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# Wildspace: The Cage, the Supermax, and the Zoo

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## 5 Wildspace

### The cage, the supermax, and the zoo

*Karen M. Morin*

#### Introduction

Standing at the top of the most iconic place on my university campus – the quad – one overlooks a beautiful pastoral landscape that encompasses the lower part of campus to the far extent of the Allegheny Mountains in the distance. This otherwise picturesque view of Pennsylvania's rolling hills and steeped architecture is always spoiled for me, though, by two equally visible sites of enclosure poking out of the landscape: the upper portions of the 'monkey cages' facility that is the hallmark of the university's Animal Behavior program, and the bell tower of the federal penitentiary on the edge of town (USP-Lewisburg). The extensive monkey cages facility currently contains an incredible array of animals for an undergraduate liberal arts school, including baboons, lion-tailed macaques, and squirrel and capuchin monkeys, all of whom live out their lives in small concrete lab cages. Few in the community would notice or care that these animals share a similar lived experience with the 1,000+ male inmates at the penitentiary, a site that has become notorious in recent years for its insidious Special Management Unit (SMU) program that features twenty-three- or twenty-four-hour a day double-celled lockdown of federal prisoners from around the country, brought here for two years of 'readjustment' (Morin 2013).

Much has been written about the penal philosophies, conditions, economics, and politics of caging humans in prison solitary confinement or lockdown cells (Haney 2008; King *et al.* 2008; Mears and Reisig 2006). Such scholars understand these practices as civil and human rights abuses. In a similar way, many animal rights scholars and activists challenge the conditions, ethics, and damage caused to animals confined in small cages in zoos and in other facilities with similar forms of captivity (Jamieson 1985; Kemmerer 2010; Acampora 2010). While I acknowledge that there are risks involved in making such comparisons and great care must be taken to do so (e.g., Spiegel 1996), a number of parallels can also be drawn between how humans and nonhuman animals alike experience and/or act upon such spatial tactics of enclosure.

This chapter brings forward a discussion of 'the cage' from a number of related angles for both human and nonhuman subjects and spaces. Comparisons between humans confined in maximum security conditions in prisons and jails,

and nonhuman animals confined in cages in zoos and other zoo-like structures, offer a number of opportunities to study the relative histories, practices, experiences, and politics of caging. I consider the critical intersections of caging non-human and human bodies in American zoos and prisons, and the oppressions and structural inequalities that span species boundaries. These include the historical-geographical dynamics of the cage and underlying disciplinary regimes of the zoo and prison; the cultural and sociological 'mandates' of caging; the associated psychological-behavioral experience of being caged; and the political and ethical challenges to long-term captivity in cages that the respective animal rights and prisoner rights movements have brought forward.

In many ways the crisis of hyper incarceration, and the human rights questions posed by increased use of solitary confinement and/or permanent lockdown in maximum security prisons, map onto the development of the zoo and debates about caging animals for human entertainment and resource. This chapter explores and compares the movements and rights discourses surrounding each, examining their effectiveness, relative successes, and roadblocks. What, if anything, can be learned by cross-pollinating these discursive and activist fields in attempts to advocate for both human rights and animal rights?

I take up these questions in the sections that follow. Before proceeding I would note that there are, of course, many forms of caging animals and humans that I do not discuss, but that have broad relevance to my topic. Animals caged in biomedical and other research labs (such as the one at my university mentioned above), despite protections especially for primate animals, remain at a critical crossroads; and animals captive within the cycles of industrial agriculture experience some of the most horrific conditions of the cage. A number of scholars likewise point to comparisons that can be made between zoo cages and other types of human enclosures (asylums, camps, etc.; see Malamud 1998: 115–116; Watts 2000). Such studies are helpful in thinking through other ways that animal and human enclosures can be studied together. However, I confine my attention to zoo and prison cages because study of their similar geographies, disciplinary regimes, and rapid transformations over the past forty+ years provides an opportunity to examine their respective ethico-political challenges that can, in turn, speak back to theories that inform both critical animal and human geographies.

### **The caged body**

The caged bodies of animals in zoos and humans in maximum security prisons can be compared through a number of rhetorical and material parallels. They both can be situated as spectacular, wild, and dangerous bodies that 'require' enclosure; as victims of the physical and psychological abuses of enclosure; as oppressed bodies wholly without social rights – as *homo sacer* – bare lives (Agamben 1998; Rhodes 2009); and as bodily capital accumulation strategies for both zoos and prisons (Harvey 1998; Nibert 2002), among others. As Malamud (1998: 117) succinctly observes, when we make the institutional parallel of the

zoo to the prison it is always the body that is at issue: “the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.”

Space limits a thorough treatment of these many resonant parallels, but suffice it to say that particularly important here are the intersections that have to do with the social construction of the caged body as wild and dangerous. The isolation of the cage for both animals and humans is intended for the ostensible protection and safety of others. Caging humans requires producing them as animalistic first (Wacquant 2001). The cage connotes a beast lacking in self-control, a human (usually male) who is seen to behave like a dangerous, brutal, coarse, cruel animal (Malamud 1998: 114). We might imagine a presumed innocence of caged animals compared to the presumed guilt of caged humans – the latter ‘got what they deserve’ and thus do not inspire the sympathy of neglected or abused caged animals; yet the dangerousness, wildness, and potential violence of both are presumed and, indeed, often showcased.

