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Phenomenologically Investigating Mediated Nature

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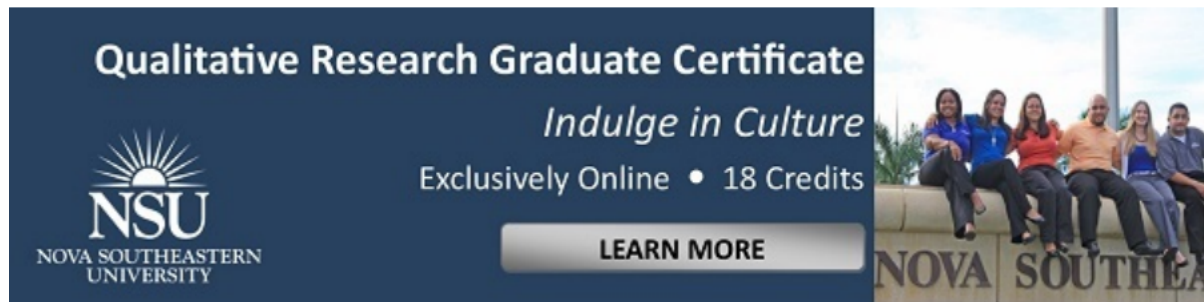# Phenomenologically Investigating Mediated Nature

Abstract

During the summer of 2001 I worked as a bartender in Wyoming, two miles east of Yellowstone National Park. This opportunity provided me with unique experiences of "the wilderness" and as a result, allowed me to become aware of intricacies of living with in a primarily simulated and mass mediated culture, i.e., the United States. Following tenets of phenomenology, this paper investigates the simulated- and mass mediated-ness of society with specific focus on experiences with two nature environments: simulated-nature places (e.g., shopping malls, zoos) and televised-nature representations (e.g., Crocodile Hunter, Jaws) .

Keywords

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Acknowledgements

Phenomenologically Investigating Mediated "Nature"

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During the summer of 2001 I worked as a bartender in Wyoming, two miles east of Yellowstone National Park. This opportunity provided me with unique experiences of "the wilderness" and as a result, allowed me to become aware of intricacies of living within a primarily simulated and mass mediated culture, i.e., the United States. Following tenets of phenomenology, this paper investigates the simulated- and mass mediated-ness of society with specific focus on experiences with two nature environments: simulated-nature places (e.g., shopping malls, zoos) and televised-nature representations (e.g., Crocodile Hunter, Jaws). Key Words: Representation, Phenomenology, Mediated Nature, Space, Marshall McLuhan

During the summer of 2001 I worked as a bartender in Wyoming, two miles east of Yellowstone National Park. Here, I could not access many of my urban conveniences. For example, I could not receive radio, television, or cell phone signals because of the mountains surrounding the resort; I could not easily travel to town as Cody, Wyoming was 60 miles away; I had to exercise outdoors since an indoor gym did not exist; and I could not access the internet on demand or walk through a shopping mall. Furthermore, I watched bears and buffaloes roam free, animals I had only ever seen on television and in zoos. I also experienced severe boredom and depression, feelings I had never before encountered.

When I arrived back to my familiar world, I became increasingly aware of how I functioned with the assistance of various technologies. I noticed dimensions of my life to which I previously remained oblivious, such as my reliance on email and television as well as the difficulties in accessing nature-related space. These interests, when combined with my role as "graduate student," led me to research mediated-nature environments in an attempt to understand political underpinnings of my most mundane nature-related habits and desires. I turned towards phenomenology, a way of investigating the lived-through experience of phenomena and decided to write this paper.

While I could focus on many aspects of U.S. culture in order to address mediated qualities of our lives, I will examine relationships that we could establish with mediated-nature settings. I specifically focus on how mediated forms of nature, such as televised-nature re-presentations and simulated-nature re-creations, influence our communication towards and ideas about "nature." I argue that such forms, which did not enter into mainstream U.S. culture until the 1950s, have affected much of how we live with the natural world.

I use the following terms to describe different types of nature: authentic-nature, simulated-nature, and televised-nature. Authentic-nature describes local, state, and nationally designated areas within the United States that we can visit in order to interact with the natural world; examples include Yosemite National Park, the Everglades, or the

countryside. Authentic-nature can also imply mythic or idealized visions of what nature is or should be. Simulated-nature describes areas that portray re-creations of nature; examples include zoos, shopping mall landscapes, or botanical gardens. Televised-nature describes nature presentations that occur via television; examples include *Jaws*, *Survivor*, and *Bambi*. One of my underlying assumptions in this project is that anyone who lives in the United States will have most exposure to mediated forms of nature, not authentic ones. I also acknowledge that we can view authentic-nature areas as mediated forms of nature as well, but such a project remains contradictory to the theoretical issues I highlight in this work.

Furthermore, following Japp and Japp (2002), the tone of my paper may suggest that I am searching for "the good life," a life of simplicity and independence from technology. However, I would like to acknowledge that my intentions remain only to probe aspects of living within a highly technologized, mediated world, an attempt to review characteristics of U.S. culture that many of us may take for granted.

Before moving through this document, consider what "nature" means to you. What words, images, sounds, smells, feelings, and tastes do you associate with it? What role does nature play in your life? Fine (1992) claims that "most Americans—three-fourths of the population if surveys can be believed—define themselves as environmentalists. The label is a badge of honor. We claim that we 'love' nature, but what does this love entail?" (p. 160). Can you answer his inquiry?

