

Reading with reciprocity, Nature's Looking-Glass

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1. What is the main point of the author?

By bringing up the red-tailed hawks' (Picture1) nest incident on the 12th-floor window ledge of NYU's Bobst Library, the author argues that it's crucial to perceive the so-called "asocial nature" and "social nature" as overlapping modes of experience in order to foster a deep admiration and concern for both the environment and society. The event, which might have been a once-in-a-while regular occurrence in the city, ended up being one of the in-person gatherings and social media conversations about many academic subjects, such as environmental studies, ornithology, zoology, sustainability, and others.

This incident sparked intense debates about whether humans should intervene to remove Violet's band, strengthen the nest, or even assist in cracking open the eggs. It also raised the question of whether people should accept hawks as "city birds" whose resourcefulness reflected an admirable adaptation to the urban environment they inhabited. In actuality, nature enables us to transcend social life, but social frames have a huge impact on how we see nature; even when we discuss asocial nature, we are framing it within a social context.

This article reminds me of a recent one that I read about the controversy surrounding drawing a line between nature and gardens. In that article, the author argued that the best strategy is something in the middle, neither dominance nor acquiescence, by basing his main point on a personal experience involving a woodchuck that he encountered while planting in his garden, which is unfenced (Pollan, 1991). The significance of considering the intertwined interaction between nature, humans, and our society has, in my opinion, been up playing in both papers.

The author claims that the ideal wild nature is primarily a concept in our minds and does not exist in reality. In actuality, the presence of various animal species in cities is nature adapting to human life. Yet, we are unaware of this because we don't view it as nature and don't value it as highly as we would a vision of untamed nature that has not been touched by humans.

These occurrences, similar to the story of the nest, blur the boundaries of a succession of situations and demonstrate that there is no strict structure, such as that between social and non-social nature; both nature and human society are influenced by one another. In fact, "my Wilderness articles" discussed how our social experiences greatly influence how we perceive the natural world (Schwarz, 2021).

2. What are the strengths of the text you have read?

The astonishing feature of this essay is how it opens with a fascinating account of a seemingly unimportant incident. This introduction was what initially interested me about the subject because we frequently encountered bird eggs on our balcony at home. It is brilliant to enter into such a profound and nuanced topic with this opening, and it can also appeal to the reader's own experiences, like mine. This ostensibly straightforward subject opens a complicated doorway to numerous discussions, not only from the standpoint of fundamental research and the scientific sciences but also from theological and moral perspectives, etc.

The audience is progressively drawn from the confines of a story narrative to a more in-depth conversation about the link between humans and nature by quoting William Cronon about how humans are turning to nature.

Then, by concentrating on the hawk's case file, a few different perspectives on nature that can be loosely categorized as Asocial nature and Social nature; by mentioning James Gibson's studies on how nature was revered and thought to have a special spirit in pre-modern societies, a view that significantly diminished in the modern age and by the advancement of science to be just a commodity in capitalist society; and finally, by emphasizing the hawk's case file;

By focusing more on animals, such as the transition of the wolf into a domestic dog and his mention of the loss of our regard for the asocial nature, John Berger shows a danger to the environment and society, according to both Gibson and Berger. The enchanted nature thesis, the asocial wilderness ideal, and the imagination of the wild—concepts that people appear to be dealing with inherently—are all mentioned afterward.

He uses Emile Durkheim's study of totemism in pre-modern aboriginal clans to illustrate how the social and natural world are inextricably intertwined in his studies on social nature. He also uses Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich's statement that every landscape is a "symbolic environment created by the human act of conferring meaning." In other words, we give greater credit to the surroundings that align with our personal notions and are derived from particular social circumstances. In this regard, Michael Bell provides an illustration of how people behave toward the natural world dependent on their socioeconomic status and class. He then refers to Cronon's argument that it is crucial to remember that the "fantasy of the wild" is a concept created by American urban elites who have never lived close to the land as a nationalism symbol; a menacing concept that affects evicting those who lived on the land and can encourage apathy toward the "impure" environments that the majority of humans actually inhabit.

He refers to Erving Goffman's explanation of the point at which our understanding of nature was altered in both the enchanted ideal and the social reality in the "frame break" part, and he follows up the debate with the example of the natural history museum, films, and habitat dioramas. By looking at their research on Turkish immigrants and their relationships with birds and how they describe it, he comes to the conclusion that "the social experience of nature can enhance our understanding of it and how asocial and social experiences of nature are intertwined" (Angelo & Jerolmack, 2012, p. 29).

3. What can we further elaborate on the text to complement the author's message?

As I said previously, as soon as I read the article's start, it brought back memories of my own encounters with birds in my parents' home. This is a really fascinating interaction between people and animals in their personal spaces, one that can touch on morals, spirituality, and religious beliefs as well as matters pertaining to the bacteria and infections that birds may spread or the unavoidable guanos that birds leave on people's balconies. Perhaps more original stories should be included.

My parents raised countless generations of pigeons on our balcony because they believed that nesting a bird on the balcony brought good fortune. However, considering that our neighborhood is monocultural, our other neighbors used to think that this had the exact opposite meaning and that you should remove the nest and eggs as soon as possible. After several hours of conversation, we came to our own conclusions and kept keeping pigeons.

They refused to eat even one seed when I tried to put some bird food out for them a few times, but we have been making sure they had access to ample water, especially during the warmer months. I used to observe how they started teaching their kids to fly and how they fed their kids; Observing this cycle of life was always a mixture of joy and torture for me, especially when it once happened that a crew took the children away; a heavy sad day for our family while we never had touched them or got close to them. Some children learned to fly easily while others happened to be bitten up and threaten to crash from the fences by their parents and it forced them to learn this way.

4. If his/her ideas are implemented, what would be the positive effects on the world?

"The social experience of nature can enhance our understanding of it and how asocial and social experiences of nature are intertwined." that is what the authors mentioned in the final paragraphs. Considering environmental issues that are affecting our daily life in many aspects, seems it is really necessary to relate to nature spiritually, and when we are seeing ourselves as social creatures but tied up to nature, it is needed to reconsider our relationship with nature. after overcoming nature's forces during the industrial revolution, the history of the relationship of humans with nature started to rewriting; while the urban areas were designed and constructed as separate places of living, like a garden from nature, still the presence of nature is felt and the way it adapted itself to drew to our daily life with a different way.

the social experience of nature can enhance our understanding of it when people share their knowledge and experiences in a social setting to experience nature and learn from each other's perspectives and insights; meanwhile, this experience can cultivate a sense of community with shared responsibility for the environment. This can lead to a deeper appreciation for nature and a greater desire to protect it and encourage critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the scientific principles underlying natural phenomena.

The ideas presented in "Nature's Looking-Glass" have the potential to contribute to a more sustainable, equitable, and livable urban environment, with positive effects on both human society and the natural world. However, the implementation of these ideas would require a significant shift in urban design and planning practices, as well as a broader cultural shift in how we think about and engage with nature in urban environments.



Picture 1 Photographer and Copyright: Christopher N. Ciccone Source: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/red-tailed-hawk>

References

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