Malamud discusses the ways that early zoos appealed to a taste for horror by stressing, and exaggerating, the savagery of their animals (1998: 106). Braverman, along with scores of others, argues that the most crucial assumption underlying the entire institution of animal captivity is the classification of zoo animals as wild and therefore as representatives of their unconfined conspecifics. “Take this assumption away, and you take away the *raison d’être* of the zoo” (2013: 6, 8–9). Jamieson, though, in his classic ‘Against Zoos’ (1985), describes the profound denaturing that occurs at zoos; while animals may look like their wild counterparts and share the same genetic code, they lack the behaviors, skills, and awareness of those in natural habitats. Acampora describes zoos as thus producing a “generic animality” (2006: 104). Nonetheless, zoos unquestionably portray their animals as wild and untamed, and intimately related to those in the wild and thus sharing in their plight. In attempts to maintain the wildness of zoo animals, many zoos have ceased giving them Western names. Today they are given a number (like the prisoner), or an African name, further locating them as undomesticated. ‘Timmy’ and ‘Helen’ have become Mshindi, Kweli, or Mia Moja, names the public will presumably associate with ‘wild’ and distant Africa, even if they were born in the U.S. (Braverman 2013: 9).

Prison inmates themselves turn to animal imagery to express the dehumanizing effects of isolation and exposure in the prison. Many express shame and anger at being caged in view of others that position them like animals in a zoo. As one inmate whom Rhodes (2009: 197) interviewed in Washington described it, “if you choose to put these people in a box with nothing, what you’re gonna get out of that is stark raving animals. I’ve seen animals produced in this very hall. People who have just lost their total cool.” An Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Doing Time: Life Inside the Big House*, covered the humiliations and rank conditions at USP-Lewisburg, including some poignant scenes of guards referring to the place as a zoo and inmates responding by ‘woofing’ like dogs or wolves for the cameras, and then declaring, “we’re dying” (Raymond and Raymond 1991). The cultures of many prisons reinforce this relationship. At Douglas County Correctional Center in Omaha, Nebraska, where I am

conducting research on spatial design and violence, the unit where the most at-risk or unstable inmates are isolated is informally referred to as ‘the zoo’ by staff and inmates alike.

Racial difference is basic to much of the ‘criminal as animal’ rhetoric, and animalistic representations of Black men in particular originate in various social arenas. As Wacquant has argued, the wide diffusion of bestial metaphors for criminals in the journalistic and political field – “where mentions of ‘superpredators,’ ‘wolf-packs,’ and ‘animals’ are commonplace” – in turn supplies a powerful common-sense racist explanation for the massive over-incarceration of African-American men, “using color as a proxy for dangerousness” (2001: 104).

We also see a tension between the visibility–invisibility of both caged animals in zoos and humans in prisons. To be viewed, to be something to look at, is an integral part of the caging process (Benbow 2000; Acampora 2006: 103–115). Prisoners, especially those isolated in maximum security, are hidden and secreted away, outside of public view, though at the same time they are subjected to constant, uninterrupted surveillance within prison walls. When their caged experiences turn into a spectacle for outside audiences – whether for media outlets, museum histories, or live performances – the association of the wild and animalistic is oftentimes reinforced (Schrift 2004; Turner 2013). Zoo cages, on the other hand – public spaces at the heart of the urban center – are designed *as* spectacle. “At the zoo, for visitors to have their (spectacular) fun, the wild animals must be kept on display” (Acampora 2006: 102). While the zoo requires such visibility, perhaps many or most animals are in fact actually hidden from view much of the time, when the zoo is closed and also when rotating on and off display (DeGrazia 2002; Braverman 2013). Ultimately we see a kind of violence and disempowerment in the perpetual visibility of the caged prisoner and zoo animal. And that visibility – combined with the social invisibility or secrecy surrounding the experience of human and animal subjects – is integral to their animalization and objectification.

Many linkages can also be made between the behavioral and psychological responses and experiences, human and nonhuman, to caged enclosure and captivity. These include depression, despair, lethargy, stress, fear, shame, and eventually anger, acting out, and violence. These responses have the tendency to reinforce preexisting assumptions that the enclosed body is wild, bestial, and savage, thus requiring caging.

Many zoo critics argue that confining animals in cages produces anxiety, sadness, neurotic behavior, poor hygiene, and suffering (Jamieson 1985; Acampora 2006, 2010; Francione 2000; Rudy 2011; Braverman 2013), even for those under the care of the best-intentioned zookeepers (let alone those who neglect or mistreat animals). While some animals existing in such captivity are well fed, disease free, and comfortable (DeGrazia 2002: 92), their living environment is boring and physically stifling, their “jailhoused bodies” never fully able to engage their physical and mental capabilities (Acampora 2006: 99–103). Zoo animals typically lack companionship, adequate exercise, and stimulation. As Jamieson argued, zoos can never hope to provide experiences that animals

deserve – gathering their own food, living in social groups, behaving in ways that are natural to them (1985: 109). While Rudy observes that most zoo animals today “reveal no outrageous behaviors such as self-mutilation or obsessive behaviors such as spinning or pacing,” she argues that this is likely because animals who engage in those behaviors are simply taken off of display (2011: 126). Conversely it is the case that most zoo animals today were born in captivity and thus many zoo proponents argue that the cage is a normal, comfortable experience for them (Zimmermann *et al.* 2007).