(Un)Natural Ideas

Marshall McLuhan (1964) encourages us to become aware of how media affect our lives. He motivates us to consider the conditions that develop from or relate to technology, and he pushes us to realize ways that our "inventions" alter our senses and desires. I find his agenda important since U.S. culture, broadly, "still tends to think of [mass] media as a generally positive force, the highest product of our technology, and hence, an important element in our culture's claim to *progress*" (McLeod, 1991, p. 70, emphasis in original).

McLuhan (1964) refers to media as "extensions of man [*sic*]," (p. 49) extensions that affect individuals' senses by their presence in a culture. A few of his examples include how clothing extends our sense of touch, eye glasses extend our vision, and the wheel extends our feet. These media alter our interactions with the world and these alterations become more complex as media mix. For instance, the light bulb blurs the distinction between day and night, but it also serves as an extension of the eye in that it extends our vision into previously concealed realms. This extension affects other senses as well. I can now stay up all night reading because of the light bulb, but my body will react to my lack of sleep. Furthermore, McLuhan and Fiore (1967) suggest that "any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments" (p. 26). I find this framework useful for investigating mediated-nature experiences; It can help us better understand how such re-creations affect our lives.

I consider mediated forms of nature vehicles that utilize aspects often associated with the concept of "nature." These forms typically present nature to us in innovative, exciting ways and they act as "extensions of man" in that they provide our bodies and

senses with fresh perspectives towards nature-related phenomena. For example, when characteristics of nature become mixed with shopping mall composition, we are introduced to new ways of experiencing both shopping and the wilderness (Price, 1995). Or, by mixing nature-related characteristics with theme parks, we may acquire new attitudes about and feelings toward entertainment industries and the natural world (Davis, 1997).

Mediated environments can also shape our "reality" and, contrary to much belief, may even constitute our "realities" of various phenomena. Here, I am not arguing for a correct or appropriate version of reality (of whatever that may consist); rather, I wish to emphasize that the reality we have of phenomena may develop solely from (mass) mediated experience. So, if I have only seen one television show on North Korea, and if I have never visited that country (or know anyone who has), my reality of North Korea will remain rooted in the mediated representation. Fürsich (2002) highlights a similar argument concerning the "packaging" and presenting of cultures via television, and Reich (1970) applies this idea to U.S. culture:

> The problem with ersatz culture [i.e., the United States] is that all that is meaningful in the experience is lost in the substitution . . . When something is put in its place [i.e., substituted], the ability to experience the genuine is reduced. In this sense, fake Chinese food is worse than none, for it deadens our curiosity and makes our ignorance more stubborn. (pp. 178-179)

This becomes problematic when we transfer our mediated realities into "real life" where they may then be deemed invalid.[1] Chvasta and Fassett (2003), in a discussion about reality television, address such an idea: "There is a tendency to mistake the possible for the real—to concretize that which, technically, is without existence" (p. 220). Funkhouser and Shaw (1990) reinforce this belief as well: "Ubiquitous (motion picture) and electronic (television and computers) media manipulate and rearrange not only the content but the *processes* of communicated experience, thereby shaping how the audience perceives and interprets the physical and social reality depicted" (p. 75). Funkhouser and Shaw further suggest that media can restructure a viewer's perceptual capacities of the phenomena presented (similar to McLuhan [1964]) and they argue that mediated experiences provide us with experiences we could never receive first-hand. For example, a time-lapsed video presentation can add much excitement to the life cycle of a butterfly, whereas trying to personally observe such a process would be boring and tiresome. Or, watching a sporting event on television can provide us with an intimate view of the experience as compared to personally audiencing it.

Gadamer (2000) advances these ideas by specifically focusing on how we can, upon exposure to mediated "pictures" of objects, transfer these pictures into our reality. He addresses this in a discussion of how a person can become altered by her/his pictures (e.g., photographs):

> When he [sic] shows himself [in person], he must fulfill the expectations that his picture arouses [. . .] For example, he can no longer avoid being

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[1] This relates to Baudrillard's (1983) discussion of simulacra.

represented by the picture and, because these representations determine the picture that people have of him, he must ultimately show himself as his picture prescribes. Paradoxical as it may sound, the original acquires an image only by being imaged, and yet the image is nothing but the appearance of the original.[2] (p. 142)

Neumann (1999) directly highlights this argument when discussing how we can take images of the Grand Canyon, drawn from guidebooks, advertisements, and mass mediated pictures, into our actual experience of the space, and Haapala (2002) maintains that "authors and artists are often the first to interpret nature . . . and through this they open up nature for the rest of us in a novel way" (p. 57). I do not suggest that this mixing of images and experiences *always* occurs; rather, I want to display that "pictures" have the potential to affect our images of various phenomena. For instance, my fear of the ocean significantly increased after viewing the 124-minute film *Jaws* (Zanuck, 1975). This pictorial presentation, the movie, tarnished *my* image of the real object, the ocean.

We can also apply such ideas to the use of space within U.S. culture. Shome (2003) claims that "[space] functions as a technology—a means and a medium—of power that is socially constituted through material relations that enable the communication of specific politics" (p. 40). Having said this, consider Price's (1995) discussion of shopping malls: "Drawing from the world over, mall developers have converted real places into décor and motif, mixing and matching as if the earth were a giant Lego set or salad bar" (p. 192). Many of us may take for granted the eclectic, human-created motifs in shopping malls, making it possible for us to unquestionably interact with politically saturated displays of nature.

