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# The Ecological Episteme: A Pathway to a Literacy of Sustainability

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THE ECOLOGICAL EPISTEME:  
A PATHWAY TO A LITERACY OF SUSTAINABILITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2013

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In this study, I ponder these primary questions: What curricular or ideological strands and assemblages in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? How has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum? What are the implications of this thinking in composition and writing studies?

By drawing from curricular and ideological histories, this study responds to these questions by recognizing and defining a way of knowing called the Ecological Episteme. This study expands upon the historical and theoretical portions of the curricular mantle of ecocomposition set down by Richard Coe in “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom,” Marilyn Cooper in “The Ecology of Writing,” Owens in *Composition and Sustainability*, Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser in *Natural Discourse*, as well more recent work. It reaches further back into history to view Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson in light of post-Kantian and place-based contexts. Propelled by this history, I identify pathways that will help compositionists to frame a set of heuristics that will lead to an ecological way of knowing. Thus, the heuristics comprise, in part, what I call the Ecological Episteme. The study of Ecological Epistemic thinking can help those in composition and writing studies to avoid getting trapped inside of categorical, linear, dualistic, or mechanized thinking tending to obscure

ecological thought. In developing these loose, malleable ideas for ecological thought, I cultivate the idea of clarifying a connective ecological thread that runs through all human beings, including, above all, those who theorize about, teach, and administrate writing. The recovery of such an ecological thread leads to what I call a Literacy of Sustainability.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In this study, I ponder these primary questions: What curricular or ideological strands and assemblages in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? How has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum? What are the implications of this thinking in composition and writing studies?

This study represents the fusion of three things that I revere: (a) writing, (b) the teaching of writing, and (c) the natural world. To promote this fusion, I wish to cultivate the metaphor of a non-severable thread that runs through every cell of every life form. Within this ecological thread lay the magic, mystery, and complexities of all life. Unfortunately, certain human activities and thought processes have obscured or obstructed this ecological thread, leading to environmental, cultural, and social disintegration. This work aims to guide composition and writing professionals into an epistemic mode that recovers this thread.

This study expands upon the historical and theoretical portions of the curricular mantle of ecocomposition set down by Richard Coe in “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom,” Marilyn Cooper in “The Ecology of Writing,” Derek Owens in *Composition and Sustainability*, Sid Dobrin and Christian Weisser in *Natural Discourse*, as well the more recent work done by Dobrin, Cooper and a host of other theorists so as to arrive at a new understanding of how the teaching of and theorizing about writing relates to and intersects with conceptions of

ecology and sustainability. Thus, below, I examine the ideas of sustainability, ecocomposition, curricular history, the theoretical implications of this study, and finally, provide an overview of the numerous historical and theoretical strands. Propelled by this history, I will identify heuristics that illuminate a way of knowing that will lead compositionists to understand and enact an ecological way of knowing. These heuristics comprise what I call the Ecological Episteme. Ecological Epistemic thinking can help those in composition and writing studies to avoid getting trapped inside of categorical, linear, dualistic, or mechanized thinking that tends to obscure and cloud ecological thought. In Chapter Two, I expand heuristics that are evident in the Ecological Epistemic thinking. Within the development of these loose, malleable ideas for ecological thought, I continue to cultivate the idea of clarifying a connective ecological thread that runs through all human beings, including, above all, those who theorize about, teach, and administrate writing.<sup>1</sup> The recovery of such an ecological thread leads to what I call a Literacy of Sustainability.

This ecological connection is by no means new in composition. In his 1975 essay “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom,” Coe affiliates the mechanized logic that led to the compartmentalized teaching of rhetorical modes with the same thinking that has led to mass destruction of ecosystems. Coe argues that writing teachers should help students to understand, along with linear, mechanistic thinking, a more complex mode of thinking that he terms as “Eco-

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<sup>1</sup> My expansion upon the Ecological Episteme at the end of Chapter Two will come after presenting evidence for ecological thought in composition. The rest of the dissertation will be an unfolding of the idea that first, as the ecological is a wholly natural way of thinking; all humans possess the capacity to think in ecologic ways and have exhibited such thinking throughout history.

logic.” I contend herein that the type of ecological thinking that Coe describes as so fundamental to social systems in learning also applies to human interaction with the natural world. Coe weaves together ideas of ecological thinking and action, suggesting that there is no dualism in these ways of being. Thus, the ecological thread that allows a teacher to see writers as malleable organisms is the same thread that one brings to activist work and pragmatic action in the spirit of ecological sustainability.

### **Rationale**

This study is valuable to the field of composition. First, despite the groundbreaking work of the above-mentioned scholars, ecological ideas have largely failed to take hold in composition studies. In 2003, while writing about applying the concept of sustainability to a composition course at Arizona State University, Peter Goggin and Zach Waggoner cite eco-critic Glen Love as saying, “Given the fact that most of us in the profession of English would be offended at not being considered environmentally literate, how are we to account for our general failure to apply any sense of this awareness to our daily work?” (50). However, one is left wondering, is it a misperception that matters of sustainability and/or the environment have been largely ignored? Have these ideas already been assimilated into composition classrooms?

Recent evidence provides a clue that Goggin and Waggoner’s concerns are valid. For instance, in her call for papers for the 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Chair Malea Powell asked participants to discuss and include the ideas of “all of our relations” in part to

“propose actions by which writing and our profession make and sustain this world as a more habitable place.” Yet, when I searched both “sustainability” and “ecomposition” on the CCCC online searchable program, out of 614 total panels, I came up with thirteen, four of which dealt with ecomposition and topics of place. Four others used the term sustainability in ways that did not relate to the earth, while the remaining panels did not at all relate to the topic of this discourse. By way of comparison, my search for “culture” yielded over 150 panels.

In *Postcomposition*, Dobrin writes that the term “ecomposition has failed to produce any substantial theory regarding ecological facets of writing” (125). He now favors a reinvention of an “ecosophical approach” laid out by Félix Guattari in *The Three Ecologies* (150).<sup>2</sup> In 2012, Dobrin published an edited collection equating the ecological movement with new media and post-humanism. Though this theoretical work is ongoing, ecology still only represents a miniscule portion of what is considered in composition and writing studies.

While this apparent omission of ecology and sustainability in composition does not mean that individual practitioners are not discussing these issues in classrooms across the country or that there is not the occasional “solar flare” of scholarly discussion or that some newer work is not ecological, it seems that the larger issues of sustainability and ecology are getting lost in this conversation.