Similar human responses to caging in maximum security lockdown and/or isolation in prisons have been well established in the literature. Mears and Reisig (2006: 34) assert that the supermax differs from earlier prisons with lockdown ‘holes’ in that they do not aim, even at an ideological level, to reform inmates; rather, they are intended to break prisoners through isolation. In the supermax, prisoners eat, sleep, live, exercise, and die in their cells alone or with a cellmate. Haney (2008: 956), Mears and Reisig (2006), and King *et al.* (2008) among many others describe the oppressive day-to-day inmate experience: it is one of overall sensory deprivation, isolation and loneliness, enforced idleness and inactivity, oppressive security and surveillance procedures, and despair. Those not broken by the system may become more dangerous and mean. Violence or the constant threat of it is one guaranteed byproduct of the supermax, and mental illness the other (Haney 2008; King *et al.* 2008). The supermax “manufactures madness”: “prisoners subjected to prolonged isolation may experience depression, rage, claustrophobia, hallucinations, problems with impulse control, and an impaired ability to think, concentrate, or remember” (Magnani and Wray 2006: 100).

There are also a number of parallels for how both human and nonhuman actors attempt to resist caging practices and enclosure, acting on their condition with gestures and acts (Rhodes 2009: 199). These are agents who oftentimes have no other means of resistance other than using their own bodies as weapons. As Braverman (2011: 1700–1701) argues, “despite their subjugated legal position, animals are nevertheless active subjects embodying a form of agency in their ability to continue to challenge, disturb, and provoke humans.” Among other actions, animals can kick back at or attack their human caregivers and perhaps even exercise their own ‘natural laws’ (also see Philo and Wilbert 2000: 14–23). The recent documentary *Blackfish* (2013) testifies to the violent behavior of SeaWorld’s orca whale Tilikum, produced as a result of prolonged captivity in small tanks. News stories and television programs such as the popular *Animal Planet* frequently play up the horrors and ‘irrationality’ of zoo animals attacking their human caregivers as such (e.g., Gates 2013).

Likewise, much could be said about the few opportunities that isolated prison inmates have to resist their spatial enclosure and associated punitive practices. Hunger strikes, refusal of cooperation, using their bodies as weapons, and creating violence are all tactics that carry numerous risks and ensure retaliation from prison administration. Throwing food and feces, acts of self-mutilation, biting, and so on are unsurprising outcomes of desperate individuals ensnared in the

perverse and violent supermax system of punishment (James 2005). Such tactics and agency, while challenging the mute passivity of the imprisoned also, though, further reinforce preexisting associations of prisoner animalism.

This brief overview of some of the resonances across the caged bodies and experiences of zoo animals and prison inmates offers a useful context for examining the historical transformation of the zoo and prison as spaces of enclosure. I turn to those now, and subsequently to the various rights movements that have influenced the development of these spaces especially over the past forty years.

### The zoo cage

Zoos are among the most popular cultural institutions worldwide; approximately 100,000 of them attract over 600 million visitors each year (Zimmermann *et al.* 2007: 4; Bulbeck 2010: 85). Today there are many kinds of zoos, and they vary considerably in quality and purpose, ranging from small, bleak ‘concrete prisons’ to naturalistic, conservation-oriented bioparks that attempt to replicate animals’ natural habitats (DeGrazia 2002: 88; Rudy 2011: 122; Acampora 2010).

The zoo as a site for modern entertainment, education, or scientific study emerged in continental Europe in the eighteenth century, and in the UK and U.S. in the nineteenth. Hallman and Benbow (2006) explain the evolution of Western zoos in three distinct stages (also see Acampora 2005, 2006, 2010). The early menageries were dedicated to entertaining the public, with rows of bare cages enclosing single specimens and intended to reinforce “notions of human power and superiority over the natural world” in the age of colonialism and empire (Hallman and Benbow 2006: 257). Fast-forward to the postwar era, the “living museum” began to emerge, with enclosures built to resemble jungles and woodlands. Such spaces were meant to “banish the emotional response to human dominance over less powerful animals,” emphasizing ecological relationships, habitat and species conservation, and public education. The late twentieth century “conservation centre” appeared as the third stage, a place that “exhibits active concern about the exploitative relations humans have with animals” and thus brings human visitors “inside the cage.” Protecting biological diversity and sustainability are central to these later institutions (Hallman and Benbow 2006: 259–261). Samuels (2012: 33) adds a fourth stage of zoo development to this typology, a mode of display he characterizes as “eco-tainment,” in which “giddy amusement-park tricks offer a measure of relief from the knowledge that nature is only another man-made illusion.” Beardsworth and Bryman call this the “Disneyization” of zoos, involving a combination of “theming,” consumption/merchandizing practices, and the emotional labor of zoo workers (2001: 91–98).

