

The Unnatural Society of Humans

In the last century, technology has advanced at an unfathomable rate. Inventions like electricity, appliances, and the internet have made people's lives easier as well as spreading entertainment and connection to every corner of the world. However, this increased creation and adoption of technology into every aspect of people's lives leaves the burning question: where does society draw the line? Rarely is it possible to escape from the endless stream of advertisements and media that pervade society. Thus, many wonder whether reliance on these technologies is causing humans to lose touch with nature, and as result, losing touch with themselves. In 2008, not long after the release of the first smart phone, Richard Louv presented his case in *Last Child in the Woods*. In the excerpt from this text, Louv employs rhetorical choices as he notes the harrowing omnipresence of consumerism in modern America while he appeals to parental nostalgia of the 50s and 60s in order to convince readers to refocus on the value of nature in childhood.

To emphasize this lost connection with nature, Louv highlights the ubiquity of consumerist values in America through a variety of rhetorical choices. He starts the passage with a formal tone like that of a research paper, further shown through the very first line being "Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo are experimenting with a genetic technology" (Louv 1-2). By removing personal voice, he makes his writing sound as artificial as the advertisements that he highlights. He repeats this monotonous tone through his short and direct sentences: "Sales are brisk; the prices are falling" (Louv 38). As he gets more detached, he is signaling to the reader the result of being so reliant on technology that humanity is now completely absent, further corroborating his ideas of over-implementation of consumerism. Additionally, Louv constantly uses diction that would be associated with business, such as

referring to companies as “cash-strapped municipalities” and 50 years of life as a “half-century survival in the material world.” Through this manner, Louv is displaying how deeply marketing is ingrained into the lives of Americans, so much so that he would define life as “survival in the material world”. Louv also incorporates a personal anecdote to support his point of consumerism being everywhere. His friend from the anecdote explains that “the salesman’s jaw dropped when I said I didn’t want a backseat television for my daughter” (Louv 29-31). By using a real example, Louv is demonstrating that this problem of constant bombardment of technology is not just affecting billboards and multi-million dollar corporations; these issues affect everyone, even parents just looking “for a little backseat peace” (Louv 37) instead of actually connecting with their children. Then, Louv appeals to the logical argument that heavy reliance on technology leads to a loss of appreciation of nature: “the logical extension of synthetic nature is the irrelevance of ‘true nature’--the certainty that it’s not even worth looking at” (Louv 17-19). By referring to advertisements as “synthetic” and the real world as “true,” Louv explains that the over-marketed world has as a result lost touch with their “true” identities and the world, pushing readers to understand the gravity of the situation. He then concludes with the idea that people have created such an aversion to the natural world, even their natural selves, that spending time away from all the manufactured entities is “not even worth looking at.” Overall, Louv’s stress of the omnipresent nature of consumerism in America through his rhetorical choices force the reader to consider the humanity lost in the process of ignoring nature.

After underlining the widespread push for consumerism and neglect of nature in modern society, Louv appeals to the logic and nostalgic feelings of current parents to convince them to let their children experience nature the way they once did. Louv asks a series of rhetorical questions to allow the reader to think for themselves. For instance, Louv inquires, “Why do so

many Americans say they want their children to watch less TV, yet continue to expand the opportunities for them to watch it?" (Louv 43-45). In this case, Louv points out the situational irony of many parents across America as they act against their own words, underlining the logical fallacy in their ideas and thus allowing space for his coming argument. He follows this question with another where he asks why "so many people no longer consider the physical world worth watching" (Louv 46-47). By repeating the word "watch" across these questions, Louv juxtaposes the reality of children being addicted to screens with his idea of watching nature, further highlighting the difference between current America and his childhood. He then alludes to the Conestoga wagon, a vehicle drawn by horses in the nineteenth century. This allusion, along with others such as "shaving cream signs" and "little plastic cars" make the readers, presumably current parents, think back on America's past and their own childhoods. As he instills nostalgia in the readers, he then mentions a hypothetical future, forcing readers to consider the contrast of past America against modern America. By juxtaposing past and present, Louv recounts the change of nature's role in children's lives over time and impels the reader to bring nature's presence into current children's childhoods. Louv ends the piece with a positive and nostalgic tone as he describes car rides from childhood, times he describes as "useful boredom" as he watched "dancing rain" and "dreamed of the future" (Louv 62, 69, 72). The oxymoron of "useful boredom" reminds readers that time can have value beyond the overdone cost-benefit analysis; sometimes that "waste of time" brings more benefit than anything else. The "dancing rain" and "dream[ing] of the future" also bring out a deeper sense of nostalgia and longing for imagination in readers, causing them to look fondly at their own memories and as a result wish the same for their own kids. The intense nostalgia is hammered in as he ends by stating "it all [went] by in the blink of an eye" (Louv 74) furthering playing on the parental

tendency of not wanting one's kids to grow up so fast; this feeling in turn causes parents to question how their kids are spending the little bit of childhood they have. Ultimately, Louv's appeal to parental emotions through rhetorical choices impel readers to reinstate nature in their children's lives as he highlights the impression it had on his own.

Throughout the excerpt, Louv highlights the strong disconnect between humans and nature caused by technology and consumerism through a variety of his rhetorical choices. He illustrates how fundamental his memories of nature were in his childhood, thus calling on readers to perpetuate the same feelings in the lives of their own children. His words underline not only the loss of nature in childhood, but also ask society as a whole where its priorities lie. He demonstrates how quickly society is slipping into one giant advertisement, and reminds readers that the most value in life comes from parts that are real and authentic, the most authentic of which are human relationships and nature. These ideas show a broader need for more nature, more humanity, and more authenticity to be propelled in modern society rather than just efficiency and ease. The wider implications of this idea ask society to take a step back, take the scenic route, and make some time to stop and smell the roses; life is too short to stare at a billboard the whole time.