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<sup>2</sup> Dobrin reinvents Guattari’s three registers of Ecosophy (environment, social relations, and subjectivity) to fit his “ecomposition postcomposition” goals to be an “ethico-politico articulation” where the current situation is to be recast to “understand environment more broadly as *writing*, social relations as all *relations*, and human subjectivity as *posthuman agents* of part/whole relation” (*Postcomposition* 155).



These omissions are curious given the enormity of post-industrial environmental havoc, predictions by some that our consumptive habits could lead to our extinction, predictions by an overwhelming majority that human activity is causing climate change, and the broad discussions that ecological concerns fuel, or should fuel, cultural issues. With all of these problems, why are compositionists still largely ignoring this issue? Part of the answer may lie in Dobrin and Weisser's criticism of Owens' work, in which they state that Owens uses composition as a vehicle "through which sustainability is promoted" (137) and, thus, is not focused enough upon writing. Additionally, Dobrin and Weisser's early work, while grounded in composition, is very diffuse, with their definition of ecocomposition encompassing many assumptions about writing being about production of texts. Moreover, in *A Counter-History of Composition*, Byron Hawk critiques that while Dobrin and Weisser are "clearly on the right track," the "emphasis on discourse and dialectics is a blinder to ecological complexity" (223). Hawk suggests that "pedagogues . . . need to put more emphasis on the material and affective ecologies that exist in and link to their classrooms and start inventing methods and heuristics out of these complex ecologies" (224). However, he gives no indication as to what such heuristics might encompass. The identification of the heuristics that encompass the Ecological Episteme, discussed in Chapter Two of this study, heeds this call.

Second, in the attempt to locate ecology and sustainability within the realm of composition, no ecocomposition scholars have explored the history and theory in the way that I am proposing, as an introduction to an ecological way of

seeing and knowing. In his 2001 dissertation, Timothy Taylor Neal identifies and traces two historical strands of ecocomposition, one that he calls “Environment as Metaphor” (EAM) and the other which he calls “Environment as Subject” (EAS). Additionally, while Dobrin and Weisser, in *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition* and other works, have contributed broad historical aspects to their studies and suggested numerous historical connections, the purpose of their early work does not lead as explicitly to the depth of inquiry that I am suggesting.

This study identifies an Ecological Episteme that springs from a North American lineage, which intersects with epistemic assemblages of ecologically-minded teachers throughout history. Thus, while I draw heavily from and build upon the previous ideas of ecologically-minded compositionists, my history takes a significantly different trajectory by looking more deeply into a number of historical and theoretical strands and assemblages. My examination of these historical and theoretical strands deepens connections and understandings between the history of composition and eco-studies, ameliorating, in most cases, the embodiment of numerous dualities.

For instance, breaking or merging these dualities will help to examine a seeming theoretical tension in ecological thinking in composition. At his featured speaker presentation at the 2011 CCCC, Dobrin issued the call to further establish a “writing studies” that would act as a buttress against composition in order to counteract a privileged discourse that serves to oppress many in the developing world. Dobrin constructs writing studies’ theory in the intellectual tradition that begins with Jacques Derrida and circulates through Gregory Ulmer,

Hawk, and Raul Sanchez, among numerous other theorists. These theorists have been very much embedded both in ecological thinking and the digital age. In another panel that same day, Janine DeBaise talked of the importance of listening to place, and Kurt Stavehagen talked of using meditation as part of a “place-based inquiry,” which takes us into the idea of the consciousness of writers who create the work. Thus, this tension exists with what mediates the acquisition of writing abilities whether gained by digital media or individual agency. The heuristics and ideas of the Ecological Episteme grow out of the liminal space between these tensions.

Third, this is a relatively new area of study for the field of composition. Both Owens in *Composition and Sustainability* and Dobrin and Weisser maintain that their research is only a starting point, and both identify the need for further research. Dobrin and Weisser state their hope that researchers “note locations in need of further study” and that their work “is by no means an end” (*Natural* 15). Dobrin also issues the broad statement that “all projects housed within rhetoric and composition are already ecological and ecocomposition has the potential to shed light on its implications” (“Writing” 15). The Ecological Episteme will help to examine this claim more specifically, which should help to foster further exploration of the types of ecological activities in composition.

### **Sustainability and Ecology in Composition: Context**

Since these terms carry diverse connotations, encompassing ideas from stewardship of one’s surroundings to being coopted to describe the maintenance

of profit margins, I begin by setting forth my vision of the study's main components: sustainability and ecology.

Any discourse that considers the idea of understanding a writing curriculum based upon a literacy of sustainability needs to begin with Owens' *Composition and Sustainability*, in which he characterizes the concept of sustainability, in part, as:

an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations . . . understanding the links between poverty and ecosystem decline . . . recognizing the short and long term environmental, social, psychological, and economic impact of our conspicuous consumption. (xi)

By illustrating a paradigm of how writing students can begin to better understand their home places and connecting them to sustainable thought, Owens further clarifies how sustainability can filter into curricula and devotes the remainder of the text to ruminating upon how the concept of sustainability can and does filter into our lives. In a later essay, Owens acknowledges that he attempts to fashion writing assignments that balance allowing students to do writing that interests them and what he feels are topics that “should be important to them” (“Teaching” 368). With this concern in mind, he struggles to “fashion a temporary environment where students, through written (and visual) expression and research, might give voice to matters . . . of utmost importance to them (and me): the welfare and survival of their local communities, families,

aspirations, and future generations” (“Teaching” 368). In attempting to accomplish this goal, Owens details assignments such as a place portrait, in which students perform an in-depth discussion and analysis of their places. Such exploration, Owens hopes, helps students to begin to think about the factors that help to sustain a place and what factors frustrate it. Further, he asks students to ponder and write about what factors lead to a quality place, what sort of future they envision and what are the things they value about work,<sup>3</sup> as I discuss in Chapter Two, “More Recent Scholarship.”