For example, Berleant (2002) argues that "people working in the environmental arts, such as architecture, landscape design, garden design, and urban planning" (p. 12) do not realize that their work helps shape perceptions of nature; Davis (1997), in a discussion about Sea World, claims: ". . . the mass-produced, popular-culture version of nature is a major source of imagery and information shaping public understandings of environmental and scientific questions" (p. 10); and Haapala (2002), in an exploration of various relationships between culture and nature, believes that "our relationships to nature have varied according to technical development, to changes in the scientific theories about nature, to changes in our religious beliefs, but also to the ways in which art and fiction have portrayed nature" (p. 57). I argue that mediated-nature spaces remain riddled with nature-related politics; Arbiters of these spaces design nature from their perspective, incorporating various ideologies into the construction of places that only allow us to experience portions of the natural world (Haraway, 1989). If this is the case, many of us may remain oblivious to what we are not seeing, that is, what the nature gatekeepers left out.

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[2] Harms and Dickens (1996) provide a parallel claim: ". . . new technologies and techniques permit cultural texts to be reproduced and recombined in different contexts, e.g., a classic rock song is transformed into an ad for an automotive oil filter. Thus, the meaning' of the 'original' has been transformed" (p. 216). Hope (2002) specifically applies this idea to nature: "When pictures of commodities from the manufactured environment, such as automobiles, are associated with iconic representations of nature, the meaning of such objects is transformed." (p. 170)

In connection with televised-nature representations, Scott (2003) highlights potential ways of interacting with (mass) mediated-nature texts. She focuses on how televised nature documentaries attempt to take viewers *into* nature-related settings:

> Observational techniques are used to encourage the breakdown of the barrier between a subject, the representation of the subject, and the audience. Natural history documentaries support this by taking the viewer into locations and situations that they would not generally have access to. An attempt to "frame" material as being unadulterated is a primary focus, promoting the idea that the action would have taken place regardless of the camera.[3] (p. 31)

So a mediated presentation of nature-related phenomena has the potential to set up the conditions for the possibility of experiencing certain places, events, objects, and cultures (also, see Fürsich, 2002).

Thus far my discussion has remained abstract, primarily residing in the realm of theory. I now move towards situating these ideas within our lives: how we live through mediated-nature environments, the politics of embodying these spaces, and the effect they may have on our perceptual and communicative capacities towards nature. For instance, what happens if we claim to "have been somewhere" based on a mediated experience? How could this affect our relationships with others and to specific spaces? And what happens to our bodies as we interact with alternative-nature environments?

The Interviews

To assist in my research, I secured permission from Southern Illinois University to interview 25 people about their experiences with authentic, simulated, and televised forms of nature.[4] I conducted 8 interviews at Busch Gardens (Tampa, Florida), 7 at Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming), and 10 at Southern Illinois University (Carbondale, Illinois). I asked each person to consider how such forms influence their communication about nature-related phenomena, and I did not consider audience characteristics (e.g., age, race, gender, sexuality) important for this preliminary research.

I randomly approached individuals within each setting, and all interviewees voluntarily participated in this study. After gaining their permission to interview, I asked each interviewee if she/he would allow me to record her/his responses via a hand-held tape recorder. All, with the exception of two, did not have a problem with this. I also

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[3] We can notice a similar idea in an advertisement featured in the January 5, 2003 issue of *Parade Magazine*, a nationally published insert typically found in Sunday newspapers. This ad highlights "America's most scenic drives on home video," and claims that "you can take twelve exquisite road trips through some of America's most picturesque countryside . . . all on home video." What I find of particular interest is the use of active verbs when describing each video experience: "You can *take* twelve exquisite road trips . . .," "*explore* California's redwood forests," and "*join* a whale expedition in Washington" (Publisher's Choice, 2003, p. 17, emphasis added). This suggests that we can become a part of the journey. King (1996) reinforces this idea by suggesting that we can feel as though we've "been somewhere" based on a mediated encounter. I thank Lenore Langsdorf for this observation.

[4] The Human Subjects Committee at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale approved my project on May 15, 2002. For more information: (618) 453-4533.

informed each person that, unless she/he would like to be personally identified with the study, her/his name would remain anonymous. None of them chose to be identified therefore I created pseudonyms for each.

Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes, and I conducted them at various times throughout the day. During each interview I asked the following questions:

1. What role does nature play in your life?
2. What type of environment do you have more experience with?
> a. environments that humans have altered so that we can experience nature there
> (e.g., state parks, national forests)
> b. environments that humans have designed to represent nature
> (e.g., theme parks, shopping malls, botanical gardens, zoos)
> c. televised presentations of nature
> (e.g., nature shows such as *Survivor*, *Crocodile Hunter*, or *Jaws*)
3. What would you like to tell me about how these three ways of experiencing nature affect you? That is, what sorts of feelings do you have in response to each of them? Why do you think that is?

I tried to make the interviews as conversational and relaxed as possible in an attempt to lessen any reservations participants may have held towards nature-related phenomena (see Fine, 1992). This was also an attempt to lessen my possibly intimidating role as "researcher."

Phenomenology

Tenets of phenomenology inform my process of understanding interviewees' commentary. Phenomenology focuses on the lived-through experience of an object or an idea and begins when "we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 116). In a phenomenological study about television viewing, Langsdorf (1994) discerns how "different media inform experience (and thus, influence epistemic activity)" (p. 82). She specifically explicates how televisual experience infiltrates her embodied engagement with everyday life. These ideas provide the foundation for this project: I discern how different nature-related media inform our experiences of and epistemic activity towards nature. In so doing, I detail how simulated- and televised-nature experiences infiltrate our embodied engagement with nature-related affairs.

