

gustav metzger:

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## ‘nature demised resurrects as environment’

*You have to climb. Occasionally carriages drawn by a small horse will pass holding a few people going down or up. Bicycles are not allowed. You start from an enclave of houses: buses stop. As you climb, all that you see are the trees, and the distant hills. You go with no sight of the destination. Only when you are within minutes of reaching it, is it visible: the Castle of Neuschwanstein.*

*The castle stands in nature. Trees, enormously tall, surround it on every side, in every direction. There is only one way out - the single road. Perhaps nowhere else in Europe is the stark contrast between nature and environment - man-made construction - so extreme as here. There is nothing to mediate between them.*

First we had Nature.

And then came the Environment.

Environment is the *smoke* humanity has put on Nature:  
the people who used Latin had no word  
for environment - they only knew *natura*.

There is an urgent need to redefine notions of nature and environment.

The term Environment has been hijacked by the forces that are manipulating the world.

When Mr Bill Clinton states that he would be the first ‘Environmental President’, what can this mean? Anything and nothing.

The term Environment lends itself perfectly to telling lies and giving illusions. The people who run production and distribution, the controllers of media, and Government, local and national, are systematically using the term Environment to hide realities, confuse the public, and distort their perception of reality.

This is being done for the basest of motives: to maintain profits and power. The term Nature is dropped, and replaced by Environment.

One way forward would be to *drop* the term Environment, and speak of Nature and *damaged* Nature.

This could be an interim stage, while the air is cleared, and the discussion brought onto a higher and more realistic plane.

The voidance of Nature, and its substitution by Environment, represents a grave threat to culture. The loose use of concepts, and their misuse, are first steps in the decline of culture. This is happening world-wide at present.

We are faced by a gigantic task: the deconstruction, de-definition, demystification, and redefinition of that term which sums up one of the big issues of our time - Environment.

In education, this clearing-up work is of vital importance.

The young are rightly attracted to studies having to do with matters of the Environment, and courses and facilities are expanding. Much of this effort will be squandered unless there is more clarity.

As bio-technology expands into different areas of life, clear thinking and communicating on Environment, nature, and human nature becomes, literally, a matter of life and death.

Political, legal, scientific and medical issues are among those involved.

Fields such as philosophy, ethics and aesthetics are also concerned, as is the field of Artificial Intelligence, robotics and computers.

They have damaged nature, or destroyed nature, and will in future destroy and damage nature.

How do we respond? The essence of response to nature was a perception that it was eternal.

Although in constant change, growth and decay, life and death evidently an integral part, nature was in permanent occupation, a sign of strength and above all, a symbol of continuity, of permanence.

Nature was something people turned to for reassurance, that life would continue. This inherited reaction to nature is no longer open to us.

When we now reflect on nature, it is with considerable doubt and hesitancy and uncertainty. A good deal of fear is involved. We constantly ask: what will happen next? What changes, catastrophic in kind, will be revealed in the future? Technology and business, which have spread the damage everywhere, also informs us about world-wide developments, forcing us to react. Painting a picture of the extent of the damage is no longer possible: it has gone too far.

What is nature? What is it for us living now? Is it the memory of what it was? Is it the poetry of nature that we have read - that we can read again? As we immerse ourselves in what nature was - how do we face what nature is? What it is now.

We face these realities, and we must face them. But are there answers? Can we make concrete what we feel and understand? It is possible, and it will be very painful.

It will involve mourning. It will mean giving in to sensations that have been drummed out of us by our society. It will necessitate that we slip out of that moral disengagement which runs through our way of living.

Reflecting on nature now forces us to face the guilt that we share with others. No one has done enough, and most have done nothing.

Reflection on nature now, is a dirge. What we take in are the multitude of things that have gone wrong.

We circle a forest now, not with anticipation of the awe that we shall experience when we enter it, but with the certainty that we shall observe circles of hell that have scarred it in innumerable places.