Such developmental stages can and often do coexist at any given site, as my recent visit to New York’s Bronx Zoo confirmed. Widely acknowledged to be one of the world’s ‘best’ zoos, the Bronx Zoo of today dedicates itself to “saving wildlife and wild nature,” and many of its exhibits are framed with information about conservation and endangered species (such as the reproduction of a poacher’s truck on Tiger Mountain). Nonetheless the Dinosaur Safari, Bug Carousel,

and the Wild Asia Monorail, all aimed at having fun, obviously distract the zoo visitor, perhaps particularly children, from the more painful reminders of animal abuse and habitat demise.

It is clear that in the last forty+ years we have witnessed the emergence of an era of the benevolent or ostensibly 'progressive' zoo – an obvious reform of zoo conditions and a change of mission. Today, many zoo advocates argue that at least for larger primates and mammals, small concrete barren cages have generally given way to larger, more naturalistic habitat enclosures, some components of which are made of natural materials; animals are rarely displayed alone; and zoos attempt to educate the public about endangered species and habitat destruction noted in informational signage. Zoos vary tremendously on these features, however, and regulatory oversight as well as collection of empirical evidence to support such assertions has been unsystematic to date (Zimmermann *et al.* 2007; Braverman 2011, 2013; see below).

Debates about zoo cages today center on whether these progressive sites are in fact "a new and acceptable form of wild animal keeping, or whether they are simply a dressed-up version of the colonizing, concrete prison model" (Rudy 2011: 123–124; Acampora 2006: 103–115, 2010: 1–8). As Benbow (2000: 13–15) argues, technology and culture have conjoined in the development of new mechanisms for caging captive animals – including various forms of wire, glass windows, electronic fences, walls, ditches, and moats. She explains that the most significant change that has occurred in the geography of the cage is the (larger) size of enclosures. Nonetheless, in zoo architecture, a balance or compromise is always made between the conflicting aesthetic demands of visitors and the needs of the animals. Thus, rocks, vegetation, and other spatial features, for example, whether synthetic replicas or the real thing, are provided primarily for the visitor (not the captive animal), intended to evoke a natural environment, habitat, or themed region of the Earth (Benbow 2000: 18–20; Francione 2000: 24). Thus many would argue that the impression of 'cagelessness' in this 'natural' zoo habitat is merely pretense, with animals simply subjected to more sophisticated regulation (Malamud 1998: 107; Acampora 2006: 103–108). Ultimately, what all zoos have in common is the display of animals to the human public; and what all zoo animals have in common is the experience of being observed, as object, within a hierarchical relationship with the observer.

Moreover many critics argue that zoos do nothing to address the primary causes of global biodiversity loss, unless one considers the intangible benefit of education, which itself is highly debatable (e.g., Braverman 2013: 18). Many zoo critics such as Francione (2000: 25) argue that watching a lion in a zoo is no more beneficial than watching a film of a lion. Others, however, argue that witnessing the embodied "wonder, beauty and mystery" of zoo animals has great potential for changing public attitudes (Benbow 2000: 15, 2004: 379; Zimmermann *et al.* 2007: 4–7). As Jamieson (1985: 111–112) noted though, "undoubtedly some kind of education happens in zoos, but the question is, what kind?... [C]ouldn't most of the important educational objectives better be achieved by exhibiting empty cages with explanations of why they are empty?"



Many also argue that zoos have not been successful at maintaining genetic diversity of endangered species and/or reintroducing species back into the wild, due to the substantial financial, health, and adjustment risks involved. Acampora (2006: 106) questions the utopian vision of “Releasement Day,” arguing that this sort of futuristic planning presumes unrealistic, wide-scale, socio-ecological stability over a very long time; meanwhile Francione (2000: 24–25) describes the inefficiency, waste, and abuse inherent in breeding programs. Most zookeepers readily admit the obvious, that the best way to ‘save’ wild animals is to protect their habitats and sanctuaries (Rudy 2011: 119; Kemmerer 2010: 42). But because maintaining actual natural habitats and protected areas has not proven feasible, especially for large land vertebrates, the zoo becomes an (albeit controversial) ‘necessity’ to breeding endangered species and protecting biodiversity. Zoo advocates argue that modern zoos emphasize conservation, education, and care and stewardship towards animals as their central mission; that in caring for animals in zoos and breeding offspring, they are caring for animals in the wild: i.e., ‘saving’ wildlife (Braverman 2013: 15–17; Zimmermann *et al.* 2007).

A number of scholars and advocates argue for new models of wildlife enclosure altogether (the sanctuary, reserve, Earth Trust, zoological garden), and signal, if you will, a fifth stage in zoo development. Such models signal the abolition, rather than the reform, of what is ordinarily considered a zoo.<sup>1</sup> Rudy (2011: 113–114), for example, supports the privately run sanctuary, founded not on putting animals on display but on developing human relationships with them. Similarly Kemmerer (2010: 37–42) advocates for the “nooz,” safe havens for individuals misused by zoos, circuses, or science, institutions framed within the logic of reparation for previous exploitation. “Nooz will not purposefully seek out prisoners from the wild, or breed prisoners to entertain human beings,” she writes (2010: 42).