I find phenomenology useful because it concerns itself with the lived experience of phenomena, "natural experience" using the language of Ricoeur (1981, p. 103). This situates research within the lives of individuals, allowing us, as researchers, to investigate how we make sense of our experiences. Phenomenology also welcomes the presence of possibilities, that is, the emergence of multiple realities, surrounding experience; as Langsdorf (1994) says, "when experience is no longer possible from one perspective, it begins again from another" (p. 98). This suggests that a search for a single, objective reality, as is often the goal for natural and social sciences, will result in an overly-exhaustive knowledge endeavor, an endeavor that may not facilitate our understandings of our negotiations and interactions with others, our experiences, and the lifeworld itself (Husserl, 1973). Furthermore, phenomenologists acknowledge that every analysis is an

analysis from one point in time: As researchers, we cannot capture all dimensions of an experience.[4] In this project, I use Langsdorf's (1994) five, interrelated, non-linear stages of doing phenomenology: participation/observation, reflection, assertion, variation, and communication/participation. I will now interpret how each relates to this project.

From a phenomenological perspective, I can only investigate experiences I have personally experienced or those that others have informed me that they have experienced (participation/observation). Thus, this stage of doing phenomenology motivated my choosing of interview sites: Yellowstone, Busch Gardens, and Southern Illinois University (at Southern, I constructed a 25-minute televised-nature montage the interviewees watched before responding to my questions). Choosing people within these sites guaranteed that they had immediate exposure to and experience of at least one of my proposed nature environments; by engaging with my study, they had lived through one of my defined areas (e.g., authentic-, simulated-, or televised-nature). In the participant/observation stage of phenomenology, I can only talk about the mediated-nature dimensions of my life as positioned within the United States; I cannot address the dynamics of another geographically demarcated culture that re-creates and re-presents nature since I have never experienced one.

Once I designate my phenomenon, that is, experiences with simulated- and televised-nature, I "bracket" or isolate these experiences in order to investigate the "subjective modes of givenness" (Gadamer, 2000, p. 244). Here, I observed my thought processes surrounding the bracketed objects (reflection). This allowed me to reflect upon and describe my experiences with mediated forms of nature. For instance, I am terrified of swimming in the ocean. Using a phenomenological sensibility, I bracketed this "fear of the ocean" and reflected upon why I possess such emotion. In so doing, I uncovered numerous possibilities: frightening, visual images of the ocean from movies such as *Jaws* entered my mind; mainstream media outlets encourage me to distrust sharks and other oceanic creatures; I consider sea animals such as crabs and lobsters ugly and scary; while on vacation to Corpus Christi, Texas in 1988, a shark bit off a girl's arm in the vicinity where I swam the day before; and salt water makes my mouth dry and coats my body with a disgusting, oily layer. I used these possibilities as reasons for my steering clear of the water; I considered how they direct my actions towards some ends (trusting the media) and away from others (enjoying the ocean). In so doing, I uncover ways that mediated-nature experiences bleed into my life. In this project, I encouraged interviewees to engage in similar reflection by using follow-up questions during the interviews; I asked them to distance themselves from their experiences with simulated-, and televised-nature, reflect upon these experiences, and then describe their observations. I used their comments to discern potential ways that mediated-nature influences their lives.

When interviewees addressed mediated-nature experience, I used their commentary to make claims, in the form of themes, about simulated- and televised-nature (assertion). I then supported these themes using relevant scholarship and personal experience. I also do not consider the themes "universal truths"; I consider them

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[4] Schutz (1972) argues that "The intended meaning of a lived experience is nothing more nor less than a self-interpretation of that lived experience from the point of view of a new lived experience" (p. 78). Our experiences change depending on our cultural, spatio-temporal, socio-economical positioning. Thus, when describing and analyzing an experience, I can only provide a particular perspective at a particular point in time. At other times, my reflection upon and description of this experience change (Van Maanen, 1988).

possibilities relevant to a particular milieu all of which remain situated within the framework of this project.

This project developed from my own experience with mediated-nature. Before embarking on my interview journey, I possessed a narrow view of simulated- and televised-nature experience and worked to step outside of this limited perspective. Thus, I decided to speak with others. I wanted to see what they had to say about nature-related phenomena. I searched for possibilities, that is, other ways of viewing mediated-nature experience (variation).

After discerning themes generated from individuals' discussions, I then spoke with others (communication/participation) about these themes (e.g., in face-to-face conversations; this paper) to see if they "made sense." This is a move towards "validating" my subjective points of view, an attempt to move outside of my limited sphere of existence into a larger community. Here, I again acknowledge that these themes and my interpretations change while I work through this project: my understanding of mediated-nature changes depending on the latest book or article I read, recent conversations I have had with others about my work, and current lived-through experiences of "the wilderness." In other words, my perspectives toward this study and the "findings" I have discerned from it alter with time; as Plato (cited in Kierkegaard, 1941) once said, "'One cannot pass twice through the same stream'" (p. 132).

Approaching the Commentary

I encountered two significant problems after collecting and working with "the data." First, I followed my three question protocol during each interview. Sometimes the conversation steered away from nature-related material, but I would then encourage the interviewee to answer my questions. As a researcher, I consider this somewhat problematic in that I remained focused solely on getting answers. I did not allow interviewees to take me in new directions regarding mediated-nature. I realize the necessity of protocols, but I also value the conversations that emerge from interacting with others, not those generated from pre-formed questionnaires (Goodall, 2001).