Anticipation is such an important part of experience, and sometimes the best part of an experience. And with nature, anticipation is all that we are getting now, because often we want to go no further. We don't want to *see* what we know to be there. The burned leaves, the discoloured signs, the pallid tones. Why exacerbate the guilt we feel?

Humanity's relation to nature has been complex and ambivalent in the past: the truly Golden Ages have been few.

Now, the complexity and ambivalence are more acute than ever.

In the past one could *see* nature, but this is no longer possible.

Mankind has forced too many changes for this to be possible.

When we see nature now we have constantly to ask, what changes are caused by pollution, by what source?

And is this effect 'natural', or is it caused? And caused by what?

And when? And how will it go on in future?

In the past, a tree and a forest would look like this for tens and hundreds of years. Today, that consciousness of settling into a future has gone.

We needed that awareness; it directly strengthened the perception of our permanence, and of our continuous survival.

We have lost these perceptions, and we can no longer gain them

from contemplating nature.

It is a double blow; as it is a double bind.

We will not fall into the trap of idealizing the past.

Yes, life *is* short and brutish. And life in the forest is a succession of one kind of life eating up and killing another.

And the past had its own share of attacks on nature.

Nature has been burned, uprooted and deformed throughout history by mankind. Good land turned into desert. Animals hunted to extinction.

And there is the attack on human nature by a variety of social forces.

Humanity created the first Environment in the forests. These were set alight on one side.

As the animals fled to the other side, they were burned to death, before reaching the forest edge.

There followed big feasts, and the burnt trees were used for charcoal for cooking and heat: this is the origin of our Steak Houses.

Humanity *is* Nature, and so has the right to manipulate the world for its interests. That is the basic agreement between religions and organized society.

What are the limits of these interventions? When is there a transgression of limits? In bio-engineering these are the fundamental questions and issues. You cannot *make* nature. And if you *could*, it would not *be* nature.

When we observe nature, the guiding feature seems to be a kind of permission to exist, a capacity to co-exist amongst the countless forms of life.

There is indeed death and destruction as well as catastrophes. There is violence and aggression, fight for dominance. There exist countless checks, preventing one form of life to totally control a particular sphere. Humanity has rebelled against this kind of perceived order, and has staked a great deal on repeated rebellions against it. These dreams and projections are understandable. Perhaps they are inevitable, considering the capacity to think, use tools, and organize, in a manner quite different to that of other living beings. So is the drive totally to gain total dominance over earth, water and sky totally wrong?

The well-tempered environment is not a dream. It exists in numerous parts of the world, where warm climate facilitates a way of life that has to be laboriously constructed in Northern parts of the world. So the search for finding ample warm water, comfort, is understandable and indeed justifiable. So what went wrong?

The dream to conquer Nature is age-old. The dream to surpass Nature. To escape into the sky, or move below the water. We can trace the rebellion against nature through different civilizations, and periods of history. If it has reached a climax in our century, what are the premonitions in other ages? The violent scourging of human nature by the Church, 1500. Columbus. North and South America proved that the subjection of Nature, human nature included, *paid off*. The ones who acted, returned, immeasurably enriched, to Europe.

The move against nature is a move against one's own nature. This is in line with Christianity.

A walk in the woods. The Supermarket as a surrogate for picking berries in woods. Low down, but accessible. A new market: nature surrogates. The bath as a substitute for the glades - Jacuzzi. These developments serve as a replacement for nature, make nature redundant.

To maximize 'growth' and 'productivity' they were obliged to encourage waste in a variety of forms. A good way is to encourage attitudes. This is done by advertising in different media. These attitudes need to go through various sections of the population. The coming of the Colour Supplements in the British Sunday papers, marks a clear stage in changing attitudes.

