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Returning to Wild? Four lions' journey from circus to "sanctuary"

Four lions — Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy — have been subjected to dramatic changes as a result of a shifting political landscape. Each experienced a life of performance in a travelling French circus until authorities seized them in Belgium after the country enacted a ban on use of wild animals in circuses in 2014. The lions then spent almost two years in temporary rescue in Belgium awaiting transport to a permanent home at a UK zoo. These lions as individuals and their movement from circus to "sanctuary," with a conception that they are being returned to a more "wild life," are the subject of this multi-species, multi-sited ethnography. The temporary rescue context is considered in terms of animal viewing, lion-human interactions, and particular physical spaces of captivity, while findings in circus and zoo sites serve as comparison and contrast.

Introduction. The Minister for Animal Welfare in Belgium initiated a bill to end the use of wild animals in circus performances, which became law in 2014. While Cirque Exotique, a French travelling circus, performed in Belgium that same year, police delivered a warning to the circus owner either to leave the country or relinquish their four lion (*Panthera leo*) performers, Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy. A few months later police seized the circus-born lions and delivered them to the non-profit, Belgian Rescue. This was a temporary solution, as the rescue center searched for a permanent home for the four lions. After almost two years at Belgian Rescue, the lions were transferred to permanent captivity at a UK zoo that had been successful in rehabilitating other animals who had once been circus performers.

Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy have moved biopolitically. Activism and advocacy for "wild" circus animals resulted in their re-categorization, to save them from commodifying, objectifying circus life and to restore them to "wild life." Each place of captivity expresses its own collective biopolitics, and this paper begins to consider individual lion experiences within particular kinds of viewing or spectatorship and spaces provided for living. I focus on the lions' immediate and temporary rescue in Belgium, while also bringing to bear my research on circus and zoo sites for comparison and contrast.

I explore whether these circus-born lions, habituated to the confines and expectations of circus life, can return to the category of “wild” while they still live in captivity. Existing bans on use of wild animals in circuses and bans enacted in the future will result in an increasing number of animals needing permanent homes in captivity; the four lions’ journey will highlight issues arising from their movement from circus to sanctuary that need to be considered at the governmental level at which bans are enforced. Hribal notes an African proverb, “until the lion has his [or her] historian, the hunter will always be hero” (29), and so this research begins to tell the life stories of Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, moving beyond cultural symbolism and lively commodity, thus “following the life” (Marcus). The study provides advocacy through narrative, giving voice and presence to Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, bearing witness to their lives to counter objectifying spectatorship that demands lively commodities.

Skinny appears to have experienced the most difficulty in his transitions from place to place; he exhibited weaker bonds with his three companions, initially in rescue being the last to eat and less integrated into the group. The name Little belies Little’s actual physique, as he has the largest girth of the lions and is most dominant, but still closely bonded with his companions. Little appears to have been castrated later than Skinny, Sid, and Sammy, seen in circus performance with a full mane. Sid and Sammy gained the name The Twins in rescue because of difficulties telling them apart, due to similar physical appearances and their constant presence next to each other. Research at the rescue, circus, and zoo sites of captivity have provided insights into the individual character of each lion as well as what they share due to shared bodily forms.



Skinny, Little, Sid and Sammy in a typical lion pile in their final place of captivity. (Photo by Author.)

Methodology. Drawing on methods in multi-sited, multispecies, and sensory ethnography (see Hannerz; Marcus; Kirksey and Helmreich; Pink; Campbell and Lassiter; Madden; and Rock), this pilot study followed the lives of four rescued lions as cultural “things,” or lively commodities, but also “followed the life,” developing the four lions’ life histories. It is located in part within existing research that has focused on wild animal performers (Bell; Bouissac; Nance; Tait, “Trained Performances”; Schwalm; Cataldi; and Carmeli). I focus on the lions’ repositioning from exotic circus performers to “wild” animals in temporary rescue center captivity, also drawing from my ethnographic research in the contexts of their captivity in a circus and final zoo home.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with staff at the rescue center, who had cared for the lions during their temporary stay, and toured center facilities, seeing first-hand the environment within which the big cats found themselves upon initial rescue. I also gained an understanding of the rescue center ethos through interactions with staff. I began to get to know the lions as individuals through several months of close observations at the UK zoo that has become their permanent home. I became a spectator during observations by also attending a keeper talk on the rescued lions, and reviewing online posts about the lions’ rescue. The circus context for the four lions came to life through online video footage I discovered of their performances and display in the Cirque Exotique “zoo.” I also attended animal performances at French circuses, but was unable to locate Cirque Exotique. All places and persons, including the lions, have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

