



DISCORDANT M O O S E

Alces alces absonus

In an era of ubiquitous digital imaging technology and near real-time information transfer, for many, mental models of North American charismatic fauna are largely shaped by photographs on the Internet. This has produced countless new species native only to the image-conscious minds of ecotourists. But what of the image-unconscious? What about the negative space between digital and material, the scrap heap of irrelevant or dissonant information we choose not to see? One's trash is another's treasure: much grows in the fertile waste of human endeavor. With this collage of found imagery, I seek to explore the radical possibilities for complex life arising in the interstitial world between digital and material.

←

Discordant Moose, Edmund B. Molder,
Materials

Consider the Moose (*Alces alces*). Would-be visitors to the U.S. National Park called Yellowstone, situated in the ancestral land of the Crow, Cheyenne, and Shoshone tribes, might have read about the large ungulate or viewed crisp images of a Moose professionally photographed for the park website. Already, we see the germs of a mental Moose fabricated from Internet info-extract.

The Internet is a capitalist and colonialist apparatus that further produces what is deemed to be natural through processes of erasure. Echoing the forces that created Yellowstone and other U.S. National Parks, these erasures online winnow away all sub-optimal, if more diverse, moose content to produce a monoculture of Moose pictures, indistinguishable in composition, lighting, resolution, and color palette (*Alces alces alces alces alces...*). Do an image search for “Moose” to sample this digital ecology.

Primed by such a digital diet, then, our would-be Yellowstone visitors are primed for disappointment. The reality of designated “natural areas”—complete

with mineral leases, rampant wildfire, and genocide of Indigenous peoples—is hard to package for easy Web consumption. And so, when camera-ready tourists spot *Alces alces* in Yellowstone, how could this animal live up to the idealized photo-Moose of the Internet imaginary? Traffic jams or pedestrian barriers are common, yet seldom photographed, cohabitants of *Alces alces* in National Parks. Encountering a Moose in such spaces—perhaps from a distance, through an insect-splattered windshield—is thus uncanny. From this fertile dissonance between digital and material, our feral ungulate *Alces alces absonus* gracefully ambles. With this collage, I aim to intervene in the neoliberal capitalist apparatus that works to separate us as ‘individuals’ and establish the dissonant ontological space *between* material and digital as a territory unto itself. The moose represents one resident of this territory and serves as a reminder of its potential for reconfiguring boundaries and cultivating creativity and connection that resists capitalist logics.

Compositionally, *Alces alces absonus* (or the Discordant Moose) are an assemblage of digital cultural artifacts. They are the condensed visual exhaust of an online society colliding with the material realities of 21st Century American wildlife areas. They are opportunists who browse among—and are constituted by—the by-products of a digitally (re-)configured

wilderness. They reside in the collective unconscious of eco-managerialism, the deep end of the swimming pool in which human ingenuity bobs like a shiny toy boat. The Discordant Moose find refuge in the mental gymnastics of Nature rhetoric and all that it attempts to obscure (Unspoiled! Untouched! Pristine! Sublime!). For, with each technological growth spurt, we leave loose ends in the messy string ball we call That-Which-Is-Not-Us. This is the bountiful domain of the Discordant Moose and their kin.

Edmund B. Molder

PhD Student, Nelson Institute for
Environmental Studies,
University of Wisconsin-Madison
—Madison, Wisconsin, USA