Owens’ broad view of sustainability fertilizes this historical and theoretical exploration that considers that ecological or sustainable thought can emerge in the following ways: 1) linearly, passed down through ideological discourse, culture, and tradition; 2) rhizomatically, springing naturally from people who think in ecological ways; 3) or combinations of both. Most notably, Owens identifies composition as the perfect place to discuss sustainability because a “composition instructor enjoys a kind of contextual freedom and disciplinary flexibility unknown to many of his or her colleagues” (5). In *Composition and Sustainability*, Owens distills, from various sources, six tenets of sustainability, as I elaborate on in Chapter Two. He also describes and analyzes his own and his students’ exploration of the ideas of place, work, reconstructive design, and the future. Additionally, Owens, along with scholars such as Dobrin and Weisser, would agree with Donald McAndrew’s contention that composition should widen its circle of concerns to include the environment along with race, class, and gender (380). Both Owens and McAndrew discuss various

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two, “More Recent Scholarship.”

environmental issues that lie at the intersections of race, class, and gender.<sup>4</sup>

Both also mention instances where ideas of sustainability are subsumed by these issues. These global and national inequalities will become especially evident as the world warms, causing mass displacements and other calamities. Thus, the ecological thoughts herein are not written as an intellectual necessity but a global exigency. My idea of sustainability comports with and builds upon the ideas of Owens, but aims, via the Ecological Episteme, to enable theorists and practitioners to identify instances when terms such as sustainability and ecology are co-opted.

Now that I have begun to contextualize and define sustainability, I turn to the idea of ecology. My version of ecology is in line with Guattari's ecosophical approach that works between "three ecological registers: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity" (19-20). In *Postcomposition*, Dobrin further articulates ecosophy as a complex theoretical approach that "enfolds subjectivity and environment into a single approach" (155). I read this to mean that ecological thinking is similar across a range of activities, whether one is striving to balance clean air with economic concerns or teach a writing class.

Whether teaching students or involved in activism, thought that recovers the ecological thread relies upon wholes, rather than reductive

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<sup>4</sup> Owens and McAndrew both describe circumstances such as low-income children growing up next to incinerators, neighborhoods fractured by highways, and unsustainable work situations for women. McAndrew explains that ecofeminism holds that males are at fault in both the destruction of nature as well as the oppression of women, as both have been objectified through a patriarchal gaze (369-370). McAndrew also explains that 500,000 inner city children suffer from lead poisoning (half of them are African American), millions of tons of Uranium tailings are dumped on Native lands each year, and three-fifths of all Latinos and African Americans live near a toxic waste dump (378). For a comprehensive discussion of eco-feminism, see Chapters 4 and 7 of Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*.

compartmentalization. The ecological thinker approaches life with a malleable sense of possibility, a willingness to foster cooperation, and a capacity to deal with the unexpected. The Ecological Episteme engenders a way of knowing that allows compositionists and writing studies theorists to understand that the perception of certain boundaries is simply due to embodiment of categories and dualisms. Further, ecological thinking relies upon interrelationships rather than rigid boundaries (Dobrin, "Breaking" 569). The discussion in this section, though, is simply a beginning as both sustainability and ecology will continue to be discussed and defined throughout this study.

### **Why English Curriculum?**

In part, this study looks at the way ecological thinking (or the lack thereof) has affected certain curricular decisions and the way these decisions relate to the study of English. Curricular history will be of help in answering the question of whether sustainability and eco-ideas belong in a composition course. Certainly, an examination of curricular traditions can place us in the position to ask more cogent questions about how and when these ideas can fit into a writing curriculum. Moreover, the English curriculum has often been at the forefront of societal movements. Arthur Applebee notes that in the 1930s most English teachers in the United States were willing to adopt a social-reconstructionist stance. James Berlin cites 1930s' educator Herbert Ellsworth Childs as stating that the "writing course should perform the duties it historically had served in the curriculum, introducing students 'to the many-sided intellectual life,' acting as a central, cohesive unit" (85). In the preface to *Tradition and Reform*, Applebee

notes that “though English is a young subject . . . , its teachers have from the beginning been leaders in the reform of school programs” (ix).

In a later work entitled *Curriculum as Conversation*, Applebee stresses that tradition in curriculum has neither been anti-progressive nor overly conservative but represents “the knowledge in action out of which we construct our realities as we know and perceive them, and that to honor such traditions we must re-construe our curriculum to focus on knowledge–in-action rather than knowledge–out-of-context” (1-2). I read this to mean that curriculum, while rooted in tradition, should be viscous, changing to reflect the context of our current social and cultural concerns. Note that I write viscous rather than fluid, because curricular fluidity would seem to connote whimsical change, affected by breezes of unfounded thought. Rather, in composition studies, we need changes that not only will reflect our context but have the support of the gale-force of tradition. That said, sometimes one needs to examine the underpinnings of tradition, a difficult thing to do given the blindness that often accompanies a tradition. When one examines these underpinnings and offers an alternative history, a group could find out that their tradition is based on misperception or misunderstanding. My hope herein is that this study will shed new light on how ecology and sustainability fits within a composition curriculum and relates to composition theory. There is, of course, a sense of exigency propelling this work, the sense that in a world of anthropogenic climate change, humans need to understand underlying structures of mechanistic thought and behavior to develop a more holistic understanding of all life. Thus, my questions of ecology, sustainability,



and the study of writing begin with a social activist stance in education. In order to fully understand the function of this study in composition, it is necessary to delve a bit deeper into the history of composition and English studies.

### **Historical-Theoretical Strands and Assemblages**

I wish to examine a number of historical and theoretical strands in composition that will allow us to reexamine our entrenched images of what composition classes are for (Miller 20). Inspecting composition's underpinnings reveals a solid basis for ecologic thought. I agree with Susan Miller that curricular history and underlying theory of composition are interrelated and intertwined in such a way that they cannot be separated (19). I would also agree with Claude Hurlbert's thesis in *National Healing* that we need to acquire an international understanding of composition, as the Ecological Episteme reaches beyond cultural and socio-cultural constructs into the heart of what it is to be human. Further, the Ecological Episteme follows David Orr in its call to reimagine education to understand our ecology at an early age.

With the broadness of the Ecological Episteme in mind, there will be occasions in this study to discuss rhetorics and theories from various cultures and places, as the Ecological Episteme is a centerpiece of human thought. For instance, the need may exist to discuss the Buddhist scholar and monk Thich Nhat Hanh alongside the origins of the process movement and to discuss Raul Sanchez's treatment of Derrida's *Grammatology* alongside the Cherokee scholar and poet Marilou Awiakta. Thus, these historical and theoretical strands and assemblages reveal how the focus on issues of sustainability and the

environment merges, permeates, and/or diverges with composition theory, writing studies, and our various pedagogies.

### **A Note on Methodology**

What curricular or ideological strands and assemblages in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? How has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum? What are the implications of this thinking in composition and writing studies? In addressing these research questions, my methodology comes from two logical impulses. First, in order to gain deeper insight into what constitutes ecological or sustainable thinking in composition, I review the field's major scholarship. From essays such as Coe's "Eco-Logic in the Composition Classroom" to book length works such Owens' *Composition and Sustainability*, these works exhibit ways of knowing that have allowed me to craft the Ecological Episteme. Place, interrelationships, and complexity are very important to ecological thinking. These ideas have allowed me to perceive the metaphor of an ecological thread. The second impulse is to simply respond more specifically to Dobrin's statement that all projects in composition are already ecological ("Writing" 15).