I approach viewing and spectatorship, lion-human interactions, and captive environments through ideas in biopower and phenomenology. I consider how the lions as lively commodities are conceived in the discourse of their immediate rescue, as well as how any continued viewing may constrain or limit understandings of Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy as individuals who are meant to move from performing life, as working animals, to wild life. I look at the ways in which lions and humans come together at the rescue site and how relationships define individual animals, considering Shapiro’s ontological vulnerability (Shapiro, “The Death”); Shapiro traces the loss of the individual animal to the species concept and to a generic idea of “animal.” Equally, I consider how enclosures are configured and how they restrict and enable movement. I employ research findings in circus and zoo contexts for comparison and contrast, and approach key points for exploration, keeping in mind Collard’s understandings of lively commodities and Thierman’s conception of care and harm in biopower. Thierman argues for a view that hones in on “places where other animals come into contact with

human beings, so that we can see how power might be functioning in those concrete instances” (91). This view is enriched by a phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that animate beings, or at least other animals, have a first-person perspective, based on particular sensory worlds (*Phenomenology; The Visible*). Animals share intentionality, agency, and kinetic intelligence, or responsivity (see Sheets-Johnstone). For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological enquiry is descriptive and returns us to a state of direct perception, returning us to “the things themselves” (*Phenomenology* 8). Westling describes how Merleau-Ponty conceives of relationships from this perspective: “Between the human body and the world, ‘there is a relation that is one of embrace’ so that there is ‘not a frontier but a contact surface.’ We are both seeing and seen, touching and touched by the things and creatures about us” (43). This can be considered a non-anthropocentric positioning with potential to lead to attunement with other animals, and equally to their attunement with humans. Phenomenological methods have been used to capture patient experiences and nurse-patient interactions in nursing (see Thomas, for example), a care-giving field arguably with some parallels to animal rescue work.

Shapiro has developed a phenomenological method of attending to other animals that I follow in this study: revealing how other animals are socially/culturally constructed, considering the life histories of individual animals, and approaching other animals through embodied experience or kinaesthetic empathy (“The Human Science”). Shapiro’s kinaesthetic empathy requires an intimate knowledge of individual animals, as well as species-specific behaviors. Thus, in keeping with Shapiro’s positioning, I approached the lions as individuals contained within human social contexts, with particular life histories, and with first-person perspectives that can be grasped, to some extent, through close observation and understandings of lion behavior. I gleaned the latter through familiarity with ethological research and through human informants who had close relationships with the lions. Of course, my interpretations of lion behavior can be challenged. I acknowledge the dangers of anthropomorphism and employ a critical anthropomorphism (Burghardt), or egomorphism, which attempts to lead to insights through personal embodied experience “achieved by *perceiving* characteristics in things rather than, as anthropomorphism implies, *attributing* characteristics to things” (Milton 260). It is possible for other animals to show themselves to observers, and to consider this impossible due to our inevitable human positioning is in itself anthropomorphic and anthropocentric (see Rivas and Burghardt).

Temporary rescue: transience and care. In the early 2000s, Belgian Rescue began emergency rescue of exotic animals, seized from private owners or from zoos and circuses across Europe. The staff have taken care of at least twelve lions over a sixteen-year period, including Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy. However, unlike the governmental support for circuses in France, center staff explained that in Belgium such re-categorizations of animals were not accompanied by significant financial subsidies. Marc, one of the keepers, explained, “The government will confiscate animals that are on a list of exotics that the public is not allowed to keep, and now wild animals from circuses in countries with bans, but they do not provide money to rescue organisations that take the animals.”

Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy move to a new position of captivity within the rescue context. It appears that their value may shift from lively commodity to valued members of a wild species and singular individuals in need of rehabilitation. Collard describes a “decommodification” that occurs with rehabilitation in rescue, although this process is not complete (161). The rescue center work involves some amount of commodification, but as Collard argues, “there is a critical difference in the nature of commodification between being an exotic pet commodity and ... a ‘wilderness’ commodity.” Decommodification will be considered as well as reflections on care and harm within this rescue context in discussions of viewing or spectatorship, lion-human interactions, and physical spaces of captivity.

Animal viewing. Belgian Rescue facilities are located in the midst of wide tracts of forested land and fields. I met Marc, one of two keepers who cared for Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy during their stay, and gained an understanding of the center ethos during the course of conversations with staff. Rescued animals have been placed within the center in the hopes that care provided will move them towards better well-being and return them in some way to “wild life.” For native species this means rehabilitation and release, while for exotic species this means providing them with the space to exhibit species-specific behaviors and choice (a level of autonomy) without significant overt control by humans. The center has grown over the years to rescue all sorts of wildlife and to provide animals with the care required for recovery and reintroduction; an entire wing of their new hospital has been devoted to the rehabilitation of hedgehogs (*Eurinaeus europaeus*).