One such place is the largest exotic wildlife rescue facility in Pennsylvania, the family owned and operated T&D’s Cats of the World near my home. Most of the 300 animals at T&D’s – including lions, tigers, cougars, leopards, wolves, and bears – were formerly abused, neglected, or illegally owned pets, or have been discarded from zoos and other operations. Most of the animals live socially on a half to two acres of woods that also feature enclosed shelters. Although T&D’s allows weekend visitors during the summer, it is not a place designed for humans but rather for animals, the latter of whom may or may not ‘display’ themselves to visitors on any given day. T&D’s is a good example of a facility that “contests exhibition” (Chrulew 2010: 205–206).<sup>2</sup>

All of this said and despite many disagreements it seems undeniable that a progressive social and spatial evolution has taken place over the last several decades in the politics, ethics, and care of animals in captivity – however much remains to be done. Real reforms are evident in the caged existence of zoo animals today, yet we also see a demonstrable further evolution, beyond reform of the zoo towards its abolition. What parallels can be drawn with the evolving practices of caging humans in prisons? Where do the narratives of these institutions converge, and where do they diverge?

### The supermax prison cage

What we might think of as the social history of caging humans in long-term isolation can be traced in the U.S. to the infamous experiment at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. Built in 1829, Eastern State is today considered America's most historic prison, primarily for the role it played in developing American penal philosophy. Philadelphia Quakers are attributed with creating the idea for this first penitentiary, a prison designed to inspire true regret, or penitence, in criminals' hearts through complete isolation, silence, and individualized labor in cells. Eastern State was a source of debate from the beginning—Charles Dickens was one of its earliest detractors, in 1842—yet its ideals were not abandoned until 1913 when they collided with the reality of overcrowding. The prison did not close until 1971 though, and the site became a popular tourist attraction beginning in the 1980s (Bruggeman 2012).

From the late nineteenth century, social reformers had sought to ameliorate the deplorable conditions in American prisons—they were overcrowded, poorly ventilated, dark, unhygienic spaces where prisoners were kept in solitary cages regardless of their crime. Most were incarcerated for nonviolent crimes such as horse theft and counterfeiting; and later, under Prohibition (1919–1933), for producing, transporting, or selling alcohol, which dramatically contributed to the massive prison-building spree in the early twentieth century. When the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) was created in 1930, its mission was to reform this system, to rehabilitate prisoners through education, vocational training, and recreation, an approach in line with contemporary 'scientific' penology.

This ideology of reform and rehabilitation suffered a short life span, however; by the 1970s, these principles completely lost traction within the prison bureaucracy and in the courts, and stood in stark contrast to the norms and practices of everyday life inside penitentiary walls (Richards 2008). Guard brutality, overcrowding, unsafe working conditions, infrastructural deterioration, and inmate civil rights challenges led to a breakdown in the ability of the BOP to control its facilities, and uprisings frequently occurred at many federal and state facilities. Prisons became increasingly violent places and dozens of guards around the country were killed and numerous lawsuits followed (King *et al.* 2008: 146; Richards 2008: 9–10; Morin 2013: 384). By 1975 the Bureau had abandoned its concept of rehabilitation, and by 1984 the U.S. Congress passed the Sentencing Reform Act, which abolished parole for federal prisoners, guaranteeing that they must serve at least 85 percent of their prison sentences. The failed War on Drugs conceived in the early 1970s, more than any other single cause, contributed to the hyper-incarceration trends we see today (2.4 million people behind bars; Alexander 2012).

The Bureau's response to the further problems that these legal 'remedies' predictably caused, such as intense overcrowding and increased violence within prisons, led to the caging practices we see today—use of solitary confinement and permanent lockdown as a primary method of prison control. Pure

punishment and retribution became the norm. Today maximum security isolation or lockdown has become an ordinary and entrenched fixture in American prisons at all scales, replacing older forms of temporary prisoner segregation.

In the U.S. there are more than thirty high-security (federal and state) super-maximum prisons, confining approximately 200,000 prisoners, and the number is growing (Richards 2008: 17–18). ‘Law and order’ arguments tend to frame the need for the solitary cage in public discourse, as advocates often claim that such confinement of the ‘worst of the worst’ is necessary to stem violence and keep our streets safe. In reality, estimates are that only about 5–9 percent of those in isolation cages are locked down for a crime committed on the outside (Vanyur 1995); nearly all of them have been labeled as gang leaders and/or have been accused of committing crimes (such as assault) while incarcerated.

