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ENGL 2010 – 909

January 01, 2011

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Managing the Manipulation of Rhetoric in Ecoporn

Jose Knighton, the author of “Ecoporn and the Manipulation of Desire,” writes that porn and landscape photography use the same methods of photography to create “equally manipulative and exploiting” (167) pictures. The use of such methods in landscape photography Knighton terms “Ecoporn,” effectively drawing a connection between the ecological depictions of the world with the seedier pornographic industry and the means of transforming girls into “cheesecake.” Using parallel language, imagery, and emotional appeals to create a comparison between porn and landscape photography, Knighton works to persuade his audience, the environmentally conscious and photographically aware consumer, that landscape photography is as manipulative as porn through it’s imagery, false depictions, and lack of intimate relationship.

The structure of Knighton’s essay is drawn out through parallels to his topic of photography and pornography. He creates the connection by first describing the methods of creating porn using the terms: “stereotyped ideal,” “intimate setting,” “provocative lighting,” and a “suggestive atmosphere” (167). In between each term he describes how the choices affect the outcome of the porn for an intended purpose of “revealing physical attributes most alluring to the viewer” (167) to help the reader understand why the porn is created as it is. Following this paragraph, Knighton states the parallel he is making and underscores the similarities between porn and landscape photography by using the same terms in the same order but now describing a landscape photographer’s choices. “The stereotyped ideal…in a setting of intimacy…selectively provocative light…a suggestive atmosphere…[and] filters reveal those physical attributes most alluring to the viewer” (167-168). By repeating the phrases and ordering them structurally in the same sequence the author shows how there is a connection between porn and landscape photography, ecoporn. With these parallels drawn so clearly the author can then explore his idea of manipulation and how each form of photography affects its audience in the same way. But imagery also plays a role in providing the audience with a sense of the pointed comparison.

Knighton first presents the audience with imagery, the author’s means of creating a picture, by describing the beautiful sunrise over Canyonlands National Park. He writes, “the swollen orange edge of the sun finally burns into view after staining the December morning for an hour with a wash of mauve, maroon, and crimson” (165). This description paints a picture in the reader’s mind allowing him to experience the sunrise through his own imagination and experience. Imagery is used throughout the essay to help the audience recall experiences with beautiful landscapes and to mimic the affects Knighton discusses about pictures and their impact.

Word choice helps the Knighton to continue the parallels between porn and ecoporn by mixing erotic terms within his descriptions of landmarks. Of The Grand Tetons and The Grand Canyons he claims, “The glamorization of these particular protrusions and cleavages, primarily by landscape photographers, into erogenous zones of our collective imagination has damaged both them and us” (169). By using terms such sexually charged terms as “cleavages” and “erogenous zones,” Knighton intends the audience to connect the landscapes of their calendars and imagination to voyeuristic acts of seeing and being stimulated by the sight. These words provide a new layer of meaning to what once seemed just canyons and peaks.

The connections drawn out through parallels, word choice, and imagery all work to play on the audience’s emotion of the socially unacceptable shame of porn with the viewing of landscapes. This appeal to pathos is creates in the reader a sense of guilt or distance between being one of “those consumers.”

In conclusion, Knighton uses rhetorical appeals to draw parallels between the porn and ecoporn to point out how both can be damaging to the unaware consumer. His structure of parallel terms, imagery of landscapes, and appeals to pathos push the reader to contemplate how such images, porn or ecoporn, have had an influence on the consumer of and how to consider the world through one’s own experience rather than the distant lens of pimping photographer.