Belgian Rescue only allows public visits by appointment during the morning and afternoon, except on some public openings on weekends. During my visit, the center received one school group and a few individuals in the morning and afternoon. The

school group created a buzzing energy, as children exclaimed and giggled, engaging with their tour guide, and were excited by the animals, especially the birds of prey and the lions. The center at that time housed two rescued lions, Aslan and Big. When Marc took me through the center, we first encountered the enclosure that housed a two-year old male lion, Aslan, confiscated from a private owner. The owner had bought Aslan as a cub from a circus, keeping him in a very small cage, with indoor and outdoor areas but little space for a growing lion. Marc explained, "Aslan will probably be rehomed in South Africa. This is the center's goal for most rescued lions." Center staff and NGOs assisting with rehoming believe that these lions belong in Africa, their natural "home."

Each enclosure had signage introducing the animal living within it, explaining how they came to be at the center and the poor conditions they endured, or the injury they had sustained if they were indigenous animals, along with species-specific information. The names of the exotic animals appeared at the top of their signage. We entered another section of the center open to visitors and almost immediately came upon another lion, thirteen-year old Big, who had crammed himself inside a large doghouse in his enclosure. He had been rescued from a Croatian zoo that closed due to financial trouble. Staff had hopes of rehoming Big to South Africa also. During my walk around the center to take photographs, I was heading back in the direction of Aslan when I heard Big's penetrating roar. The guttural roaring took over the air and all other sounds at the center. Aslan then began to roar at the other end of the center, just as loudly. This was part of the visitor experience on that day.

Belgian Rescue remained relatively quiet, in contrast to circus spectatorship I had experienced. I could hear the chirping of birds, and the brisk breezes brought with them fresh smells of nearby woodland and fields. Visitation here supports the running of the center, and visitors know that the aim is to release wild animals after rehabilitation, and to rehome exotic animals to sanctuaries or in some cases to zoos or wildlife parks. The animals are transients, although a handful do become permanent residents, and regular visitors may see different animals during each visit, depending upon the duration of the animals' stays. Visitors glimpse a moment in the animals' lives during this transition period back to wild and permanent rescue. Marc also described public participation in the center work: "Members of the public often call about injured wildlife. People will also report exotics that should not be kept." They reflect the care in biopower explained by Thierman. At the same time, individuals may attempt to intervene and provide care that could be detrimental, as in the case of calls to the center regarding fledgling birds who are considered in need of help.

Animal viewing in this rescue context involves learning about individuals in brief, as well as placing these individuals within species categories and conservation. Davis has explored spectatorship at Seaworld and an associated environmental concern that may be felt by spectators; attendance at Seaworld performances can reflect a consumption based on such concern (237). Visitors to Belgian Rescue may experience satisfaction that their visits contribute to the conservation work undertaken there. Signage provides individual profiles in the case of exotic animals, similar to animal sanctuary animalographies, but without any apparent gross anthropomorphism (see Huff and Haefner). Center visitation can feel guilt-free, as it did for me, in contrast to the guilt of attending a circus show, where the focus remained on entertaining the audience through animal performance. Here, animals still in a sense perform for a viewing audience wanting to see them going about their lives “naturally” in recovery; there is a thrill in seeing a kestrel only feet away as she recovers from a wing injury, or hearing a rescued lion roar. Parreñas describes an intimacy experienced by staff and volunteers involved in wildlife rehabilitation, a copresence with individual animals (“The Materiality”). Intimacy may also be felt by visitors to the center, especially if they see, hear, and smell an animal that they had some role in rescuing. They may not touch the animal in rescue, as staff and volunteers might, but they have the opportunity for a close encounter involving other senses, and in which kinaesthetic empathy can develop.

Abrell describes an unease that sanctuary staff may feel in treating the animals under their care as lively commodities through display to gain income (323). However, at Belgian Rescue such encounter value could be seen as less problematic because animals, especially indigenous wildlife, experience visitors for only a short time; those animals who require privacy to recover remain out of the public eye. At the same time, following Collard, exotic animals at the center are “neither fully commodities, nor wild beings” (159; see also Jaclin), and they are not destined for reintroduction. Visitors view wild animals with a captive history in the midst of wild born animals being rehabilitated for wild release; this location for viewing can absorb viewers in a context that covers over individual lion histories in the circus context, without understanding of the attachments and habituations that occurred within it. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy may have been constrained by a rescue narrative that failed to fully reflect on their many years as circus performers and their hybridity of being neither completely wild, nor completely tame or domesticated.

Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy exhibited behavior in their subsequent zoo captivity that showed such habituation, as well as possible stimulation felt in performing. On my last

visit to the zoo in winter, during the lions' second year there, the holiday rides, lights, and music had been set up. As I walked to the lion enclosure, I could still hear 80s rock music and the mechanical sound of the small roller coaster ride. Lights flickered through the trees. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy all paced at the point in their enclosure closest to the noise, brightness, and movement; this was the first time I had witnessed such behavior. Skinny sank to the ground, staying alert, as the others paced around him, later joined by Sammy. I at first interpreted this movement as anxiety, born out of memories of circus life; these sounds and sights certainly brought the experience of attending the circus back to me. The four paid no attention to the group of spectators clustered in front of them, who expressed excitement at the lions' closeness. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy continued to stare beyond us, watching and sniffing the air. During another visit, a keeper described the behavior I had seen somewhat differently to my interpretation: "They love engine sounds and follow machines like diggers around that are moving outside their enclosure. The mechanical sounds from the fair they like, they're interested in them." The lions appeared to gravitate towards the familiar, and also to experience the anticipation they may have felt prior to performance, as they listened to machine sounds, music, and crowds nearby.

In the same breath, focus on restoring some kind of wild life also allowed the lions freedom to engage (or not) with humans at a distance, to interact with each other, and to explore their surroundings without the rigid limitations and prescriptions of circus captivity, a becoming based more on their own choices, yet still within confinement. The constraints and stressors exacted from the lions in performances were revealed in footage of Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy performing in Cirque Exotique. The lion act took place in the midst of other traditional extreme circus acts. Sammy entered the ring first, slinking low, ears back, and looking around furtively, as he gradually made his way to his pedestal, located on the edge of the ring. The Pirates of the Caribbean theme song blasted on speakers, as did the announcer's voice. Lions' vision and hearing are acute, more so than a human's, evolved for hunting (see Haas et al), so we can wonder whether these sights and sounds would overwhelm their senses. Sid entered next and found his place on a pedestal relatively quickly; he consistently moved with more speed and precision than his companions. Skinny and Little ran into the ring together and immediately head rubbed before taking places next to each other; head rubbing and licking in captive lion social groups have social bonding functions, also serving to reduce tensions (Matoba et al). Soon after they had taken their places, a spotlight on the ring illuminated all four of them. The lions yawned often during the act, which could be a sign of anticipation or stimulation (see Baenninger).

The first trick created a small lion pyramid, with Little in the center and on the highest pedestal, flanked by Sid and Sammy. Skinny stayed in his original place, but soon became the focal point for the trick that followed. The trainer directed him to a low platform in the center of the ring, prodding him with a metal bar and whip in the face, which prompted growling and swiping from Skinny. Skinny's entire body seemed tensed, hunched as if in defensive mode even when the prodding had stopped. Once Skinny took his place, Sammy, Sid, and Little began several rounds of jumping over him. The trainer almost continually provoked Skinny during the 15-minute act, and at one point when he tapped Skinny on the head with the metal bar, Skinny flinched, growled, and lashed out with his paws, and would not move quickly to the next trick. The lions had all been declawed, to avoid injury to the trainer.

The final part of the act involved the lions walking across a thin plank secured into two high pedestals. Sammy was directed to lead and he stopped before he began to walk it, but he acquiesced after the trainer yelled loudly; Sammy seemed relatively docile and imprecise with his jumps. Little followed Sammy, without protest. But when Skinny approached, his body language still reflected absorption in defensiveness and fight, back hunched, head low, ears flush against his head, and eyes constantly on the trainer, as he growled and almost refused to submit to the trick. Sid also showed some resistance, growling in the direction of the trainer, as all four lions lay along the plank, one after another. Skinny began to bite Little's back vigorously as they lay there, and Sid bit Skinny's, but the trainer stepped in with yells and whip movements to discourage them. Sammy, Little, Skinny, and Sid, in that order, returned to the ground and then raised themselves onto hind legs, gripping the plank with their front legs. They stood bipedal for several minutes as the crowd clapped and music swelled. Here we glimpse the lions as working animals, their function specific, to entertain as at once anthropomorphized and thrilling exotic creatures, while in the rescue context they are asked to do what is considered natural for their species, other than being allowed to express predatory behavior through catching prey, and what they individually choose to do without such overt direction.