The impact was tremendous. The supplements showed people how to live. They opened vistas of endless consumption. 'Schwelgend'. A whole new way of life was displayed. As people see the facsimile of nature *in colour*, the need to experience Nature diminishes: one has it right in front. But this switch is not felt *as a loss*; rather it becomes a gain. After all, living in large cities did not bring much contact with nature for a start. However, shifts occur, that can have very deep effects on the future. Simulation of nature. Holidays in remote countries. The stories merge with the ads - a fantasy world is constructed - much cash and power is involved. The owners of the media and the advertisers become aware of the power locked up in their pages.

Wars went on in different parts of the world. In Vietnam,

chemicals burnt and mutilated trees and whole stretches of land.  
Babies and children also.

It was war on the Environment; it was an Environmental war.  
Wars in Africa and Asia ravaged the countryside. Millions of  
people died. Vast profits were made selling arms and equipment  
for the wars.

The use of the armaments damaged the Environment.

Disneyland. CNN. A total enveloping environment where nature  
is excluded - by definition - and intention.

It is this complete cocoon that is offered and given by society that  
is part of its 'Eroberung' tactics - and accounts for its success.  
Under increasing stress, caused in part by the lack of nature, the  
impossibility of large numbers of people to have any contact with  
it, people turn to that which is available: a variety of drugs,  
artificial environments, discos, TV etc. football.

It is easy to dismiss what you do not have. So with Nature.  
To suggest that you do not need it is an easy step. But something  
*is* needed to take its place.

Using the term Environment gets rid of a multitude of  
associations and connotations attached to the term Nature. It  
removes the 'ballast', so to speak, the detritus. Nature is a  
quagmire; you can easily get trapped by its use - it can pull you  
down. Removing it makes any operation so much easier.

Unpredictability and transmutability are the essence of nature.  
They want to bring down the former, and seek to exploit the latter  
in their interests.

The Eastern idea that Nature is *there* is abhorrent.

Because it is *there* to be manipulated - not to be gazed at in  
wonder and awe.

Awe is taboo to start with, since it has to do with very deep levels  
of emotions.

And it is the disarousal of emotions that is at the centre of all this.  
Deep levels of emotion tend to cripple action, will inhibit 'das  
Einschreiten' that is the key operation.

You have a rebellion of the 'Fallen Angels'. Certain basic human  
reactions are OUT.

Around Nature, there are a multitude of layers going back very  
far. Accretions of meaning and significance, layers of emotions,  
historical associations.

The entire development of art is indivisibly fused with nature and  
with concepts of nature: poetry is shuddered with Nature.

The production of Environment. Environment becomes *a product*.  
Once there is a product, you can buy, sell and exchange it.

Under the cover of darkness - the manipulated perception of a  
threat coming from the Eastern Block - the emergence, or one  
could also say, the construction of the Cold War, the West put  
everything into the melting pot.

Production expanded; ceaseless invention took place. There came  
the rise of the Military Industrial Complex.

Directly tied to the Cold War, came the exploration of space.

Throughout its conception, this served military priorities.

Although very little came of this, it promised domestic spin-offs, ie  
domestic applications.

The Information Explosion occurred, the Personal Computer was  
launched. And all the while, the earth was overrun with waste  
and poisoned.

In the shadow of the nuclear threat, and people obsessed with Super-Power confrontation, pollution, and degradation of nature, reached unprecedented, unimaginable levels.

The 'peaceful use' of the atom was in fact a blind so that the military could obtain large quantities of material to build up their arsenals of atom bombs.

Great Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union were engaged in this.

In consequence, vast stretches of the USA were covered with all kinds of nuclear waste, which also entered rivers.

In the Soviet Union, nuclear accidents devastated entire regions. They sank boats with nuclear reactors into the sea. The 500 atom bomb tests, many over land, in Kazakhstan, will threaten nature and people for centuries to come.

France did the testing on the Pacific Islands, Great Britain on the open spaces of Australia, and flowed radioactive waste into the sea at Sellafield and elsewhere.

