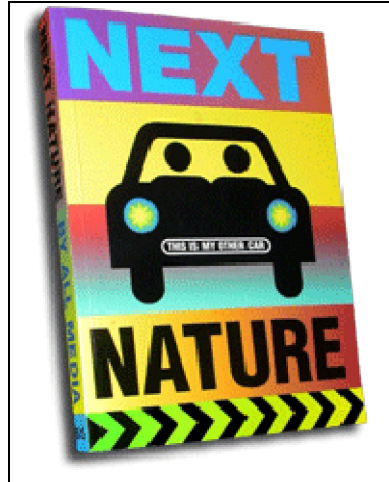


Next Nature - Next Nature - Next Nature

See: <http://www.nextnature.net>



Koert van Mensvoort:

“There may even come a moment that our connection with an industrially manufactured coke bottle may be richer and more mythical than our relation with a genetically analyzed and manipulated rabbit in the woods”.

Next Nature FAQ

Q: What is Next Nature about?

Next nature is the nature caused by human culture. That may sound like a contradiction, but really, it isn't. Our technological world has become so intricate and uncontrollable that it has become a nature of its own. This means we have to re-investigate our notion of nature.

Q: Nature caused by human culture? Sorry, I don't get it.

A: Well, let's look at old nature first. Everyone knows nature is often cultivated. But it is still less known that the opposite can happen as well: culture can become nature. That is next nature. The main idea behind next nature is the insight that we should not see nature as something static, but rather as a dynamic force that changes along with us.

Q: Nature is changing along with us. What do you mean with that?

Old nature, in the sense of trees, plants, animals, atoms, or climate, is getting increasingly controlled and governed by man. It has turned into a cultural category. At the same time, products of culture, which we used to be in control of man, tend to outgrow us and become autonomous. Our notions of nature and culture seem to be trading places. The 'natural powers' shift to another field.

Q: Do you have a definition of Next Nature?

A: Next Nature is culturally emerged nature.

Q: Culturally emerged nature? You mean plastic flowers?

A: No. Plastic flowers are fake nature. Plastic flowers try to look like nature, but they are culture. Next nature is not about that. Next nature is real nature, no representation, or a simulation of some long-lost phenomenon. It might be difficult to explain what next nature is, but we sure can tell you what it isn't.

Q: How can nature emerge from culture?

A: It is very simple. Everyone knows that nature can be cultivated. It shouldn't be hard to imagine that also the opposite can happen as well: Culture can become nature. That's next nature.

Q: Are nature and culture becoming one?

No, that is not where we are aiming for. Some people say nature & culture are one and the same thing. But this is not a workable model; in the end you aren't saying anything. We still want to distinguish nature from culture. But the way to do draw the border between the two is changing. In the past, Nature was the realm of the 'born' and culture was the realm of the 'made'. But through human science these categories became blurry. The new way to distinguish culture from nature is to draw a line between 'controllable' and 'autonomous'.

Q: What do you mean with 'culturally emerged nature' exactly?

A: Nature that emerges from culture might sound like a contradiction. Still, we argue that some things that weren't nature to begin at first can, at a certain point, become nature. It happens when cultural products are so 'out of control' that they become autonomous.

Q: Can you give a few examples of next nature?

A: Yes, here are some examples.

Example 1: Mobile phones. Fifteen years ago they didn't exist, now everyone has one and when you leave your house without it, you feel amputated. Like you are missing a limb and you go back to your house to get it.

Example 2: The use of domestic robots is rapidly increasing. People don't have time to look after their smart alarm clocks, toasters and vacuum cleaners anymore. They will have to organize themselves.

Example 3: Lots of people play games. That's culture. But when some people start living in games and even manage to earn an income within a virtual world. Then it becomes next nature.

Example 4: The Enologix company of Sonoma, California, makes software that predicts how a wine will rate in reviews even before it is made. In order to achieve the high rating, winemakers invest in processes rooted not in agriculture but in biochemical information. Wine making becomes an information science.

Example 5: In cities like Los Angeles, it is almost impossible to live without a car.

Example 6: The global economy is such a complex system we are unable to control it. Of course people try to influence it, but we cannot completely control it. It's a next nature phenomenon.

Example 7: Products that grow in its own packaging

Q: Why do you use the word 'nature' for these phenomena? Isn't that confusing?

A: We speak about Nature, because it has all the pragmatic functioning of nature, so that is what we should call it (even when it is not green). Next nature it is as real as can be, and has all the workings, threads and opportunities of the older, natural phenomena. It might be confusing at first, but after a while things become clear again.

Q: Why is next nature so important? What is the urgency?

A: If you ask people what Nature is, they mention trees, animals, everything that is green. People tend to talk about nature in recreational terms or as something that is long lost. We believe this image of nature is naive. If you ask people to talk about nature in more abstract terms, they describe nature as: infinite, inaccessible, overwhelming in power, primal, wild and fearsome. Where can this kind of nature be found nowadays? In the park on the outskirts of the town? Or on the windowsill, where your cat is gently sleeping? Probably not. Nature likes to hide itself. Our next nature arises from cultural products that have become so complex that the only way we can relate to them is in terms of a man-nature relationship.

Q: Is next nature related to ongoing scientific research?

A: Nanotechnology, Genetic manipulation, Ambient intelligence, Tissue engineering, Neuroscience, Social Software, Soft Architecture. All of these young research fields radically interfere with our sense of what is 'natural'. They are connected in the next nature research.

Q: What do you mean with old nature?

A: Old nature is the part of nature still untainted by human influence. Think about deep sea, the South Pole, the moon. Indeed, there isn't much old nature left. Old nature is the part of nature that is not next nature.

Q: When did next nature start?

A: It would be difficult to pinpoint one moment at which is started. Some argue it started with the

industrialization. Others take early human activity as its starting point. The emergence of next nature happened over time. Its influence is continuously increasing.