Lion-human interactions. Marc launched into the following description of the differences between Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy when I asked him how well he knew the four lions, but he did not refer to them by name:

It was difficult to tell two of the lions apart [Sid and Sammy], but two were easy, the dominant male [Little] and the one outside of the three [Skinny]. The biggest lion was the most dominant, but they all had larger

body size than other lions that had come through the centre before. We think this is because the lions were castrated and so they don't have manes.

Marc explained that he and another keeper looked after the lions. Jackson has highlighted lion behavior that may get in the way of knowing individuals in shorter spaces of time:

lions spend 80 per cent of their time doing next to nothing. A lion is an overstuffed armchair, a stalled car, a rock. With his eyes half closed he stares into the distance, thinking lion thoughts, dreaming lion dreams. Flies buzz. A single cloud shaped like a croissant drifts across the sky. There is not an awful lot for a researcher to report. (33)

Relationships among keepers, volunteers, and rescued animals are often short-term, as previously noted. Recent migration studies have focused on transience and what this means for human migrant relationships with people and places (see Gomes et al). Transient migration is defined as “a specific migrant modality that is characterized by temporariness, transitoriness, impermanence, ephemerality, mutability and volatility” (Yeoh 143), in which migrants must face “serious issues of poor or non-existent assimilation, marginalization and acculturation” (Gomes et al 7). We can see some parallels when considering the lions’ position within the rescue center. The animals do become known as individuals to some degree, in order for staff to provide adequate care, while at the same time staff understand this as a moment of care, albeit a crucial moment; attachments and knowing are short-lived. Success comes in releasing the indigenous animal, or “good” rehoming of the exotic animal, rather than holding onto relationships and maintaining them; in fact, this would be considered problematic in the context of this rescue center.

Marc began to discuss how the lions reacted to human presence in the rescue context, and what he knew about Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy in the circus context:

The lions seemed relaxed in our presence, but whenever they saw something that resembled a stick, they became nervous; there is a video of [our] director raising a stick towards the lions. The stick also bangs against the side of the enclosure and the lions reacted with fear when before this they were perfectly relaxed. We don't know much about their life in the circus but we know that they are afraid of the stick.

Marc then mentioned the circus owner referred to the lions as his children, and this was considered extreme and not a perspective to encourage, the reason that educational programs at the center discourage ownership of such exotic animals.

Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy spent the first six years of their lives as performers. Jaclin presents the idea of “beastness” to refer to animals as capital, with focus on “exotic” animals as pets (260). He explains that these pets’ hybrid nature is “not wild anymore, but neither quite domesticated” (257), and this is the position of Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, born into circus life and raised by humans in this context. They must have performed hundreds of times, retaining memory of training for stages of the acts in order to perform them. Skinny, who experienced the most provocation during the circus act as seen in video footage, would know what to expect from his trainer, that the provocation would end, as it did in every act. At the same time, he may have felt significant irritation and/or threat each time the whip came close to his face. Little, Sid, and Sammy appeared somewhat detached from the act, going through the motions, but they had to remain alert and attuned to the trainer’s cues as they moved from one trick to another. Cirque Exotique training seemed outwardly to rely on negative reinforcement by whip and stick, with no meat rewards in sight. Punishment may have also been used, if we return to Marc’s comments about the lions’ apparent reaction of fear of brandished sticks. The declawing and castrating of the lions reflected the circus owners’ need to reshape lion bodies for performance, creating docile bodies.

Rescue center staff member Ben recounted an interview with the owner of Cirque Exotique that had taken place after the lions’ seizure. The owner explained that his son, the trainer, had raised the lions, bottle-feeding them as cubs, and felt devastated. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy were considered part of the circus family. During the interview, the circus owner explained that a lion will cost 3000 euros, and a trained tamed lion double that, so the circus would experience financial loss and also a drop in attendance. This problem, he had said, meant nothing in comparison to losing their children. This account is accurate, matching descriptions in news articles about the confiscation. The owner uses anthropomorphizing language and expresses a closeness to the lions that transforms them into beloved companions, in contrast to the narrative of conflict and dominion that was presented in circus spectacle. The lions, the owner, and his son must have experienced an intimate relationship based on physical closeness and observations, especially when the lions were cubs.

The moment we approached Aslan's enclosure, Marc said his name and Aslan began pawing at a large ball nearby, and then played with it vigorously, batting it about in front of us. Marc pointed to a large beat-up tire lying on its side in one corner of the enclosure and explained, "Aslan likes playing with that too, he tries rolling it but it's really heavy so he doesn't always manage it but he keeps trying." Aslan had a full golden mane and massive paws. He seemed indifferent to my presence then, but later, when I stopped at his enclosure on my own, Aslan eyed me with great intensity and leapt in my direction. In response, my heart leapt as I thought of myself as prey. Then he sank into the grass, totally relaxed, and as I spoke to him, his eyes would close and open slowly, in what appeared to be contentment (an expression I have seen on my domestic cat companions' faces).