The post-war period was the most manipulated period in history. It climaxed with the Gulf War. The Media War.

As the programmes of A-bomb testing got under way, and the world, mesmerized by the constant threat of the outbreak of nuclear war, the decades 1960-1980 were in progress.

Whilst the energies of the most conscientious people were immobilized by the threat of nuclear war, their thoughts taken up with the problem, speed and maximising of gain fuelled the Corporations. An epidemic-like activity spread through the world, blasting away all constraints.

Corporations facilitated moral disengagement among their members. Conduct was not restrained by the demands of the world in a wide sense, but was on the contrary guided by the

interests of the individual Corporation.

The battles between corporations stimulated the 'progress' of the economy.

Having to live with the trauma of a potential war that might take away all life, many people sought security and gratification in the most immediate ways. Business and Industry seized its chance, and crafted its strategy accordingly. It unleashed an unlimited range of goods such as had not been known before. It was in this period that the Corporations producing cars and other large domestic products such as washing machines, refrigerators, TV sets, made their breakthrough.

The idea of replacing a car every few years took hold. The Colour Supplements preached expansion and consumption. TV opened a fairytale world for almost anybody. The TV ads reached new heights of sophistication and effectiveness, heating up existing markets, and opening new ones.

People suffering from fear and anxiety, grasp for support. It was at this point, in the early sixties, that the supermarket expanded in Europe.

Here was a mechanism that reached out to the millions, offering, if not solutions, then at least, a helpful hand in reducing anxiety. Then what is more comforting than a large cornucopia where all one's needs are laid out in grasping distance? The very act of outstretching to one's needs and desires is therapeutic. The element of choice too, is a soothing factor. The mere knowledge that this storehouse exists is a relief.

The supermarket is the surrogate for walking in forests and now bending to pick berries, or lifting one's hands to pluck fruit from a tree or hedge.

The supermarket brings us back to our origins thousands and

tens of thousands of years ago. Reaching and grasping, and then stuffing into a pouch accumulating on the way to the exit. If the supermarket is the surrogate of the walk in the woods, is it a replacement for nature?

If some of the human motor activities are given an outlet, searching locating and collecting food are realized in supermarkets, then the answer will be, yes.

If some of the activity that we are used to perform, is indeed fulfilled, the need for the larger environment, ie the forest, is reduced. The absence of nature is made more bearable. We have gone through an adaptation to city life.

Young people found in Pop Music, and the gatherings, a link with nature, movements in forests, etc.

Environment considered as a graph. Each aspect is divided into sections, and sections divided up further. The objective being, to maximise gains. They can plot in all directions, calculate loss and gain, make predictions.

They can *operate*. They operate with a system of points. It is like the division of a carcass. The value of keeping plants in the forest, or aborigines in the remote parts.

Environment has been approached by Big Business in ways comparable to the Arms Trade. First you make it, and then you scrap it: in the process money is made, and power gained.

If armaments would not be scrapped - or used up in actual war - the cycle could not last.

The global manipulation involved is a highly skilled operation. Similar forces and principles are involved in Environment. First you build up, and then take it down, and so get a sustainable cycle - the key to expansion, and survival of the system.

You must plan ahead, or be shattered.

They'll bounce back no matter what.

We cannot overestimate the brutality involved. Brutality, and shortsightedness.

Within their terms it is quite logical and defensible. You make money dirtying up the Environment. You make money cleaning it up. What you do does not matter providing it pays.

That has been the 'philosophy' of our time. The trouble is that you cannot treat Nature like a machine, or an economic system.

TV led to a reduction of sensibility. As compared to cinema, the image reduced. In a cinema the shared emotions of an audience was a reality, and used to be one of the factors drawing people to go to the cinema.

TV makes a thorough break. Individuals watching respond differently than groups.

Moral disengagement is fostered by TV. The flood is overwhelming, there is no escape from impact.

