment in which the animal experiences the death of their wild life – the animal is torn from their wild lifeworld and alienated from the forms of relationality that teach them how to be themselves. The severing of familial bonds is not at all limited to wild animal capture, however; it is an experience shared by wild and domesticated animals alike. Calves born into the dairy industry, for instance, are immediately removed from their mothers, severing what are intimate nurturing and knowledge-making bonds. Puppies and kittens are routinely torn from their kinship bonds with parents and siblings – either purchased or “adopted” (a discursive formulation that implies they are orphans in need of new parents), rarely seeing their canine or feline families again.

At the point of wild animal capture, it is common for several others to die (e.g. the mother monkey who is shot out of the tree to enable the capture of the baby clinging to her body). From there, animals begin a journey of being trafficked to their ultimate destination in a home, petting zoo, film set, circus, breeder, or other space of enclosure, and in the process, the high mortality in the trade continues: “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” (p.15). For those who survive in these new sites of captivity, their wild life is extinguished again and again; they are “cut off from the complex history of ... [their] own being” (p.29), with each new exercise of enclosure and control delivered by humans. In captivity, it’s impossible to disentangle the death permeating the creation of lively capital in

the exotic pet trade from the commodification and death of other animals: “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” (p.6). Industrial animal agriculture is implicated in dramatic land use change and global warming, which in turn puts further pressure on the survival of wild animal populations, creating what Tony Weis (2018) refers to as landscapes haunted by animal ghosts – what we might think of as another kind of hollowed-out deathworld.

In the shadowy wake of these deathworlds of lively capital, then, what kinds of lives are possible? This is a question that Collard takes up first through an analysis of the work of wildlife rehabilitation centers where attempts are made to rehabilitate (or, put differently, *de-commodify*) animals who have been recuperated from the capital circuit. Central to the project of release back into the wild is the work of making the animal *unencounterable* – an at-times violent remedy to the already violent process of capture and trafficking that made the animal *encounterable* in the first place. Rehabilitation work is premised on a clear understanding of the scale of death that underwrites the process of commodification and the making of animal capital – through capture, transport, sale, and animal lives lived until their end in captivity. This understanding of death as a form of violence embedded in every stage of the process governs the wildlife rehabber’s avoidance of death at all costs, embodying a logic in rehab work that if an animal cannot learn to become self-sufficient and adequately avoidant of humans, then they cannot be released – in this case (and Collard explains that this is most often the case), “a captive life is preferred to a death outside the cage” (p.115). But this captive life is a kind of impoverished lifeworld embedded in the deathworld of captivity and enclosure. Collard is uneasy, then, about this prioritization of captive life over free-living death at the cost of animals never again experiencing, for even a moment, a wild life.

And so this means that another kind of lifeworld is needed – one where animals remain free to begin with, where they are allowed to live outside of the constraints of capital, and where the capitalist structures that drive animal capital at its roots are unsettled. Collard advocates for a *politics of wild life*, which is a life “lived in conditions of relational autonomy” (p.127) and where animals can “be world-making subjects” (p.131). She calls on us as readers, as critical scholars, and as humans in the world to “[fight] for the capacity of animals to lead wild lives, lives characterized by openness, possibility, a degree of choice, and self-determination, in which beings are understood to have their own familial, social, and ecological networks, their own lookouts, agendas, and needs” (ibid.). We are left then with a call to action to radically transform not only our theories but also our relationships with animals under and outside of capitalism – relationships in which we honor their animality and the alterity of their being, and where we work in solidarity to help create conditions where they can flourish on their own terms and in their own lives lived in ways that are meaningful to them.

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