The identification of behaviors, scholarship, and activities as ecological has caused me to question previous categories and to view the world through a new lens. In this light, Michel Foucault's chapter "The Unity of Discourse" in *The Order of Things* illustrates how categories are artificial constructs that can be reconfigured and malleable. Additionally, Hawk's *A Counter-History of*

*Composition* offers immense help in the formation and consideration of the complex factors that arise when building a theory.

### **Overview of the Study**

The trajectory of this study proceeds as follows. Chapter Two responds to the research questions by addressing how the recent history of eco-studies in English reveals an Ecological Episteme that evidences various strands of ecological thinking in composition and writing studies. Chapter Two contains an analysis of malleable heuristics that help scholars to identify subtle and explicit ecological thinking in composition and to recognize the implications of such thinking. Chapter Three is a meta-study examining those scholars who see Emerson and Thoreau as post-Kantian and those who see them as growing and originating from the pragmatic philosophy of the "new" world. This discussion identifies important underpinnings of ecological thought in composition. The chapter also works on a performative level to reveal the implications of reviewing theory in an ecological way. In Chapter Four, I examine the ideas of reverence and exigency as a mode of seeing what is ecological in individual teachers. By connecting the pedagogic styles of Bronson Alcott, Fred Newton Scott, Gertrude Buck, and others to early process theories, I show first that thoughts considered to be process oriented actually have roots in ecological thought and that what has been represented as the process movement constitutes an ecological epistemic rupture in composition. This rupture provides an entryway for the ecological thought known herein as the Ecological Episteme. Chapter Five contains my conclusions and

implications that mostly relate to the classroom but also touches upon writing programs and writing studies.

Throughout these chapters, my hope is to identify ideas related to ecological thinking that practitioners and theorists can apply in an effort to attain a literacy of sustainability. Also, this dissertation serves as an eco-tour through many avenues of scholarship in composition. Finally, in answering the research questions, I intend for this dissertation to serve as an historical and theoretical map for practitioners and theorists who are interested in considering and re-imagining both the teaching of writing and the interrelationship between writing and the natural world. This reimagining should enable those in composition and writing studies to uncover and understand the thread of nature that connects all of us.

### **Chapter Summary**

Why does composition need a study that asks what curricular and ideological strands and assemblages in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? First, despite the work of numerous ecocompositionists, ideas of ecology and sustainability have largely failed to take hold in composition theory and practice. Also, this deeper history and theoretical understanding still illuminates ecological thought in composition and writing studies. Second, contextualizing and defining sustainability and ecology provides a sound basis to understand an Ecological Episteme, which is a way of knowing that responds to the research questions. Herein, I have begun to define sustainability and

ecology, discussing the viscosity of English curriculums and clarifying my methodological impulse. I have also introduced the way that ecological thinking can clarify a metaphoric ecological thread that runs through all living things.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MOVING THROUGH HISTORY TO UNCOVER AN ECOLOGICAL EPISTEME

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the recent historical and theoretical strands and circulations that allow theorists and practitioners to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum. Herein, I offer a relatively recent historical overview of how English studies has dealt with the idea of ecology. I do this in order to illustrate the relatively recent beginnings of eco-studies in English classes and to clarify the connections that provide a basis for a deeper discussion of the ecological, curricular, and ideological strands and circulations described in the next two chapters. In this light, I have split this history into subsections. First, I touch upon how ecocomposition has in part grown out of ecocriticism. Second, I delve more deeply into the early works of ecocomposition. Third, I review the post-millennial works relating to ecological composition and the place movement in composition studies. Fourth, I discuss the post-digital age scholarship that brings ecological aspects of postmodern theory into composition. As this history begins with a discussion and analysis of how early ecocompositionists gave primary focus to published texts, proceeds to production of texts, and continues into post-humanist theories of the digital age, the movement of this history mirrors the history of studies of composition and rhetoric.

In this movement, ideas emerge that help to forge and clarify what is ecological in composition. The ecocriticism discussion I present below

reinforces the idea of malleable categories and historical recirculations. The ecocomposition sections of discussion reveal the importance of holisms, the ever-changing nature of the way writing works as a system, and the problems with over-reliance upon categories (categorical embodiment). This history also points toward the idea that ecological thinking is needed to navigate the digital age. Out of this history will grow the malleable heuristics of the Ecological Episteme that will be very helpful in identifying what is ecological in composition and writing studies. This chapter will then close by showing how such a history reveals aspects of the Ecological Episteme, which substantiates and clarifies Dobrin's claim that "all of the many projects housed in composition are already ecological" ("Writing" 20). This episteme is historical, philosophical, rhetorical, and performative. Most of all, I conceive the Ecological Episteme to be open, holistic, and malleable, not totalizing and rigid. In other words, this history is meant to help those of us in composition and writing studies to begin recovering or maintaining our ecological thread.

### **Short Historical Overview of the Relationship Between Ecocriticism and Ecocomposition**

Ecocriticism and ecocomposition both began with a similar urge to do something in an age of ecological crisis. As the aspect of ecocomposition that is environmental rhetoric literally grew out of ecocriticism (Dobrin and Weisser, "Breaking" 570), it is important to discuss this history. In the realm of literary criticism, the first use of the term "ecocriticism" occurred in 1978 with the publication of William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment

in Ecocriticism” (Glotfelty xx). Although the 1980s were a time when eco-studies in English began to sprout, the 1990s became the decade when the earth began to gain recognition in literary studies. In 1991, at a special session of the MLA conference entitled “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies,” Cheryl Glotfelty introduced the concept of ecocriticism (Fromm ix). In her “Introduction” to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty builds ecocriticism on Elaine Showalter’s “three developmental stages of feminist criticism” (xxii).<sup>5</sup> She further notes that in 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed, and, in 1993, Patrick Murphy “established a new journal entitled *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*” (xviii).