No one can sustain a moral sense of outrage against the onslaught of the media. When people eat, while watching executions, catastrophes, how can there be any balanced reaction?

The media bludgeons people into passive response. Saturated with bad vibrations, people can no longer react with basic instinctual horror at all that is thrown at them. This is where commercial TV and advertising score. An emotionally flattened - drained - person is more susceptible to advertising. Anything goes. Clearly, here is another point of entry for the environmental fix.

Environment. TV gives you the perfect means to mix nature and Environment: to juggle the two. To confuse and mystify. To point to the indivisibility.

By presenting the illusion of bringing nature into the drawing

room, TV opens the door to a variety of means that will lead to Environment. In this area, TV is the great merger.

Environmental destruction was part of an ongoing approach to maintain the viability of the system.

The explanation why it has worked reasonably when compared to the Communist Block - is in the preparedness, and the ability, to incorporate the clean-up process as part of the long-term strategy. The Block countries have fallen flat on their face because they never incorporated the clean-up as part of the profitability equation. Did they profit from the destructive process?

There was one major miscalculation in the programme. The Greenhouse Effect and the Ozone Layer.

No one, thirty years ago, was in a position to predict the extent of this development. It is the genie in the bottle.

Just as no one would have predicted the world-wide AIDS scourge. Damage the Environment: OK. And then repair it: clean it up, change your technology. A viable path into the future. Like radiation from a nuclear reactor at a point of no return, the Ozone Layer and the Greenhouse Effect entered the equation, and stands like Chernobyl, before the world, as a warning and worse, as an uncontrollable event that can bring all down.

It had not been planned for. The idea had been to let all systems run.

When forced to by legislation and public opinion, changes would be made. To reduce the exhaust in vehicles. To clean up the chimneys. Reduce emissions from power stations. Improve the safety of nuclear power stations.

Calculate risks. Incorporate them into the projections for future production and consumption.

You then move into an emergent phase where resources are given over to begin the massive clean-up operation that will be faced. This work will keep you going at a period when productive capacities are lowered, and, in some sectors of production, phased out.

The goal throughout is a sustainable economy.

This was demonstrated most vividly by President Bush at Rio. Pollution must go on, he said, or our economy would sustain unacceptable losses. Loud and clear. If that is stated so blatantly now, and at this highest tribunal of global consciousness, what did political and business leaders say in all the decades before?

*What did they say?* And what did they not say, or, at least, what did they say in private? At Cabinet and Board meetings?

That we must do all we can to protect the Environment? The decisions were made. First we'll dirty it up, and then we'll clean it up. We'll benefit both ways.

This must sound cynical. *It is cynical.*

It is with cynicism of this kind that business decisions are made. Remember, improvements have to be paid for. We are permanently reminded of this basic wisdom.

The damage to the forests came like a bomb.