Second, when I first approached this project, I intended to analyze how people made sense of authentic-, simulated-, and televised-nature. I conducted my interviews around this intention by asking every interviewee about each type of experience. I soon realized in the "writing up" (Wolcott, 2001) of this research that I only wanted to focus on how people made sense of simulated- and televised-nature experience, not how they made sense of authentic-nature interactions; we find authentic-nature accounts (i.e., tales of how people feel *in* and about nature) in many pop culture venues with one of the most famous and canonical being Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. (And when talking with the interviewees, most provided trite, *Walden*-esque answers towards authentic-nature experience, e.g., "It's beautiful.") Therefore, I directed my focus towards responses dealing with simulated- and televised-nature, responses not often found in mainstream settings. Furthermore, I realized that I only used authentic-nature as a category to stimulate discussion about mediated-nature. Thus, when discerning themes from interviewees' commentary, I did not include talk that foregrounded or privileged, authentic-nature experience.

For instance, I did not consider Ralph's response to my question (What would you like to tell me about how these three ways [i.e., authentic-, simulated-, and televised-nature] of experiencing nature affect you?) beneficial for highlighting his "making sense" of simulated- and televised-nature interactions:

> I find it peaceful to experience [authentic-nature] places first hand. I get the most out of nature when I do it this way. [In simulated- and televised-nature environments] there isn't a rush of experiencing something that you'll never experience again. Every time you go into [authentic-] nature you're going to feel something different. It's never going to be the same each time. I don't mind going to zoos, though, as long as I'm able to get out and do something.

Also, I did not consider John's response to the same question,

> Well, to me, it's great to experience nature on television. You can learn a lot, and information can go into your brain. But it's not the same thing as actually smelling a tree or actually touching a tree or having the feeling of it. When you're in nature, especially in a park like this [Yellowstone], I don't know about Busch Gardens or zoos or anything about that stuff, but like a place like this, even though people have designed it so that people can come into it, but still like this is a live tree. When I smell it or touch it or close my eyes and feel it, it brings something out in me that isn't brought out in TV because your senses are not being used, it's just eyesight.

Ralph and John briefly addressed their experiences with mediated-nature; thirteen other interviewees followed similarly. However, during the remainder of this study I focused on what people specifically said about simulated- and televised-settings, not authentic spaces.

When analyzing interviewee responses, I inductively allowed themes/patterns to emerge rather than deductively place the commentary into pre-formed categories. I transcribed each interview within one week of its occurrence. I also used a separate notebook to comment on, reflect upon, and pose new questions based on what each interviewee said.

I moved into coding the data, discerning themes, categories, and interrelationships which I felt the responses directed me towards. I focused on commentary that referenced simulated- and televised-nature, and then re-viewed this commentary to discern how interviewees' talked about the interactions as well as other experiences they thought about. I did not use any special tools or data analysis programs when transcribing my responses, and I typed interviewees' words as recorded. I also used the typed commentary to construct and reinforce themes, the unifying essences I discerned from their responses (Sandelowski, 1998). As previously stated, the interviewees' commentaries directed me towards the creation of these themes; I did not create them in advance.

After reading all of the commentary, I searched for clues in interviewees' comments, repeated words, phrases, and ideas and developed these themes. For instance, four people discussed how mediated-nature presentations influenced their embodied interactions with simulated- (Busch Gardens) and televised- (the African Savannah) space; thus, I created the theme "adapting to simulated- and televised-nature environments." Five individuals specifically addressed the content of mediated-nature experience (i.e., what it consisted of) as well as how it allowed them to imaginatively travel to distant places; thus, I created the theme "vicariously experiencing nature." Two interviewees described how television programs influenced and constituted their realities about places in the world (e.g., Italy and authentic-nature); thus, I created the theme "'picturing' nature." Three people talked about "zoos" when discussing simulated-nature experience; thus, I created the theme "negotiating zoo experience." I did not intend to provide an all-encompassing discussion of relationships with mediated-nature. Rather, I used these themes to "reframe understanding or explanation of an event" (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002, p. 216) to come to know how others make sense of mediated-nature experience.

(Un)Natural "Findings"

In this section, I present the themes I developed from interviewees' commentaries. As stated, I developed four themes involving mediated-nature experience: (1) adapting to simulated- and televised-nature environments; (2) vicariously experiencing nature; (3) "picturing" nature; and (4) negotiating zoo experience. In the next section, I move into my description of the interviewees' accounts, making sense of their stories via analysis and interpretation (Sandelowski, 1998). I interpreted their responses, possibilities of what they felt and thought, why they felt and thought as they did, and how their experiences resonated with my own mediated-nature interactions and relevant scholarship.

Adapting to Simulated- and Televised-Nature Environments

We interact with physical spaces and mass mediated displays in a variety of ways, but we sometimes do not realize how they alter our conceptualizations of the world. For instance, consider Elliott's claim:

> Here [at Busch Gardens, a simulated-nature space] you are on a mission to conquer nature and there [in authentic-nature] you can just enjoy nature for what its worth. Here you have to get everything done because [you] paid for it.

While Elliott briefly addressed the economical issues of a simulated-nature environment, Camille touched on the safety of such places:

> Simulated-nature places are crowded. You got to worry about somebody smashing your stuff. It's a lot more tense [than visiting a state park, an authentic-nature space] and you're more 'on guard'.

Veronica added another dimension to how spaces influence us, discussing how mediated-nature environments encourage us to be fake and lazy:

> Authentic-nature places relaxes a person whereas artificial [simulated-], uptight places make people feel like they have to be 'fake,' just like the nature. Relaxation in authentic places is more real in experience and feeling than televised settings, even though they are also relaxing in a lazy, non-realistic way. Artificial [i.e., simulated] nature places can actually be experienced whereas televised, lazy settings cannot. Television makes people lazy.