While ecocriticism began to proliferate, two books were published relating to environmental rhetoric: *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* (1992) by Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer and *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America* (1996) by Carl Herndl and Stuart Brown. Both “critically analyze the discourse through which environmental issues have been conveyed by addressing contemporary issues in environmental politics through the lens of rhetoric” (Dobrin 263). In 1997, McAndrew wrote “Eco-feminism and the Teaching of Literacy” wherein he illustrated how six major claims of ecological feminism, largely a literary theory, connect with current discussions of literacy. He also discusses the composition teacher in terms of being a facilitator and envisioned a “heterarchal,” rather than hierarchal, classroom. Heterarchy replaces the hierarchy of a top-down, teacher-

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<sup>5</sup> These stages are discussed in the next section. See broader discussion of Eco-feminism in the Buck section in Chapter Four.



centered authority figure with a more student-centered approach of “interacting and interdependent writers who make their own decisions about topics and form and pace” (379). In his focus upon how writers are interdependent, McAndrew taps into issues and systems that are fundamental to eco-studies and writing. Similarly, composition classes that Timothy Taylor Neal discusses as “ecology as subject” also tend largely to draw from literature, with a number of common, usually eco-oriented, texts and writing.

### **A Historical Model for Eco-English Studies**

In that she draws from history and understands that her theory needs to be malleable, Glotfelty’s reliance upon history in the founding of ecocriticism provides a model for my historical work herein. In founding eco-criticism, Glotfelty includes many historical texts. It all started when William Fromm received an exhaustive bibliography from the then graduate student Glotfelty that centered upon “the anything but apparent connection between literature and the environment” (Fromm ix). In her introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty indicates that her ecocritical vision was promoted by the “absence of any sign of an environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies” despite scholarship’s revisionist strategies and yearning, as one editor put it, to respond “to contemporary pressures” (Glotfelty xv). Also, as Glotfelty notes, “if your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would never suspect that the earth systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all” (xvi).

In 1991, Fromm organized a special session of the MLA conference entitled “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies.” The field then gained serious momentum with the formation of ASLE, whose mission is to “to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world” and to encourage “new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research” (Glotfelty xvii). In her “Introduction,” Glotfelty notes that in trying to set up a “branding system that would make sense of this mixed herd” of eco-literature and criticism, western novelist Wallace Stegner advised her to “let the topic remain ‘large and loose and suggestive and open . . . . Systems are like wet rawhide’ he warned, ‘when they dry they strangle what they bind’” (xxii). Thus, pursuant to this advice, she proceeds to attempt to adopt a new and malleable system based upon history.

Glotfelty’s version of such a non-binding system adopts Showalter’s three stages of feminist criticism, each evidencing some form of consciousness-raising. The first stage raises consciousness by exposing sexist stereotypes, such as “witches, bitches, broads and spinsters.” Glotfelty applies this model to eco-criticism by studying “how nature is represented in literature” and looking at “consciousness-raising results when stereotypes are identified—Eden, Arcadia, virgin land, miasmal swamp . . . .” (xxii-xxiii). In doing so, Glotfelty’s first stage strives to develop a new mode of awareness, allowing theorists to examine foregone conclusions such as why we might identify land as virginal or an

untouched, healthy swamp ecosystem as miasmal. The second stage, involves “consciousness raising as it rediscovers, reissues, and reconsiders literature by women” and is applied to eco-criticism by recovering old non-fiction volumes (xxiii). Showalter’s third phase, involving a theoretical stage, which Glotfelty describes as “far reaching and complex, drawing on a wide range of theories to raise fundamental questions about the symbolic construction of gender and sexuality within literary discourse,” is applied to ecocriticism by “examining the symbolic construction of species” (xxiv). She mentions that this critique ultimately involves examining numerous dualisms in Western thought “that separate mind from body, divide men from women, and wrench humanity from nature” (xxiv). What is powerful and germane to this discourse is that she looks back a couple of centuries to bolster her theory.

Since 1993, when *The Ecocriticism Reader* was published, ecocriticism has proliferated to such an extent that Oxford Press is publishing an anthology on ecomposition. At the 2011 ASLE Conference, Glotfelty joked about such proliferation causing her to be referred to as first wave, and to recall the irony that in 1993 Oxford Press rejected her book and labeled ecocriticism as a passing fad. That ecocriticism is more than a passing fad was evident at the 2011 ASLE; though it was still a conference that focused on literature, many panels dealt with both the production and interpretation of environmental rhetoric, digital images, and creative writing.

## **Ecology and Composition—a Closer Look**

What curricular or ideological strands and assemblages in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? How has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum? What are the implications of this thinking in composition and writing studies? Three early ecological thinkers in composition reveal how ecological thinking works in this field of study. Coe alludes to the idea that mechanistic thinking in writing classes represents the type of compartmentalization that can lead to the decimation of ecologies (232). Cooper promotes the idea of writing as an interconnected and dynamic system (187). Erika Lindemann draws from Cooper to offer an ecological model that works as an alternative to expressive and current traditional models of composition (295-296). Though she makes very good points about Cooper, Lindemann's conclusion becomes overly embodied in categorization as she attempts to exclude personal writing (297).

As mentioned in my introduction to Chapter One, Coe provides the first blatant ode to the idea of ecology and composition. In his "Eco-Logic in a Composition Classroom," Coe writes that due to the increasing complexity of the modern world, composition teachers should help students to understand an "eco-logic," which considers a more complex contextual relationship of wholes. He makes two very important points that build a vital, yet unrecognized, inquiry into how de-contextualized, mechanized practices contribute to the mindset that causes humans to destroy the earth. In this mindset, Coe challenges the

analytically based logic occasioned by the scientific and technological revolutions. In his call for an “eco-logic” that represents a deep understanding of context (the whole system, rather than a subsystem), he is not attempting to dismiss analysis. Rather, he wishes to augment discussions of analysis in writing classes to help students see the world in terms of relationships (233).

Coe’s second point is that, through metaphor, he illustrates how an ecological way of knowing can allow writers to understand complexity and how ideas such as traditional logic can be misleading when the issue is examined from a socio-cultural context. He gives the example of how a Westerner might consider illogical the Hindu practice of not eating cows in the face of starvation. However, when considering this practice from a holistic perspective, the tremendous amount of resources required in the raising of cows makes not eating them an ecologically wise decision. Recently, Michael Pollan has made similar assertions about how unscientific culturally-based eating habits turn out to be healthy. For instance, the staple of rice and beans comprises a complete protein (Parker-Pope). Inasmuch as dietary staples evolved from eating habits that depended upon conditions of place, one could say that cultural eating habits, which appear beyond logic, in fact operate in the more complex realm of eco-logic. Helping composition students understand the complexity of contexts through puzzling over topics, or seeing the complex role of context in their own stories, begins to work toward the realm of eco-logic.

