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THE ROCK ASSIGNMENT

This project was prompted by a wish to explore the boundaries that separate nature from art and art from pollution. Man's relation toward nature is one of conflict, sometimes showing respect, but most often not. The time frame for human wellbeing is defined by satisfaction within an individual lifetime. This is alien to the timing of developments in nature. Pollution is the collateral damage to nature caused by the human pursuit of short-term gratification and as such is symptomatic of the discrepancy between both time frames.

An unanswered question is how the production of art fits into this picture. Does it have an impact one way or the other on the conflicted relation between humans and nature? Does it have anything to say about ways of keeping time? Is it innocent with respect to pollution?

This project seeks to engage school children in considering these questions. It consists of four steps.

The first step involves handing out a series of questions for students to discuss (see the list below), with the request that they use these questions for extensive speculation, possibly aided by research. The approach should be as open and interdisciplinary as possible (geology, geography, meteorology, politics, philosophy, religion, ecology or any point of departure the students may wish to use). The level of the complexity encouraged by the teacher should be matched to grade level, consistent with normal expectations.

SPECULATIONS

- 1) What is a rock?
- 2) Who put it there?
- 3) Why is it there?
- 4) How long will it stay?
- 5) What happens if I move it?
- 6) What happens if I make one and add it?

The second step, following discussion and research, involves class production of rock-shaped objects made of trash (what humans have thrown away). How trash is defined should be discussed at this point. The objects to be built should resemble rocks in size and structure, and preferably be of a large size, so as to be visible when placed in nature. Care should be taken that the structure is sound and stable (in itself a research project), and that the items of trash used to construct them remain visible.

INSTALLATIONS

The third step is the temporary placement of these "art" objects within a landscape of natural rock formations found in the desert.

The fourth step is the photographic documentation of the installations once they are in place in the desert. Once documented, the objects should be removed.

DOCUMENTATION

examples of answers to the questions
photographs of the installed artificial rocks.

