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AMONG ANIMALS

BY AMISH MORRELL

It is unusual for me to be editing this issue at my desk in Toronto. Usually in mid-August I am on Cape Breton Island, where I find myself about five times a year. One of my favorite pastimes when I am there is to go on long walks at all times of day or on clear nights. During my solitary excursions, I rarely meet another human. But I run into many other kinds of animals. When travelling along the uninhabited highland plateau that covers the northern part of the island, I pick up well-worn moose trails that allow me to travel greater distances more quickly. In following one of these paths, I am acutely aware that other animals are also following the same path—ahead of me, or behind me—and that, one day, we will encounter one another. We are never far apart: sometimes there is a particular odour, like an invisible line that crosses the trail. Most palpable at night, when one's sense of smell is heightened, this odour is the particularly sweaty horse-like scent of a moose, or the unmistakably dank odour of a bear. And sometimes I do catch up to these animals while on these paths, or they catch my scent and I hear them thunder off through the trees. Knowing that these animals are more frightened of me than I am of them, I often wonder if I am the first human they've ever encountered. Since I am greatly outnumbered by animals here, such encounters pose a reversal of how most humans understand their relationship to animals. If the animal is "Other"—what people most fear running into when they are out walking in the woods—for the animals, I am "Other"—what they most fear when they are roaming about in the forest after dark.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of exhibitions featuring animals, including *Becoming Animal* (2005–2006) at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts; *Animal House* (2009) at SAW Gallery in Ottawa; *Natural History* at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in Toronto

(Spring 2010); and most recently, *Adaptation: Between Species* (Summer 2010) at the Power Plant in Toronto. Similarly, 20th-century philosophers from Jacques Derrida to Donna Haraway have taken up the idea of the animal in their work. Discussions of animals in contemporary art and culture, however, have often focused on animal *representations*, rather than on animal *relations*. Indeed, images and non-visual representations of animals structure our understanding of them to an enormous degree. This is an issue that Werner Herzog probed eloquently in *Grizzly Man*, his 2005 documentary about Timothy Treadwell, who spent much of his life defending the grizzly and brown bears of southern Alaska. Tragically, it was Treadwell who needed protection, not the bears, as he was eaten by one of the grizzlies he sought to "save." While this issue of *C Magazine* takes up how representations shape our understanding of animals to a certain extent, it deals more directly with the relationships that form between humans and other animal species and how artists engage with and represent these bonds.

Each writer in this issue explores this problem in a different way. However, ultimately, they all share an ethical concern about the nature of human/non-human animal relationships. Art historian Carla Benzan revisits a number of works by Carolee Schneemann, looking at the intersection of gazes between Schneemann and her cats, and asking what an ethical position might look like when it involves a point of view that we cannot know. Philosopher Karen Houle examines certain historically entrenched impulses within contemporary culture, philosophy and contemporary art that shape how we think about animals. Through practices that explicitly attempt to de-centre the human, she develops a model of "infinite, indifferent kinship" based not only on the relationships between human and non-human animals, but also on the ones between other animals. Curator and writer Helena Reckitt also explores inter-

species relationships in her essay, "Touching Animals," making the case for complex interspecies interdependencies that are both biological and affective. In a similar vein, Jon Davies writes about Mike White's 2007 film, *Year of the Dog*, which depicts the relationship between Peggy (played by Molly Shannon) and her dog, Pencil. Davies investigates how the film explores a model for non-heterosexual intimacy and radical politics.

This issue also includes an artist project by Canadian artist Bill Burns: *Bird Radio for Afghanistan* (2010). Burns' centrefold piece includes depictions of a number of homemade birdcalls that make the calls of species native to Afghanistan, which are connected to a radio that transmits these sounds. Inside the back cover, there is a key linking the devices that appear in the centrefold to each of the different bird species. In her essay on Burns' practice, Gentiane Bélanger describes his work as enacting a "polymorphous institutional mimicry" that critiques the complex, mediated relationships that we have with nature, connecting discourses of democracy, war and environmental preservation.

As the theme for an issue, "Animals" poses a particular problem. Karen Houle explains that humans are animals. And the philosopher Donna Haraway tells us that humans are made up of other animals, explaining that only about 10 percent of the cells in our bodies contain human genomes; the rest are filled with bacteria, fungi, and other species.¹ For Haraway, the human body is merely *figural*, the place "where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all the force of lived reality."² We share ourselves with many different species. This issue is about how we imagine and represent and experience our relationships with the other species that live around us and within us. ♦

1 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.

2 *Ibid.*, 4.