And while Zeke may dislike the "lazy" label Veronica may give him, he discerned what televised-nature settings require of him in order to take part in the action:

> When I'm watching some of the African Savannah documentaries on the *Discovery* channel, which are amazing, it's literally like they've strapped the camera on the head of the animal. And you wonder how real is this, how much did they try to make it real at the expense of how real it actually is. Watching nature on television requires, much like in theater, a suspension of your disbelief. Like you know that the cameraman wasn't really this close to the tiger, but you have to suspend that disbelief in order to participate in the show. And you know that they didn't strap cameras to the tiger cubs' heads and show what they saw, but you have to suspend that disbelief in order to participate in the program.

I believe that all of these interviewees highlighted ways that simulated- and televised-nature environment can impact our behavior, whether it involves getting everything done in order to get the most mileage out of your dollar, negotiating issues of safety, fitting into the role of couch potato or displaying "fake" appearances, or having to restructure your thoughts about "reality" in order to participate in a particular medium of communication.

Vicariously Experiencing Nature

Television may allow us to interact with nature without having to exert much effort and may provide us with opportunities to experience distant places we may never visit. Luke and Mary, who I interviewed together at Yellowstone National Park, made such a claim in that television, with its significant amount of programming, supplied them with exposure to places they may never travel:

> Luke: We just seen [*sic*] a nature program on Tazmania and some of those things are marvelous. Now probably, I'll never get to Tazmania.
> Mary: But [the film] was a great second-best.

After this comment, a scraggly coyote walked next to us. Luke and Mary became excited by the creature's presence and, knowing that I had worked in the area the previous year,

asked me if it was tame. I told them that I did not think so. They then processed the event in relation to our previous discussion about different types of nature experience:

> Luke: To see a bedraggled coyote five feet from me just means so much more for me than seeing it on television. It just enriches my life. It's something that makes me happier.
> Mary: It's many, many more times enriching [seeing a coyote in person] and is much different than seeing it on television. I've probably seen coyotes on TV several times or in pictures, but the feeling I'm anticipating seeing it and I'll know I'll remember it much more than I would [seeing it on TV].

This situation encouraged Luke and Mary to reflect upon televised-nature experience and further solidified their claim that television receives "second-best" when it comes to actual experience. Brenda hinted at this idea as well, but seemed to appreciate television's ability to grant her access to unique areas:

> I watch a lot of nature shows because I cannot always get out to the places I want to be. They kind of suffice that little bit of me that [wants to be in nature, and it] makes me feel at home to see it on television.

Wayne accomplishes a similar feat when experiencing televised versions of nature, only he replaces his body with the positioning and location of the camera:

> [. . .] in videos like *Jaws* I can picture myself swimming and doing a backstroke in the water and enjoying the sky. And the same thing with [the nature featured in] films like *Jurassic Park*: I can feel being there.

Xena further contributed to this discussion, arguing that televised (re)presentations can motivate her to travel to new and seemingly exciting places:

> [Experiencing nature on television] is similar to this example: I really want to go to Italy because of the movie *A Room with a View*, and a few other Italian movies like *Bed of Roses* a foreign Italian film that's pretty authentic. That's where we're [she and her husband] going to take our honeymoon. We both have never been to Italy before, but we have both seen lots of movies that romanticize Italy. Our opinions are based on what we've seen on TV and the pictures we've seen.

These ideas suggest that the conditions of mediums, specifically those featuring simulated- and televised-nature, may equip us with tools to use when approaching nature-related ideas and spaces. These mediums may also allow us access to distant areas we may never feel or see.

"Picturing" Nature

Mediated pictures of objects have the potential to affect our personal, embodied experiences of and communication about them, and the more we become exposed to mediated re-creations of various phenomena, the more we may transfer aspects of these pictures into our realities (Gerbner & Gross, 2002). For instance, consider Xena's previous discussion:

> I really want to go to Italy because of the movie *A Room with a View*, and a few other Italian movies like *Bed of Roses* a foreign Italian film that's pretty authentic. That's where we're [she and her husband] going to take our honeymoon. We both have never been to Italy before, but we have both seen lots of movies that romanticize Italy. Our opinions are based on what we've seen on TV and the pictures we've seen.

Xena transferred aspects generated from mediated-pictures, specifically those pertaining to Italy, into her reality of Italy. Analogically, a similar phenomenon occurs if, after we visit a restaurant that specializes in "authentic Mexican cuisine" we feel as though we really experienced Mexican culture or that Mexican culture resembles the food and place presented, that is, "pictured." Or, if we have never personally seen an ocean, I'm sure that we would still have images of one based on pictures to which we have been exposed.

Zeke's experiences with mediated-nature somewhat parallel that of Xena's, but they venture into negative territory when he transfers his mediated pictures into his reality of authentic-nature space:

> You think that [authentic-] nature is going to be like a Monet painting. You think it's going to be lily pads and flowers. But then you get there and there are bugs and wild cats. It's not like a Monet painting, but you think that it's going to be. It's pretty, until you get there. So I like televised nature because it takes away the bugs, it takes away the smell, it takes away the heat and all the stuff like that [. . .] When I watch nature on television I know that if I was standing there next to Jeff Corwin bugs would bite me and the snake may bite me too so it seems real.

Langsdorf (1994) provides a theoretical base for Zeke's claim: "If we read or listen to others telling about any of these tactile or kinesthetic experiences, we expect congruency between what we read and our embodied experience" (p. 106). Zeke didn't experience this congruency during his interactions with authentic-nature.

Negotiating Zoo Experience

When asked about various types of nature experiences, three interviewees at Yellowstone National Park discussed their interactions with and attitudes toward zoos. During the conversations, each attempted to compare zoo visits with their feelings generated from their immersion in Yellowstone National Park. For instance, consider Gary's claim:

> Zoos are less realistic than in it is here [Yellowstone]. They have all of the bars, they [the animals] have adapted to human environments. They are not house trained, but they are accustomed to the humans around them.