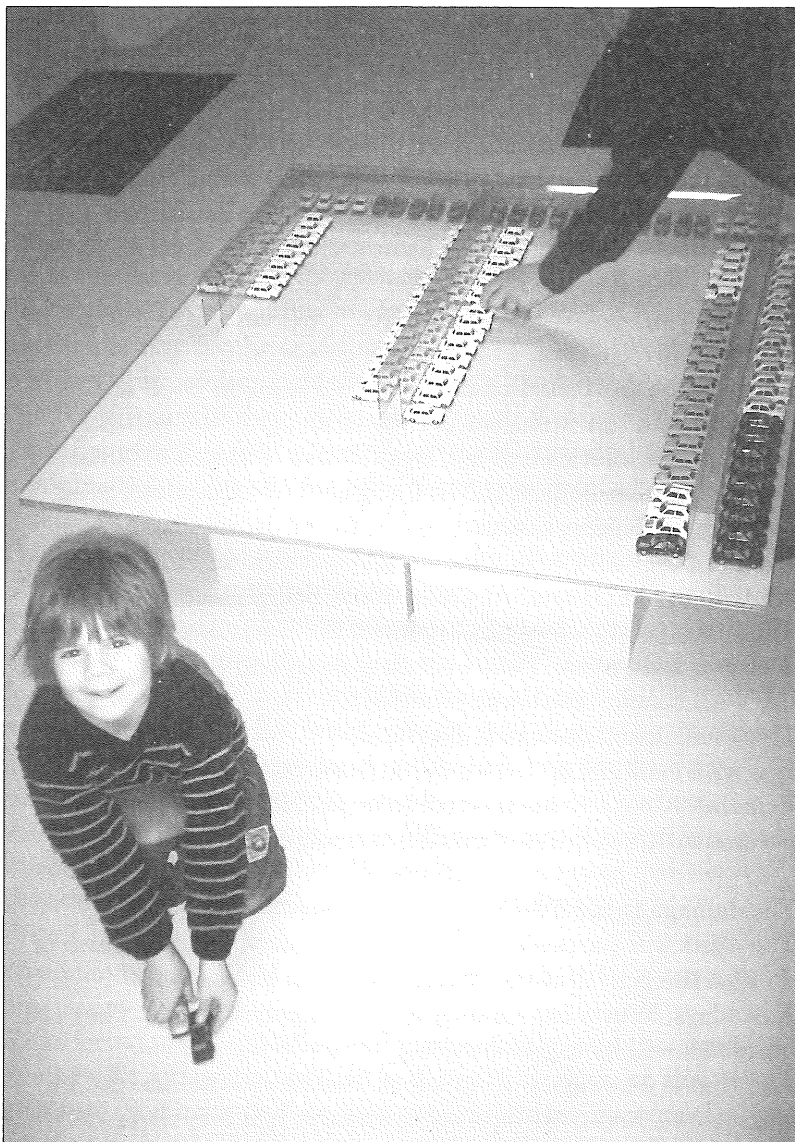
The effect was particularly strong in Germany, and had much to do with the growth of the Green Movement there.

Nowadays, forests have hardly a place in public debate. They are overshadowed by bigger dangers.

And that is a tendency of our times. Bad news is submerged by worse news. Bad news does not evaporate: it is only covered over.

In a lifetime, the lifetime of my generation, nature has been turned into a hybrid: Environment.





'Earth Minus Environment' 1992  
Harry Ruhé, Galerie A, Amsterdam

If I were to return to the forests I knew as a child, in the environs of Nürnberg, the forests I missed so much when I went to England as a refugee, I would react in a completely different way to my earlier experience.

Instead of the profound calm I knew then, there would be feelings of unease and anxiety, fear even.

And in place of the deep colours that I observed, I would be faced with so many sights indicating that some radical change for the worse has occurred. What are these changes - from Nature to Environment: how did the changes occur; and how are people responding to them?

It is not just that Nature is wiped out: it is our memory that is overturned.

It is our apprehension of a future, where people will not have that contact with forests where an englobing experience was given - shelter, verdancy. Not knowing is form of erasure. It is quite different to not having.

*You can walk, take the subway, or a taxi. St John the Divine lies in Upper Manhattan, and is the largest cathedral in the world. Like Neuschwanstein, it is unfinished. There are now plans to complete it with the creation of a glass roof, that will include a 'bio-shelter' for about 40 living trees. The impression will be of '... a green cross by day while offering a crystalline shimmer from within at night'.*

*In the one hundred years since the creation of the Castle of Neuschwanstein, a circle has been completed. There, the seemingly endless vistas of tall trees and hills, have an overpowering effect. In*

*nature demised*

*New York, the Cathedral offers shelter to the bedraggled remnants of a rout. With its bio-shelter, the Cathedral celebrates - piously, and with restraint - the Triumph of Man over Nature: a central tenet of the Church, and a concept that is at the heart of Western civilization.*

Santiago Calatrava  
Project for St John the Divine, New York 1991