In his connection between mechanized thinking and ecological destruction, Coe indicts the teaching of the rhetorical modes and gives an

ecological justification for the teaching of writing as a process. He issues this indictment by contextualizing past theories, rather than seeking to destroy them by succumbing to an evolutionary model of theorizing<sup>6</sup> that replaces one ideology with another. His affirmative scholarship is important to the Ecological Episteme in that it focuses upon constructive relationships,<sup>7</sup> rather than destructive attacks. After reading the promise of Coe's work in light of post-humanism, which focuses on writing ecologies at the expense of the writing subject, one begins to understand how the ecology of writing needs to include the writing subject, along with the understanding of writing as a system.

In that each writer's body represents an ecosystem in and of itself, Coe's work provides insight about why the writing subject should not be shut out of ecological models of writing. Further, his connection between the methods of teaching writing and the processes that destroy the earth validates this inquiry and the principles of the Ecological Episteme . I agree with Coe that students and the earth, itself, would benefit from an understanding of ecological ways of thinking and writing. A constructivist pedagogy inspired by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development would be especially useful in this context, wherein students would be deepening their context by learning from other students as well as the teacher (Vygotsky 34).

While Coe concerns himself mostly with the perceptions of individual writers, Cooper is concerned with seeing writing itself as a system. In her seminal

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<sup>6</sup> See Roskelly and Ronald's *Reason to Believe*.

<sup>7</sup> Such relationships fall in line with Michael Kropotkin's 1905 *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, in which the author holds that cooperation (not competition) among species is most important for species' survival.

1986 essay, "The Ecology of Writing," Cooper stresses that writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of ever-changing, constituted systems (186). She differentiates her ideas from those of cognitivists, who at the time implicitly held that writing was performed by a solitary author. While Cooper punctuates Kenneth Bruffee's now widely accepted argument that "writing is a displaced social act" (185), she further distances herself from "the static and limited categories of contextual models" by writing that "the ecological model postulates dynamic interlocking systems which structure the social activity of writing" (187). Cooper describes the connections that arise in writing to "that of a web, in which anything that affects one strand of the web vibrates throughout the whole" (190). She looks upon the concept of two separate theories of audience: those who hold that writers must assess and analyze a real audience, and those who feel that writers must hold audience in their imagination (190). In this sense, she constructs her ecological perspective as a model to show the complexity of writing and how to avoid the binary dualisms that befall a society. Unlike Coe's piece, which dealt more with the way an individual writer views the world, Cooper's systems approach has become a polestar to scholars of ecological composition. However, though Cooper is often credited with beginning the systems movement in composition, which seeks to take the focus off of the writing subject and onto writing itself, her more recent work has dealt with a writer's sense of rhetorical agency.

In "Three Views of English 101," Lindemann builds upon Marilyn Cooper's ideas to clarify the ecological epistemic in two ways: First, she finds that

Cooper's ecological ideas fall in line with her own vision of how a systems approach can help students to understand academic discourses. Second, though her conclusion that the ecological model would not include personal writing exemplifies an over-emphasis of categories, Lindemann provides a lucid description of the product, process, and systems approaches in composition, grounding her conception of the systems approach in the ecological understanding of contexts. She notes that the "ecological model usefully complicates the learning and teaching of writing because it reminds us of the social context in which all writers work" (296).

From her reading of Cooper, Lindemann identifies five systems in which writers participate: 1) ideas that act as the modes through which writers transform "experience and observation into knowledge;" 2) purposes that "allow writers to coordinate their actions;" 3) interpersonal interactions that mediate writers' access to one another; 4) cultural norms that mediate writers' participation in broader discourse communities; and 5) textual forms that are the way writers communicate (296). Lindemann's conception of an ecological classroom suggests that classes adhering to the social and ecological model would be so focused upon the acquiring of academic discourses that there would be little time left for self-reflection or expressive writing (297). Though she differentiates the ecological model from process, she allows that ecological educators act as facilitators in a collaborative environment that relies upon writing groups. In her conclusion, Lindemann adroitly recognizes that all three approaches are valuable and that practitioners need to discuss the philosophic



tensions underlying them (299-301). What she does not see is that the connections she makes between the groups are indeed ecological connections in that they deal with relationships as well as the needs of the particular students in the context of the class. These ecological connections most certainly include self-expression. In her statement that there would be little time for such expression, Lindemann seems to be leveling some sort of bald, yet veiled attack on expressivism. Nonetheless, her theorizing, along with that of Coe's and Cooper's, has been valuable to the scholars who have been vocal in the area of ecological composition.

### **Recent Scholarship**

More recent ecocomposition scholars begin with Owens, as well as Dobrin and Weisser. Owens focuses on the relation between sustainable environments and on students writing about place, whereas Dobrin and Weisser concern themselves with place, the production of discourse, and distinguishing ecocomposition from ecocriticism. Because of the broad nature of topics covered in composition, Owens would agree that composition is a perfect forum to explore holistic connections and to see beyond the imaginary disciplinary boundaries that have been imposed upon students throughout twelve years of compulsory schooling. Owens elaborates that "not only do compositionists and their students inject material into courses that other colleagues and their students can't address, they also can orchestrate zones of inquiry that juxtapose eclectic webs of information, inspiration and provocation" (5-6). Though careful to mention that no class is *tabula rasa*, Owens further makes the point that Milton

scholars cannot very well foster Aldo Leopold's land ethic in their classrooms (6). In his "Appendix B," Owens illustrates his teaching vision by showing how he asks his students to proceed through four phases designed to engender thinking about sustainability. In each phase, Owens has set forth assignment sequences that build on and scaffold shorter assignments into a larger writing. The first phase culminates in students making a place portrait, a somewhat comprehensive study of where they live or another place of importance to them. In the second sequence, students have the choice of doing an oral history, tribe, eutopia (a good place), service learning, or a project of their own design. These topics obviously help students to begin thinking more deeply about their home places and communities and, perhaps, in some cases, it propels them to actively improving community conditions. In phase three, students explore work and education, wherein they begin or continue to consider what they value about work. In phase four, students ponder the future. Within each of these phases, students respond to various reading assignments and writing tasks that help them to think holistically about issues of sustainability and a meta-understanding of issues. In other words, Owens is asking students to enact projects that give them an understanding of context. Without being told that they will begin thinking ecologically or sustainably, students begin to do so through the consideration of these issues.