Marc had spoken to Big as well, trying to convince him to extract himself as we stood in front of his dog house, but Big merely opened and closed his eyes, remaining inside. A relationship based on kinaesthetic empathy appeared to exist between Marc and Aslan, as a young lion who clearly engaged with this keeper, responding to his voice and failing to exhibit the indifference lions have been said to express when habituated to humans (Jackson 27). Hosey and Claxton consider that zoo captivity and keeper-other animal interactions can possibly be enriching, depending upon an individual animal's life experiences and species-specific behaviors. Keepers did need to observe and interact with the lions to gauge their health, and daily coerced them into a small cage with meat when they needed to clean the larger enclosure, for example. They required docile bodies at times to adhere to daily feeding and cleaning schedules. This is a more subtle lion-human interaction than what I witnessed in the circus, where direct contact between lion and trainer occurred, and trainers needed more precise control. Direct contact does not occur in the rescue setting, as the lions move into the "wild" category and this wildness would only be endangered by and endangering with such interactions.

Even so, intimacy develops because rescue remains about saving specific individuals (see Aitken). We can return to Parreñas's conception of copresence, which aligns to some degree with Shapiro's kinaesthetic empathy ("Materiality"). Volunteers I observed feeding young hedgehogs with syringes exhibited a tenderness, care for their wellbeing, kinaesthetic empathy developing through close observation, and actual physical closeness. They are invested in these little lives, and as Parreñas explains, "copresence resulting from the act of individuals caring for individual animals produces forms of knowledge and feeling that are impossible to mediate through sight and sound alone" (99). Thomas's review of phenomenology in nursing notes the

“dialogue” that can develop between nurse and patient, relevant here if we consider dialogue in the case of rescue staff and other animals as copresence, and she quotes Merleau-Ponty: “in the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground. My thought and his [sic] are interwoven into a single fabric ... the other for me is no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his [sic]; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity” (72). Parreñas notes that “affect is produced between bodies” (“Producing Affect” 682), and closeness matters; we cannot deny that the circus family and lions may have also experienced copresence during bottle-feeding, for instance. At the same time, volunteer experiences with wildlife can become commodified or packaged, often brief encounters, so that animals still may retain lively commodity status, as Collard has argued; the experience in some cases can be about the satisfaction and excitement volunteers feel when close to wild animals, but we can identify clear inter-species benefits occurring in the Belgian Rescue context with successful release.

Center staff recognized and aimed to preserve the closeness between Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy after their arrival. Marc explained that, “We will normally rehome lions to South Africa, but in this case it was impossible because there were four and we did not want to separate them.” Marc continued to describe relationships:

At first when the lions arrived, it was one separate and three together. Three lions would eat and then the fourth would eat. The fourth lion was a problem to put away because he was not as bonded to the other three. Meat would entice the fourth lion into the holding cage. But this began to change over 3-4 months after they had arrived at the centre and the lions seemed to be more comfortable together.

Free-roaming male lions will form strong and life-long male-male coalitions, often with brothers or cousins (Jackson 39). In the circus context and in rescue, Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, who came from two separate litters, were allowed to remain in a coalition group.

At Belgian Rescue, the lions’ contact with each other increased, as beast wagon cages no longer separated them. This interaction continued in larger space in the zoo rescue context. I came to know the four lions in some small way after months of observations at the zoo and to recognize the physical differences between them. Often when I visited, the boys were in one pile of lions in the middle of their enclosure, similar to Jackson’s description (33). During a visit in Autumn, I witnessed a sustained episode of play. It

was a crisp day moving into winter, with blue skies for miles and brilliant sunshine. Skinny rose from his place on the rock formation to scuffle with one of the twins (due to the distance, I was unable to tell Sid from Sammy). Skinny began to roar, a guttural crescendo that consistently enralls me; roaring penetrates deeply, likened to a baby's crying in its rough sound quality and ability to grab human attention (Zielinski). As his roar began to diminish to low panting grunts, Sid or Sammy responded with a roar, and they replied to each other three times in succession. (While Tait notes that in performance roaring can signify boredom [Wild and Dangerous 39], research has shown the importance of communal roaring in solidifying bonds between individuals, or to enhance an individual lion's presence as dominant [Schaller; Stander and Stander].) Skinny then leapt onto the nearest tree trunk and hugged it between his front paws, sliding down and then running off in a rolling gallop. His companion stayed there to rough up the tree, but soon followed Skinny. Skinny had found a ball and lolled about on the grass trying to balance it on top of his paws, while Sid or Sammy joined him to stick big paws through a car tyre. The other twin ambled down from his platform perch to join his brother and Skinny on the grass. Little slept at the bottom of the rock outcrop. This play with Skinny at the center of it reflected a freedom to make choices and a lack of any stereotypical behavior.