Luke and Mary seem less critical of zoos when addressing the nature experiences they provide

> Luke: The Bronx Zoo does a good job, it's a great zoo, a famous zoo. And they do a great job. Thirty years ago they used to leave the animals in cages, and the tigers were so miserable in cages, they do re-create the environment. But it's not the same as being right here [in Yellowstone]. You could get killed out here, that's not why we're here for the thrill, but you could get killed out here.
> Mary: I like zoos because of the predictability factor, even though the views as zoos are much better than they used to be, at least in the east they are not in cages so much as they're in their habitat, but there's always a moat or bushes that prevent the animals [from] reaching you.

Even through Gary, Luke, and Mary addressed the potential controversy surrounding the value of and practices within zoos, each articulated how she/he made sense of the simulated-nature space.

(Un)Natural Commentary

> In order to develop an effective politics of everyday life, we need to understand better than we do now [. . .] the 'micropolitics' of our most ordinary transactions, the ways in which we inscribe and reinscribe our subjection in the fabric of the ordinary.
> --Sandra Lee Bartky (1990), *"Femininity and Domination"*

> The saddest thing I ever did see
> Was a woodpecker peckin' at a plastic tree.
> He looks at me, and "Friend," says he,
> "Things ain't as sweet as they used to be."
> --Shel Silverstein (1981), "Peckin"[5]

I have encountered much tension, with myself and with others, about how mediated-nature environments affect our communication and ideas about nature. Some of this tension may occur because many of us can not imagine life without television, email, or shopping malls. When I first spoke with others about this project, I remained critical of simulated- and televised-nature. Now, I find it difficult to think about life without such luxuries, especially since they provide me with nature-related experiences without having to exert much effort. In this section, I provide some personal observations and experiences related to interviewees' ideas about mediated-nature.

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[5] I thank Tammy Jeffries for providing me with this poem.

Five interviewees described how simulated- and televised-nature encounters influenced how they think, feel, and act. For instance, mediated representations of the world encouraged Xena and Zeke to think and act differently towards the aspects featured in these representations, and Elliott, Camille, and Veronica acted differently depending upon the nature environments in which they found themselves immersed. While working in Wyoming, I noticed this idea as well: Many visitors of Yellowstone had a difficult time adjusting to the *lack* of mediated experiences within and around the park. I constantly heard children complain of boredom, and folks commonly asked where the exciting activities were. (I even had one man, a visitor of the resort at which I worked, yell at me because the guest rooms did not have television.) I would argue that many mediated-narratives of Yellowstone remain riddled with adventurous and exciting images. Thus, exposure to these mediated narratives may affect individuals' perceptions of and interactions within the park as well as their ideas about what the space "contains."

Many authentic-nature environments, in an attempt to compete with the expectations we may acquire via interactions with mediated-nature settings, have tried to become more exciting. For example, many state parks now provide cable hookups for campers, and Yellowstone National Park continually constructs new paths that allow visitors access to previously concealed parts of the park. A plethora of tourist stores, restaurants, and tours have surfaced in similar government-managed parks, and hunting has been abolished in order to make them safe, family-friendly areas. Furthermore, these places must strive towards maximizing the time visitors stay because the more time spent, the more money is made. And, as with most businesses in a capitalistic society, profitability keeps them functioning.

After returning from Wyoming, I also noticed the emotional and social requirements associated with various spaces. For instance, when we travel into authentic-nature areas, such as Yellowstone, we should feel relaxed and enjoy the scenery in which we're immersed; if we venture into Disneyworld, we should enjoy it, especially since it's the "happiest place on earth;" and we should not feel guilty about visiting Sea World because we're told, by management, that "just by being here, you're showing that you care" (Davis, 1997, p. 39). Furthermore, if we do not assume the appropriate emotions related to each environment, we may encounter criticism from others. So, if I did not enjoy my trip to Disney, I'm outcast from mainstream society unless I can provide valid reasons for my deviant response.[6]

Five interviewees seemed to physically experience place and space via television. Fürsich (2002) presents a similar idea when discussing televised travel programs, and Quammen (2000) directly addresses this in relation to nature, arguing that "You can go bird watching in Botswana without suffering the jet lag or the shots" or can "get a zoo-visitor experience without even crossing town to the zoo" (p. 202) by going to the local video store to rent nature films. If embodied engagement occurs by way of such televised-nature representations, that is, if we feel as though we *actually* went bird

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[6] Eaton (1995) provides a foundation for this idea in claiming that "How one feels depends to a great extent on how one learns one is expected to feel" (p. 96). Carlson (2002) specifically connects this argument to nature: "we see in nature what we have been taught to look for, and we feel what we have been prepared to feel" (p. 61). Neumann (1999) displays how such an idea surfaces on visits to and in discussions about the Grand Canyon.

watching or visited the zoo, what impact does this have on our desire to seek out and our communication about these represented areas?

In connection with such mediated-nature "pictures," we may transfer parts of these pictures (e.g., images, feelings) into authentic-nature settings. (Xena highlighted a similar idea when talking about how she takes televised-images of Italy into Italy itself; Zeke explicitly identified this when he said that he transfers televised-images of nature into his embodied experiences of nature-related settings.) Then, if the authentic-nature settings do not to live up to our expectations, we may become disappointed or we may become injured. For instance, a coyote passed by Luke and Mary as I interviewed them. I did not acknowledge the animal, but they projected a fascinated attitude towards it. I then watched others attempt to interact with the animal. Many tried to pet the coyote, but, once it displayed its sharp teeth, these same folks ended their advance. Why would people do such a thing? Who would approach a wild creature without hesitation?