As discussed in Chapter One, Owens could perhaps be attacked for teaching something akin to sociology rather than writing. However, students have a great deal of freedom to write and follow what is ecological about the process

model in that students are encouraged to do multiple drafts. Moreover, students choose the form in which they wish to write. Indeed, many of the examples Owens shares comprise personal narratives in which students are hashing out their lives. I expand upon this connection between writing narrative and holistic thinking in Chapter Three.

Not only does Owens favor the idea of having students write about sustainability, he feels that education itself should be part of a sustainable system. Drawing from ecological educators such as David Orr, Gregory Smith, Richard Clugston, and Thomas Rogers, Owens distills and discusses six curricular tenets that serve as the basis for what would consist of his formation of a sustainable curriculum. The value of these tenets lies in the idea that they connect sustainable systems to ecologically sustainable ways of knowing and, thus, serve to fuse the issues of ecology as metaphor to ecology as subject. I illustrate how such a fusion occurs, as follows:

1. Sustainable societies are created by sustainability-conscious curricula.

Owens writes that

some have called for new curricula that include among other things, studying sustainable indigenous cultures; understanding the complex relationships between soil, vegetation, and climate, as well as complexities inherent in energy flow and dissipation; and developing radical differences in socioeconomic expectations between the North and the South. (28)

In envisioning this new curriculum, Owens notes the importance of departmental interdependence rather than disciplines sculpted of compartmentalized niches. He asks in this regard, “To what degree can one remain interested in sustaining one’s own niche while remaining uninterested in sustainability?” (28). It follows that students who understand how their curriculum is interconnected would better understand complexity in nature. As I have touched upon above, Owens implements broad reading areas of interest that tend to show interconnections. Additionally, in writing about their places, students begin to see how place relates to the environment, or how the highway that runs through their neighborhood begins to detract from their quality of life. From there, they may begin to ask larger questions.

2. Sustainable pedagogies would illuminate “social traps of unsustainability” (29). Such methods would allow both teachers and students to develop ways to not be caught by them. A social trap according to Costanza and Daly is defined as “any situation in which the short-run, local reinforcements guiding individual behavior are inconsistent with the long-run, global best interest of the individual and society” (qtd. in Owens 29). Owens writes that “a sustainable pedagogy would be inherently interventionist” recognizing that “our consumer culture fuels unsustainable behavior, and the educator’s job on some level is to disrupt the assumption of the behavior” (29). This

disruption is another way that Owens breaks through the dualism that exists between school and real-world concerns.

3. A pedagogy of sustainability should be antigrowth and pro-development. Owens distinguishes here between growth and development by imagining student development rather than growth, placing the emphasis “not on a minimum number of credit hours necessary to graduate but on the ability to articulate a developing synthesis treating varied subject matter” (30). Again, Owens focuses on synthesis of ideas rather than the linear achievement of credit hours.
4. A pedagogy of sustainability would promote an ethic of sustainability. Owens explains this pedagogy by writing that “a pedagogy of sustainability would create contexts in which students and faculty define, rank, and ultimately redefine our needs and desires” (31). This concept, at work in the recirculating nature of a sustainable mode of assessment, tends to be important in sustainable writing programs.
5. A pedagogy of sustainability would reject many conventional notions of work and labor, recognizing the need to reinvent the nature of business and work as a fundamental part of creating a sustainable society. Most work, according to Owens, is unsustainable (32). If this is the case, how could we help students to re-conceptualize fields that they are interested in? Again, he examines work not simply through the income achieved but through the level of sustainability achieved.

6. The daily operations of the college campus must reflect the ethic of sustainability promoted within the curriculum. Here Owens mentions Eric Zency's "The Rootless Professors" in discussing how academics often come from afar and are estranged from their local areas. For instance, many do not know their local watershed or native plants. Sustainable curricula need to spring from sustainable university systems relating to such things as "food acquisition, preparation, and disposal; maintenance of buildings and grounds; purchasing for labs, departments, offices, and classrooms; energy expenditure; and so on" (33). As schools begin sustainability efforts, they tend to follow through with sustainable food and energy systems.

The fusion represented in the above six sustainable ideas evidences ecological thinking. For instance, while forming his version of systems theory, Gregory Bateson's ideas of the ecology of mind grew from ecological processes in nature (xviii). As will be seen in my discussions of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Buck, and others, ecological thinkers tend to possess a holistic way of knowing no matter the activity they are engaged in. Though Owens mostly aligns himself with urban sustainability and distances himself from Thoreauvian nature writers and retreat narratives, his ecological ideas of place are closely linked to philosophies of place and sustainability that were championed by Thoreau.

As alluded to in Chapter One, while Owens seeks to answer questions such as, "Of all possible writing assignments one can come up with, which ones will have the greatest effect on students' lives?" (7), Dobrin and Weisser offer a

critique that provides a reason why composition has been slow to respond to issues of the environment. In setting the parameters of their definition, Dobrin and Weisser argue that “ecocomposition must be primarily about the production of written discourse” (*Natural Discourse* 137), and, though they applaud Owens’ work, they criticize his focus in two important ways. First, while analyzing an early version of Owens’ text entitled *Survival and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*, Dobrin and Weisser write that Owens wishes to reshape composition from a discipline that is writer-based into one that promotes sustainability. Such a reshaping, they feel, shifts the agenda from writing production toward all too familiar political agendas, such as the mantras that critical thinking can be engendered through the study of culture, gender, or sustainability. Their second criticism is grounded in the idea that in placing such importance on the field as being the center of university-wide curricular change, Owens ignores the reality of composition’s marginalized status “near the bottom of the food chain” in institutional environments (137). Yet, in the published version of the book, *Composition and Sustainability*, Owens seems responsive to this issue by stating that literature and composition studies comprise two chambers of the heart of English studies and that “writing is at the core of what English majors do” (5).

From this discussion, one sees that Dobrin and Weisser broach the question of what is a proper topic to be covered in a composition course. Applebee notes that “virtually any human activity can be proposed for inclusion in the English curriculum by virtue of the uses of language that surround it; and

virtually every activity imaginable has been part of one curriculum proposal or another for the past 100 years” (343). Surely, sustainability and green ideas are not among trivial practical skills. Yet, perhaps it is the vivid imagination of English practitioners that causes the wariness of composition teachers to implement these methods, especially when they may be under certain pressures by administrators and peers to perform and conform in acceptable ways. Perhaps these ideas would gain both depth and weight if fueled by something as rooted as curricular tradition. Thus, regarding Dobrin and Weisser’s point about composition’s perceived status as a second-class citizen, the rooting of this study of sustainability and ecology into the soil of long-standing tradition helps to show that ecological thought has always been part of the writing classroom.