Physical spaces of captivity. Belgian Rescue enclosures were meant to suit particular animals, in terms of size and characteristics. Paul, one of the keepers, explained the complications associated with rescuing a mix of native and non-native wild animals:

New regulations have meant that exotic animals must be kept in quarantine for a period of time and then in certain parts of the centre, in certain enclosures, to stop possible spread of diseases. Once through quarantine, exotics go to their designated enclosures, but if these enclosures are not filled with exotics, they remain empty, because we can't put indigenous wildlife in there.

Marc took me to the enclosure that Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy had inhabited for almost a year and a half, while the UK zoo raised funds to build their permanent enclosure. It now held three snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*), taken from a zoo in Eastern Europe that closed due to financial reasons. One female came up to us, as close as she could, and began to make chirping noises, to which Marc and I both responded with verbal greetings. I looked around the main enclosure, measuring fourteen by twelve meters, and imagined the lions in it. It had a cave-like section at the back, under the platform. The enclosure was designed so that animals within it would have a place to

retreat, away from close proximity to passing visitors. At the front to the left, I spotted another smaller enclosure attached to the larger one, where the lions would be herded during cleaning and feeding. A human-made pond featured in the center of the main enclosure. It seemed quite natural, in part because of the smells and sounds from wooded areas nearby.

Marc and Paul described the lions living in cramped beast wagons and conditions where they performed at the end of a stick, so the situation here seemed an improvement in terms of the space the lions inhabited all day and the lack of stress from performing. Online footage of Cirque Exotique filmed by a spectator reveals a glimpse of the caged circus “zoo” spaces, a circular enclosure or run in grass, eight to nine meters across, where the four lions interacted directly with each other. In the footage, the lions sleep beside each other, and only Little gets to his feet to walk a short distance from the group to urinate. Pan shots of the circus grounds also showed beast wagons and footage of Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy pacing in these small cages; rescue center staff acquired photographs of the lions in one of these trailers. This element of the circus complex acted upon the lions to reduce them to docile bodies (see Foucault 172-173). Thierman notes that:

Docility is inculcated and perpetuated by a variety of techniques, such as the distribution of individuals in space by enclosure, partitioning, and ranking (e.g. barracks, classrooms, etc), by the control of activity (e.g. with time-tables, training to perform particular gestures, etc) and through various forms of surveillance (e.g. panopticism). (96)

The beast wagon cages appeared as a row of barracks, and animals were trained and prepared for performance pegged to a time-table. The lions had nowhere to retreat so as not to be seen, remaining ever visible to both passersby and circus staff, while part of circus zoo display. But one could say that the lions provided input into their captivity. They dictated the types of enclosures that could suitably hold them, in terms of materials used and structures created, the case at all three sites of captivity, and each lion reacted individually to systems of captivity.

However, performance could be seen as having provided stimulation, perhaps in some ways mimicking stresses of wild life, if we accept Bouissac’s reading of training, where the trainer takes advantage of, or taps into, natural behaviors (there are, of course, contrasting interpretations, for instance Cataldi). The rescue center context, where the lions constantly inhabited the same, small space could provide minimal change and

stimulation, leading to monotony and perhaps boredom, resulting in its own kind of stress. However, Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy failed to express stereotypies while at the center, according to staff; Skinny exhibited the most anxiety initially, but within months he had integrated with his companions. The understanding of temporary rescue had implications in terms of physical spaces provided for animals, and Marc acknowledged that enclosures for the lions were too small for permanent living. He also explained that the center had plans to expand, in order to build larger facilities for predator species, despite their short sojourns. Biosecurity also provided limitations, as exotic animals had to be segregated in certain cages, away from rehabilitating indigenous wildlife.