As one USP-Lewisburg inmate wrote about the situation there (Morin 2013: 393), “the prison provides only 55½ square feet for two grown men to live and be locked down in for 18 to 24 months straight.” While the Lewisburg SMU’s double-celling lockdown practices bring about their own set of stresses and violent outcomes of which few seem aware, the notorious federal ADX prison in Florence, Colorado, serves as a more familiar example of just how far the caging of humans can and has devolved. At ADX, prisoners are alone in their cells at all times, they recreate alone, and at no time come into contact with another human being, sometimes for years at a time. Cells are self-contained, a spatial design that maximizes security by ensuring that inmates rarely leave their cells. Cells are made of concrete walls, floors, and ceilings, and all cell furniture is made of reinforced concrete. Each cell has only a concrete slab bed, with a built-in storage shelf, concrete desk and seat. Each cell has its own toilet, sink, and shower. Each cell also has its own vestibule and two doors – an inner open grill that allows direct observation of the inmate upon entering the vestibule and an outer solid door that “prevents the inmate from throwing things or firing projectiles at staff” (Vanyur 1995: 92). Most services that prisoners receive are delivered to them electronically or through the small hole in the cell door.

Only recently are we beginning to see, from the mainstream media and from the corrections industry, challenges to the abuses inherent in solitary confinement, as well as more pragmatic arguments about the efficacy and economics of the practice. Raemisch (2014), for instance, Executive Director of Colorado state corrections, checked himself into a solitary confinement cell in order to better understand the abusive nature of the practice and the psychological damage it caused. He lasted only twenty hours, becoming “twitchy and paranoid,” spending his time counting the small holes carved in the walls. Raemisch concluded that confining men to small solitary cages does not solve problems, “only delay[s] or more likely exacerbate[s]” them. Goode (2013), likewise, reported that the Mississippi Commissioner of Corrections “used to believe that difficult inmates should be locked down as tightly as possible, for as long as possible.” But after a rash of violence at the state’s super-maximum security prison in 2007, rather than tightening restrictions he loosened them, allowing inmates

out of their cells each day, offering basketball, a group dining area, and new rehabilitation programs. In response, “inmates became better behaved. Violence went down” (Goode 2013). Ultimately an entire unit was closed, saving the state more than \$5 million.

The devolution to permanent isolation or lockdown in U.S. prisons as normal, everyday practice can be attributed to a number of social and legal trends noted above. But ‘cracks’ in this system are beginning to show that might help ameliorate or reverse the trends. At this juncture we might question the relative impact that the prisoner rights movement has effected within this scenario, and compare it to that of the animal rights movement that has similarly challenged caging practices at the zoo.

### **Prisoner rights and animal rights: resonances and dissonances**

One of the important things to notice when comparing animal rights and prisoner rights in America is the crucial changes that have overlapped in curious ways over the past forty years. Prior to that (and grossly generalizing for brevity’s sake), the humanitarian basis of Progressive Era reforms led to improvements in both prisoner and animal welfare (Finsen and Finsen 1994: 27). New organizations pushed for improved treatment of animals; and new agencies governing the caging of humans (including the BOP itself) were created, based at least in theory on reform-minded principles. At the same time, while conditions arguably improved for animals caged in zoos, starting in the 1970s conditions dramatically deteriorated for humans caged in prisons. While the zoo and the prison are obviously different kinds of institutions, run under vastly different regimes of power, both have been historically subjected to pressures from outside activist organizations that have to a greater or lesser degree effected their reform. Yet advocates for change in both the prison and the zoo have drawn on similar ethical and biopolitical arguments about the cage as a disciplinary geographical space, and as such, offer a nexus of interests that can be put to productive use for both critical human and animal geographies.

While it is difficult to isolate a unified movement advocating for the rights of prisoners as an oppressed group, it is nonetheless possible to locate the origins of the idea of prisoner oppression and rights within the Civil Rights Movement generally, particularly considering that African-American and other minority men and women have historically comprised a disproportionately high percentage of the U.S. prison population (currently 70 percent; Alexander 2012). To Gottschalk, race was the “crucible” for the contemporary prisoner rights movement in the U.S.; the race question gave birth to the most powerful and significant prisoner rights movement in world, yet the U.S. was simultaneously a forerunner in the construction of the carceral state (2006: 165). These two factors are linked. Gottschalk (2006) offers one of the most comprehensive explanations for why the American carceral state did not encounter a more unified opposition, a question closely tied to explanations for why prison activism has a complicated, un-unified history with few successes.

To Gottschalk, the term ‘prisoner rights movement’ refers to a broad range of moral, political-economic, judicial, legislative, and cultural activities and institutions (2006: 165–196). Key to her thesis is that strong, well-organized activism inside prisons, particularly inmates’ alignment with the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers, and other New Left organizations, exposed the deep racism in American culture with which few outsiders would align themselves, particularly as their activism included strikes, uprisings, and calls for revolution. (Even the NAACP chose to focus more on affirmative action in schools and the workplace during this period, rather than on prison reform.) Some of these activists became household names, such as Malcolm X, George Jackson, and Angela Davis. In turn this activism created a strident ‘law and order’ backlash from conservative hard-liners, fed as well by the successes of victims’ rights movements that perhaps unwittingly facilitated the more punitive turn in corrections and caging we see today.

