

Man Versus Nature

If man is part of nature then anything he does is perfectly natural, and all his works and engineering projects - dams and the like - and his trash heaps and pollution and deforestation are different only in degree from ant hills, wasps colonies, and bird's nests or the defoliation produced to vegetation in bird colonies, the accumulation of bat dung in caves, or guano deposits on Pacific islands.

But traditionally man is not part of nature. He regards himself above nature. This point of view goes back to ancient times and is rooted in our Judeo-Christian culture and finds expression in the Old Testament. God created the whole world with everything in it before creating man, which was a special act, the climax of His creative powers.

What do we mean by the Nature of Man? Do we mean "What is man", or do we mean the characters of man that are natural - that, in other words, are consistent with what we consider are the basic characteristics of all living things. Do we mean his characters that define as well all other living things.

Nature and the Artist

Nature surrounds the artist, he is obsessed with it and in his attempt to understand nature is constantly portraying it in paintings or slicing out bits of it in photographs. The artist believes that the understanding of nature is to be found in its beauty, if you will, or complexity and not in its utility. Beauty has acquired an unfortunate sentimental soft overtone, which is not at all what the artist finds so compelling in nature. It is rather the extraordinary complexity and infinite variability in the world around him that inspires the artist. In this respect the artist and the ecologist have much in common. One expresses his inspiration

emotionally in his pictures; the other expresses the same preoccupation intellectually. Art can't exist without emotion and good science with it. A work of art may be attempted on an intellectual basis but emotion creeps in inspite of the artists efforts to keep it out.

Man as a Part of Nature

Emphasis has always been placed on man's ability to control nature, which distinguishes him from all other animals.

This power is greatly exaggerated. He is only able to control a very small environment, and even if his big cities are accepted as controlled environments in them he is only partly successful. Storms still batter them, floods inundate them, and snow sometimes buries them. So much for external forces arising in weather disturbances, but what about the disruptions to this artificial environment caused by his own mismanagment?

Thus, consider the effects of smog and polution of rivers and lakes, and even the ocean, by his effortsto control his environment, which succeed only in deteriorating it. Man is successful, however, in establishing micro-environments: artificial shelters with controlled atmospheres to suit his needs and taste. No other animal can do this except some of the social insects. But it is a matter of degree only between man's house and the nests of many birds or the dens of many of the mammals.

Adaptations, some of extraordinary specificity, are genetic reactions to environmental conditions, and, if not examples of artificial environments, are at least selections of environments most suitable and agreeable to the species in question. For extreme specialization consider the waterfall larval insects and and Adreey's insect flower and miroorganisma adapted to extremes of temperature.

The Question of Abstraction

From one point of view all photographs are abstractions. That is they are abstracted from the surroundings of the photographer. This is not the generally accepted meaning of abstract photography, which is subject matter with no recognizable counterpart in outside reality - outside the image. This kind of abstraction is, in its present form, the subjective creation of the photographer. But such a photograph is very hard to make because it cannot be an image of anything. Even a composition made with light reflected from surfaces is an image. Sometimes the impression of abstraction is produced by putting this an unrecognizable image out of focus. As long, however, as a lens system is used to produce the photograph an image of some quality is the result. But if no lens system is used - if no optical equipment is interposed between the subject and the recording material the result is not a photograph and so does not qualify as a photographic abstraction. When sensitive material is exposed to light without the intervention of an optical system the result is called a photogram.

Short Notes

Transistor radios carried on trails in the woods are a protection or an insulation against nature. It is bringing man made environment onto the wilds for security almost like erecting a shelter.

People are so afraid of nature that they must take with them into the woods, even on short hikes, the signs and symbols and signs of civilization.

Nature and the artist

1. Choice of subject depends to some extent whether working with color or in B & W. Color adds dimensions not necessarily always desirable. B&W can be more expressive for some subjects where simplicity produces dramatic effects. In complex and intricate subjects color may actually be necessary to bring out relationships.
2. Color must be convincing.
3. True color is a meaningless term. In photography it is essentially subjective. Color depends on environmental conditions: time of day, weather, geography, season etc.

4. Composition must also be convincing.
5. The uses of photography in conservation depends for its effectiveness on the conviction the photograph stimulates.
6. Truthfulness of subjects is like color: it is subjective. But it is essential that the photograph be plausible otherwise it will be taken as a fraud and its effect may be just the opposite of that intended.
 - a. Glen Canyon photographs accepted more often than otherwise as plausible.
 - b. Reclamation brochures, "The Jewell of the Colorado" discounted by many as improbable and therefore fraudulent. Reproduction quality as well as subject matter has much to do with this result. This shows what insensitive designing and editing can do - produce adverse effects.

The artist is particularly concerned with conservation because of his commitment to nature. He speaks for nature through his art. Nature is his subject in which he is wholly involved and therefore he must be a conservationist because if nature - the natural world - were destroyed his art would perish. Piecemeal destruction of wilderness is piecemeal destruction of the inspiration to his art.