The lions in zoo rescue inhabit a naturalized two-acre space surrounded by tall electrified fencing and consisting primarily of grassy land with a small section of woodland. The zoo constructed a concrete rocky hill with waterfall and pond, a large wooden platform lookout, and an indoor heated den lined with straw, into which keepers coerce Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy each night; the lions pace every morning in the den, awaiting release into the main, large enclosure. Another fenced area within the main enclosure serves as a holding or transition cage from the den during cleaning. Pacing behavior in this case indicates the lions' desires to enter the large enclosure, and the difficulty keepers experience in "putting them away" at night indicates their desire to remain in a less confined space. We could say that Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy remember their confinement in small spaces in the circus and now reject it after experiences of a much greater expanse.

Braverman describes zoos as theme parks, catering to consumerism and thus ensuring that animals within them are lively commodities for spectatorship, rather than singular individuals, similar to their place in the circus narrative (242; see also Malamud; Jamieson). A critic posted on the zoo social media page to argue that the lions had traded one life as spectacle for an equally abhorrent life as spectacle in the zoo rescue context, after their brief and partial de-commodification at the rescue center. Zoo staff pushed back against this negative comment to ask where the lions would go, if not to the zoo, since they could not be released in Africa. Mason describes captivity as "a haven for some species but more prison-like for others" (713), and in this case a potential haven for particular individual lions, based on their past experiences of captivity.

Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, knowing limited spaces and highly controlled interactions with trainers in the circus context, have a different experience of rescue

center and zoo life than lions who were born into zoo captivity. Skinny, for example, as the seemingly more reactive and provoked of the four lions in the circus, may continue to experience anxiety with change and even in different situations that arise and limitations day to day. Personality research has moved into the foreground in zoo studies; it is now considered meaningful for the welfare of zoo animals (Tetley and O'Hara; Watters and Powell). Recent studies of subjective well-being in lions (Gartner et al; Dunston et al), with trait-mapping over time and considerations of individual idiosyncrasy, may enrich our interpretations of lion experiences in permanent captive environments.

Conclusion. Biopower, considering the lions as lively commodities, manifested uniquely in rescue center captivity. Each captive context has shaped Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, leading to different individual becomings, and equally each lion has shaped these contexts to some extent. Viewing or spectatorship at each site imposed constraints on perceptions of the lions. The rescue center presented a narrative of wildness, or returning to the wild, that could cover over individual lion experience of the tame and taming circus life. At the same time, visitors had the opportunity to imagine or see the lions as individuals, so that viewing would not evoke the same reaction in everyone. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy were there to be sensed, their first-person perspectives there for interpretation, even in short spaces of time. Lion-human interactions and relationships exhibited similar complexity. In the specific foregrounded rescue context explored, the species focus of conservation and the transitory nature of exotic animal emplacement could result in keepers failing to get to know individuals. However, Marc most likely spoke softly to Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy, just as he spoke to Aslan and Big, creating intimacy as he related to them as individuals. Individual animals also knew and responded to him.

The rescue center provided a larger and more varied space than circus captivity, with enrichment, fewer regimented movements from one space to the next, and a lack of noisy circus performance spectatorship. Yet, as temporary rescue, the still small enclosure size due to a transitory stay remained part of a transitional location that the lions began to settle into, but were then moved away from in rescue. The two-acre zoo enclosure affords each lion space to run, play, and choose different environments for activities. All four of the lions have exhibited a preference for spending their time in the large enclosure. Their large enclosure, however, comes with the simplifications of naturalized zoo enclosures and potential stresses of zoo spectatorship and attractions, still far from the life of free-roaming lions in their indigenous contexts. It is still captivity, requiring human control over animal bodies, restricting movement to the two

acres within electrified fencing. Even so, for Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy this positioning may provide for satisfying movement and choice after their experiences of circus captivity; we can consider a distinction described by Fischer in relation to characters in a play who “are written by the playwright” and a person who “in contrast, writes herself into the drama of life” (62), where in zoo captivity the lions escape being “written” to the degree that they were in circus captivity.

Madden, mirroring Shapiro, argues that, “It is in the interdisciplinary zone between ethnography, ethnology, philosophy, biology, psychology, zoology, and other allied approaches that we might find an appropriate script, an anthrozoography, that can create qualitatively rich and trustworthy accounts of naturecultures and the relations between humans and animals” (290). This project has been guided by understandings in biopower and phenomenology, which takes into account ethological research. The study focused on particular locations, following Thierman, rather than on higher level biopolitics; exploration of legal and funding landscapes around rescued exotic animals is needed, for instance to address absence of governmental support for care of animals seized as a result of newly enforced bans on wild animals in circuses. Continuing traditions of animal performance in circuses also warrant consideration to understand their persistence and the lived experiences of individual animals. Skinny, Little, Sid, and Sammy equally deserve further attention to bring their first-person perspectives to life in greater detail as they continue to inhabit permanent captivity.

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