Within this context the prisoner rights movement – if we can call it that – evolved as diffuse and frayed efforts, with agendas, tactics, and philosophies varying greatly from place to place and across many scales of activist organizing. Today, groups at various civic scales focus on a broad range of issues, from working to improve the conditions of confinement within prisons to abolishing prisons altogether. Agendas range from calling for sentencing reform and an end to mandatory sentencing; providing resources for legal representation; opposition to the death penalty; assistance to families of the incarcerated; self-help, vocational training, and education; religious rights of prisoners; and recidivism and re-entry. A number of national-scale organizations address prisoner issues, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Restorative Justice, and the Sentencing Project; as do regional and state organizations such as Decarcerate PA and California’s Mothers Reclaiming Our Children; as well as those more local and/or devoted to the rights of individual inmates such as Mumia Abu-Jamal’s *Live from Death Row*. This short list does not begin to capture the vast number of organizations and coalitions active today – from grassroots and community-based groups to the more mainstream and institutionalized; from those based on prisoner organizing on the inside to those at work on the outside; and from scholarly and academic organizations to those based within the corrections industry itself.

Within this landscape are many organizations that have aspired to improve and reform conditions on the inside. To the extent that prisoner rights groups have attempted to effect tangible improvements of caging policies and practices over the past several decades – specifically those to do with the degrading practices of solitary confinement and permanent lockdown – they have done so mostly by bringing court action based on constitutional or civil rights of inmates, typically based on violations of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom from cruel and unusual punishment. But these have had negligible success rate in the courts (ACLU 2013). Activists have to some extent begun to influence those within the industry though, such as the National Institute of Corrections, prison architects and planners, as well as various guard

unions. Such entities recognize, among other things, that dehumanizing caging practices put staff at considerable risk, as well as create further instability among persons returning to life on the outside (Morton 2008; Raemisch 2014).

Turning to the zoo, the more recent transformations of its purpose and culture is a subset of the many changes in animal treatment, care, and use brought about most recently within the 'modern' animal rights movement, begun in the 1970s U.S. alongside other mid-century social movements. The idea that animals have intrinsic rights and/or selfhood resonated with these other movements (Jamieson 1985; Nibert 2002). The 1970s were also a decade within which animal suffering was witnessed on a new and grand scale (Finsen and Finsen 1994: 5–54). Animals became a much bigger part of medical and scientific research, and animal use in industrial agribusiness rose dramatically in the postwar period. With these as impetus, a virtual explosion of animal rights organizations arose in the 1980s U.S., with hundreds of organizations springing up at the local, regional, and national scales.

Perhaps unlike in other institutions within which animals are held captive and used as human resources (the farm, the research lab), transformations within zoos owed primarily to the ostensible 'voluntary' improvements made by the zoo industry in response to outside pressures from animal rights activists (Donahue and Trump 2006: 6; Braverman 2013). Zoos existed within the larger paradigm shift to animal rights and animal welfare, and in order to maintain (or establish) credibility, zoo keeping itself became professionally managed, with evolving cultural values, standards, and missions.

During the Progressive Era zoos were basically unregulated; zoo jobs were patronage jobs, and any improvements stemmed from pressure from local conservation or animal welfare groups. Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, college-educated, conservation-minded biologists and zoologists began to take on roles as zoo managers (Donahue and Trump 2006: 8), and the professional organization, the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA; later AZA, Association of Zoos and Aquariums), codified in 1972 as a separate organization. Subsequent changes to the organization co-emerged with the national animal welfare and rights groups which directly challenged zoo practices: the Animal Welfare Institute and the Society for Animal Protective Legislation among them.

As Donahue and Trump describe it (2006: 9), "despite their commitment to protecting wild animals, these professionals became formidable opponents" of animal rights activists and fought many political battles to continue operating zoos (also see Chrulew 2010: 195). Owing to outside pressures, the AAZPA was forced to clarify and (re)define its mission, eventually adopting those of conservation, education, and breeding vulnerable species. But lacking a singular purpose – and indeed attempting to sustain their conflicting and competing recreational, commercial, educational, and species preservation purposes – the industry also hired professional lobbyists to help align zoos with various conservation and animal protection groups. Faced moreover with congressional support for the federal regulation of zoos, the newly established professional network

worked hard to ensure that “new laws provide zoos with a limited right to take protected animals from the wild, while at the same time acknowledging the independent regulatory capacity of accredited zoos” (Donahue and Trump 2006: 10–11, 37). In essence, zoos became and remain self-regulating institutions, subject to industry standards they themselves establish.

As Braverman (2011) explains, though, zoos are almost “extralegal creatures” regulated through myriad variances and exceptions. Owing to the powerful status of the AZA and “almost-monopoly” over relevant knowledge, zoo animals remain largely outside the provisions of official law (2011: 1703). As a result of “the physical and cultural nature of zoos on the one hand, and the long history of political battles between the zoo industry and animal rights groups on the other,” a complex and eclectic mix of international, federal, state, and local agencies and codes regulate various aspects of zoo operations, but none address the zoo as a whole or the particular needs of most animals (Braverman 2011: 1694). Some only contain standards and care of warm-blooded animals; or of endangered species; or of particular kinds of animal breeding practices; or of only non-federally licensed operations; or have oversight only of building codes or of animals as property; and so on (Braverman 2011: 1689–1702). Indeed, most regulations governing zoo buildings are primarily aimed at protecting human accessibility and safety (Braverman 2011: 1700–1702; see note 2).