If I had never worked in Wyoming and received training on how to interact with wild animals, I am sure I would have behaved in a similar way. I always thought that if we acted nicely towards animals, even wild animals, the creatures would return the niceness; an animal should not or would not feel threatened if I did not want to hurt it. At least that is what I thought. Every year, though, many tourists visiting Yellowstone become injured, even killed, by animals because they possess similar beliefs. King (1996) highlights an instance of this, claiming that Americans usually have the

> tendency to err on the side of cuteness [and this] can have consequences that range from the beneficial—the preservation of species—to the downright stupid: for example, a tourist couple cited by a Yellowstone Park ranger, who covered their son's face with honey for a bear to lick for a photo opportunity. (p. 67)

While this story may appear extreme, I find it important to consider possible conditions as to why many of us may possess such an idea. Evernden (1992) suggests that "through our conceptual domestication of nature, we extinguish wild otherness even in the imagination" (p. 116). If this serves as one possibility, what factors facilitate the acquisition of such an attitude? Do animal portrayals in shows such as *Bambi* (Disney, 1942) or *Sesame Street* (Sesame Workshop, 2004) play a role in this acquisition? What about zoos and, more specifically, petting zoos? Characters such as "Tony the Tiger" or "Michigan J. Frog?" Circuses? Siegfried and Roy? I argue that each has the potential to contribute to our ideas about the tameness of animals.

Three interviewees attempted to detail the role zoos play in society as well as how they physically and psychologically interacted with such spaces. This motivated me to reflect upon whether hegemonic places like zoos could serve as fine alternatives to authentic-nature areas. Gary, an interviewee at Busch Gardens, addressed this idea:

> It's 2002 now and you figure that in another 100 years it's going to all be like this [simulated-nature]. You have to put it in perspective: the way the population is growing this is all we are going to have left. You'll have to see animals in cages, just like this.

> My question: Do you think that some people get their fix of nature through places such as this?
>
> Gary: City people may think they get their "fix" of nature through places like this because they don't know any different. It's just like having sex: if you've never had it you don't know what you're missing.

In the spirit of McLuhan (1964), I wonder how these nature-related mediums affect our lives. Does it matter if we come to rely on mediated-nature for our nature experiences?[7]

I have come to realize that nature is a transitory, situated category. Our conception of it changes often. Simulated- and televised-nature environments may influence how we approach nature, and I find it important to understand how this occurs. Understanding allows us to see and act in new ways and to work towards "construct[ing] a world that is worth living in" (Conquergood, 1986, p. 33). Wild animals are *not* friendly, but why do some of us believe they are? And what happens if we approach authentic-nature areas with mediated-nature realities? I live with these questions, these dilemmas, when making sense of my life and my relation to cultural phenomena such as nature. I am not searching for answers or "the Truth," since "knowing a culture, even our own, is a never-ending story" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 119). I am only searching for new ways to negotiate nature.

Concluding Naturally

> Could places like Sea World come to typify our contact with nature better than walks on the beach, hikes in the hills, or struggles with the garden? And if theme parks do become our commonsense models for nature, should we care?
> --Susan G. Davis (1997), *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*

> It's 1995, and I doubt that my brushes with nature are going to become simpler or more direct, less mediated, or any less tangled in a consumer economy.
> --Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company"

I am immersed in a world in which I cannot escape (mass) mediated encounters. I must type on a computer in order to complete this paper. I can choose not to watch television, listen to the radio, or surf the net, but I guarantee that someone with whom I interact does. Because of my location, I must use a car to travel into areas designated as "wilderness," which, as I have suggested, are regulated by local, state, and national government agencies. I live in a world where I constantly hear cell phones ring. I have also realized that I must spend a good amount of my life indoors because, as my dermatologist once told me, "if I didn't I'd get cancer."

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[7] Davis' (1997) book, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience,* revolves around such an idea.

During the latter part of this paper, I've attempted to explicate mediated-nature qualities of our lives. Phenomenology allows for such an explication. I do acknowledge limitations of this project. The first deals with social class. All of my interviews took place within three privileged environments: a theme park, a national park, and a university. In order to gain entry into each of these places, a fair amount of money is required. Thus, I have left out individuals who lack this resource. Second, many of my interviewees possessed a preservation-is-correct attitude and thereby appeared concerned about the environment. A limitation surfaces when discussing mediated-nature experiences with these same folks since many automatically assumed a disapproving stance towards mediated-nature experiences. Finally, I do not generalize that *everyone* experiences nature in ways that I have highlighted. I imply that our perceptions about and behavior towards nature may become influenced by mediated-nature settings, but I present this as a possibility rather than a totalizing claim.

Many areas concerning the relationship between mediated forms of nature and culture remain unexplored. Future research on the topic may uncover deeper relationships between authentic-, simulated-, and televised-nature settings. Other research could investigate relationships among simulated- and televised-nature representations and environmental crusades focused on managing authentic-nature areas. For instance, many of these movements have not considered the *impact* mediated-nature has on individuals or on environmental conservation; Most only consider *why* authentic-nature places should be preserved. With this in mind, new strategies could develop in the realm of environmental management.

Mediated nature influences our lives, our perceptual and communicative capacities towards nature-based phenomena, and our movement through the world. It also shapes interactions and relationships we have with "the wilderness." I have come to realize that with regard to simulated-nature settings, I often take space for granted; in connection to televised-nature experiences, I typically do not reflect on their political dimensions nor do I consider how such portrayals could affect my view of nature. However, in talking with others, I have come to better understand the dynamics of mediated nature experiences that I frequently encounter.

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