Anqi Wang

English 250 Assignment 3

Date 04/27/2012

Section FK

Ms. McCourt

Where is the Real Nature?

When I watch “Animal Universe” (a television program about nature), I always think whether it is a real wild life or not. On the article called “the Artifice of the Natural”, which originally appeared in Harper’s magazine in February 1993, Charles Siebert states how nature seen through the media (television programs) is different from the real nature. Also he argues that people should perceive less artificial to nature shows and encourages people to return to real nature. To make his thesis more convictive, he uses an interesting cartoon, lists reasons in a logical way and uses a cynical writing style. Siebert is an essayist, journalist and the author of nonfiction books. Sometimes he publishes his articles on Harper’s, which is a monthly magazine of literature, politics, culture, finance, and the arts. Thus, the intended readers are people who are interested in literature.

The author found this argument occasionally. One Sunday evening, Siebert was watching a nature show about elephant seals. The show narrated that a seal pup was taken by a storm and after struggling he survived the storm. But the show added too many dramatic things like background music and operatic narration. Siebert thought that over- using movie techniques on the nature show would get people attached to the minor characters rather than real nature. After watching a show about the rain forest, including describing tadpoles and other kinds of insects, Siebert realized that real nature would never be conveyed by a simple nature show. Nature was a wondrous place! As he lived in a big city, he missed his log cabin in woods and real nature. From his experiences on watching nature shows and his stored knowledge, he states that televised nature was not actual nature. Meanwhile, Siebert persuaded that people should care more about real nature.

One of this essay's rhetorical strengths is that a cartoon is included at the beginning of this essay. In the cartoon, a man is sitting in a soft sofa and watching television. Beside him, there is a huge window with a beautiful landscape. However, the man in the cartoon seems disappointed. “What ever happened to quality programming?!” he says. From his rhetorical question, the readers can easily feel that he is so disappointed with the program that he was a little angry. Using cartoon will let readers catch the author’s idea visualized. From the landscape, television and the man’s word in the cartoon, people can easily find that the topic is about nature programs. What is more, cartoon will make the essay more interesting, and it will attract more readers. Besides, using a cartoon will show that this essay is for majority of people rather than just professional researchers.

Another writing technique Siebert uses to persuade his audience to adopt his approach to reading is to offer lists of reasons to support his ideas.

The first reason for the author to say the nature on TV is not real is that the nature we show through media is just what people expect to see. He states in paragraph 5 “the natural world is for us a place of reticent and reticular wonders that command our coaxing, our active exposure and editing; a world made up of what we half create and what, even when we’re there, we fully expect to see”. To make his reason relevant, firstly, Siebert describes a nature show about many elephant seals crowded in the beach of a small island, and slipping through open sea. To represent this simple picture, the narrator says that the elephant-seals look helpless and primitive, even absurd. Meanwhile, the show is added with a lighthearted Latin music. Obviously, he thinks TV nature shows are extravagant dramatizing, voicing in human terms. Generally speaking, humans are controlling what we view from the program. The nature we see on TV is just people’s expectation.

The second reason for the author says that nature shows are not real is that nature shows are much more like cities because the entities which are created by human will increase influence in the way we view nature. That is why Siebert says in paragraph 8 “the more facts we compile about the animal’s days, the more human the tales we tell of them.” From TV programs, nature is not as inscrutable as people think. However, in real world, nature is a wondrous place that a show cannot convey. Just like the author says “we’ve come so far from actual nature.”

Besides the strategies which are mentioned above, I really like Siebert’s language style. He describes every detail in a cynical way, and states that what we see through TV programs is not the real nature. The author always talks about background music about the nature show. Sometimes it is Latin music, and sometimes it is deep, sonorous flute music. Nevertheless, this inopportune music is added to the show according to the editor’s feeling. For instance, two shows are about seals, but they give audience a different feeling because of the editors. Siebert writes, “elephant-seals don’t have a constant inner aria of grounded-seal woes playing in their brain. It is no doubt played in the minds of those who made this film.” The author emphasizes that the nature show is over anthropopathy. The most typical cynical sentence is, in paragraph 13, that “Perhaps I should not watch nature shows, lest I become no longer able to suffer the real place.” He emphasizes that the nature shows go so far from actual nature. There is no doubt that Siebert is angry and disappointed with the quality of the program.

Overall, Charles Siebert states that how nature seen through the media (television programs) is different from the real nature. Furthermore, he encourages people to return to real nature. The use of cartoon, logical organization and cynical language style makes his essay full of evidences and forceful.