Thus the regulation regime of zoos, to the extent that one exists and influences practices, owes to a complex (though limited) bundle of self-regulating codes as well as various legal statutes at various scales. These in turn owe largely to much more widespread cultural pressures, including the more philosophical and ethical arguments that have led to reform of zoo caging practices as well as the abolitionist movement.

### **The critical nexus of human and animal geographies**

Evidence suggests that the relative oppression and disenfranchisement of caged animals and prison inmates are closely linked, based on a range of policies, practices, and experiences. Since the 1970s in particular many scholars and activists have linked the structural and ideological similarities of racism, sexism, and speciesism (Nibert 2002; Francione 2008). As Watts categorically asserts, “[t]he zoo is a prison – a space of confinement and a site of enforced marginalization like the penitentiary or the concentration camp” (2000: 292). Many parallels and tensions can also be noted between the ‘reformers’ versus the ‘abolitionists’ with respect to both institutions: those who advocate for improving zoo conditions to those who wish to abolish them; and those who advocate for improved conditions of confinement within prisons to those who go beyond a discussion of civil or constitutional “rights” of prisoners to argue for the wholesale abolition of the prison industrial complex (Gilmore 2007).

At first glance it seems important to recognize the relative successes of animal rights activists in transforming the zoo compared to the relative ineffectiveness of prisoner rights activists to effect change in methods of incarceration. The zoo

industry radically changed its mission, ideologies, and day-to-day practices owing fundamentally to animal rights activists whose strategies of evidence collection, public education, and savvy use of the media brought animal abuse issues to the forefront (Chrulew 2010). One of their key strategies was in publicizing to mainstream public audiences the horrors occurring in the secreted spaces of the animal cage. Lobbying efforts and notable legislative and judicial changes followed, and when they did not, organizations relied on protest and direct pressure to draw attention to animal abuses, including in zoos (Donahue and Trump 2006).

The potential impact of public intellectuals and journalists who have recently taken the same approach with respect to prison abuses cannot be overstated. Within the context of intensified use of control units, solitary confinement, and lockdown, and all their associated 'sort' response teams, heavy shackles, and myriad and severe daily restrictions that have become the norm, prisoners themselves have few options to mobilize, and those they do have carry enormous risks (Morin 2013). Thus some of the tactics and strategies successful with animal rights seem essential to shifting the grounds of the debate – that is, for advocates to bring issues directly to the public since legislative bodies and the courts have been unresponsive. Activists' attention to the questionable ethics of solitary confinement is beginning to make notable difference (cf. Gottschalk 2006), effecting change from within corrections that is not unlike the process by which the AZA fought but then eventually acceded to animal activists' pressures (e.g., Raemisch 2014).

Communication with and from inmates is essential in this process. One of the greatest misconceptions about prisons today is that the 'animalistic' behavior that occurs within their walls solely originates in the individual; that criminals are locked up because they are bad, deviant, or unfortunate people, driven to crime and trouble from some indelible social or psychological cause, and that their criminal nature will follow them wherever they go. Legislators, judges, educators, and journalists, as well as much of the public, are just beginning to understand the extent to which prison behavior and violence is a product of the carceral system, not an explanation for its need.

In many ways, though, the jurisdictional and regulatory regimes across types and scales of prisons are similar to what Braverman (2011) argues about the 'extralegal' nature of zoos and their self-regulation. While prisons reside within the American legal system and thus their practices are an instrument of it, super-maximum prison conditions also manifest features of a lawless, 'camp-like' space, exempt from outside scrutiny with inmate treatment typically beyond the scope of the law (Rhodes 2009; Agamben 1998). Prison administrators have been all too successful at making their own rules and keeping secret what happens on the inside. This, combined with the powerful influence of prison bureaucracies at every level, and community leaders with vested economic interests in keeping 'the machine' going, profoundly complicates the ability to make strident advances in prisoner treatment.

Acampora (2006: 109) meanwhile, citing the works of philosopher Heini Hediger, observes that there is a deep similarity between the professionalizing



“loving sight” (Acampora 2006: 114). Ultimately, comparing the relative histories, practices, and biopolitics of the cage as a disciplinary geographical space offers us crucial insights to understand and then move stridently forward in challenging the abusive conditions that span species boundaries.

## Notes

- 1 Other post-zoo models, beyond the scope of this chapter, call for an end to animal captivity altogether, in, for instance, the ‘Zoöpolis’ (Wolch 1998).
- 2 Nonetheless and quite obviously, the animals at T&D’s remain enclosed and captive. Moreover, the facility is essentially self-regulating: while it is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Game Commission, it is not accredited by the AZA – which, to its owners, would only mean a great deal of retrofitting for human visitors. While this particular sanctuary appears on the path towards zoo abolition, perhaps any number of animal abuses could occur at similar such facilities.

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