In founding ecocomposition, Dobrin and Weisser do much more than just criticize their eco-colleagues. They differentiate themselves from ecocriticism and set forth numerous propositions for their theory. Much like Owens’ work leans toward environment as subject but serves as an extended definition of the intersection of sustainability and composition, Dobrin and Weisser’s work serves the same function but leans more toward the subject as metaphor in the service of their theory of ecocomposition. Their essay “Breaking Ground in Ecocomposition: Exploring Relationships Between Discourse and Environment” provides a thorough overview of the work that has been accomplished in the realm of ecocomposition and describes that “ecocomposition’s emphasis on relationships is a multifaceted area of study that draws on many other areas of inquiry, including rhetoric and composition, feminism and eco-feminism, cultural



studies, ecology, literary criticism and environmentalism” (572). The following represents Dobrin and Weisser’s working definition of ecocomposition:

Ecocomposition is the study of the relationships between environments (and by that we mean natural, constructed, and even imagined places) and discourse (speaking, writing, and thinking). Ecocomposition draws from disciplines that study discourse . . . and merges their perspectives with work in disciplines that examine environment (these include ecology, environmental studies, sociobiology, and other “hard” sciences). As a result, ecocomposition attempts to provide a holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment. (572)

Further, ecocomposition views writers as members contributing to broader systems by “taking into consideration the role of environment, place, nature, and location” (572). In the process of breaking ground, Dobrin and Weisser note that the immediate roots of ecocomposition spring from two separate strands, one from ecocriticism, and the other from Cooper’s “The Ecology of Writing,” which Dobrin regards as the “first step toward ecocomposition” (“Writing” 20).

After Owens published *Composition and Sustainability* (2001) and Dobrin and Weisser published *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogic Approaches* (2001) and *Natural Discourse* (2005), book-length studies spun off in numerous directions. Goggin edited a collection entitled *Rhetorics, Narratives, and Literacies of Sustainability* that analyzed discursive constructions of

sustainability. Dobrin and Keller edited *Writing Environments* (2005), a work in which various ecological writers and scholars were interviewed about their perception of writing and place. During this time, another strand of ecological thinking began to enter the digital age.

### **Ecostudies and the Digital Age**

The shift into the digital age has brought new possibilities to ecological studies of writing that involve thinking about how writing circulates in systemic ways. This epistemic shift was foretold in 1974 by Coe's prophetic piece entitled "Rhetoric 2001" wherein he prophesized that the coming digital age would necessitate a new, more ecological way of thinking. Noting that the "primary function of education has always transcended content" in favor of teaching how to be human, he felt that it was the job of the writing professional to help develop theories dealing with the coming digital age (2). The ecological thought that has spun off into the digital has drawn from systems and complexity theories. For instance, in *The Wealth of Reality*, Margaret Syverson described the complex ecology of writing in three case studies of different writing scenarios. Other scholars, such as Sanchez, sense a need to eschew looking at writing as the hermeneutic experience of the writer that places focus on knowledge rather than on how writing operates. In *A Counter-History of Composition*, Hawk employs complexity theories to think about writing ecologies and rekindles for composition the philosophic vitalisms of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which include a plethora of invention strategies. Taking inspiration from Killingsworth and Palmer's *Ecospeak*, published in 1992, Dobrin and Sean Morey develop the concept of

Ecosee in part to gain an understanding of “how humans use images to construct ideas of nature and environment and how these images create and reinforce those constructions, and how humans may use existing images (or make new ones) to create alternative ways of seeing nature and environment” (8). Dobrin and Morey published their edited collection entitled *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* in 2009.

Morey, Hawk, and Sanchez published essays in Dobrin’s 2012 collection entitled *Ecology, Writing Theory and New Media*. A number of the authors in the collection interrogate the identity and what it means to be a writer, often employing the term “agent” in the place of “writing subject.” For instance, drawing from recent work in distributed cognition and other scholarship, Laurie Gries discusses assumptions about the intentionality of agency while seeing the brain as one part of spatial temporality. She broadens the idea of an agent into numerous shifting factors that she breaks down into their component parts. She finds that there is an agential dance in that “rhetorical production” is an “extended intentional state” that “actualizes, in part, as a consequence of material affordances” (72). Gries echoes Bateson’s concept of ecology of mind by writing about how our permeable bodies are made and remade to correspond with our environments. In other words, things are constantly changing with the agent continually adapting to shifting circumstances, which approximates Cooper’s point in “The Ecology of Writing.” Gries, though, pushes this idea a bit further by discussing a “spatio-temporal” agent who represents a larger dynamic than an individual writer. She also writes that “rhetorical discourses emerge from a

dynamic assemblage of agents involved in ongoing intra-actional performances” (69). Gries feels that theories of agency need to encompass the complexity of a rhetorical becoming, rather than simply being reduced to the individual. She illustrates this through writing a rhetorical discussion of “Shepard Fairey’s Obama Hope image” through the use of a method she calls iconographic tracking. This method foresees dynamic transformations of the image as others intra-act with it and how it “reassembles the social” as transformed and changed across various materialities (83). Such a discussion has great promise for understanding how culture permeates into and through all of us. In a similar way, we all intra-act with the ecological thread.

In “Digital Ecologies,” Morey contemplates the ways in which nature is digital and what we could learn about this observation. In this regard, he writes that “where literate nature potentially fails in understanding digital nature and digital ecologies, and how a re-theorization of these concepts through Felix Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies* and Gregory L. Ulmer’s electracy might offer alternatives about ecology from this understanding” (107). These post-human constructions, often viewing writing on an ontological level, represent a new and important frontier of ecological writing studies. However, I contend that ecological thinking is the same whether navigating digital environments, helping to restore a watershed, writing an essay, or running a writing program.

### **The Ecological Episteme —Helpful Heuristics**

Ecological thinking in composition is based upon the circulation between relationships and categories, and most importantly, the ability to see beyond the

categories. Thus, rigid thinking and divisiveness tends to cut against the ecological. Dobrin and Weisser write that ecomposition “fractures as those working inside of its loose borders direct their attentions toward subspecialties and disagree with one another over theory” (“Breaking Ground” 575). The Ecological Episteme is based on the circulating and webbed relationships among large and loose borders. Thus, the ideas presented below are meant to be useful as malleable heuristics that will help characterize what is ecological in composition.

These heuristics represent the tendencies of people who exhibit ecological thought, as well as representing a fusion of social and ecological principles. They embody commonalities and modes of thinking that allow for the operation of a literacy of sustainability. The praxis of ecological thinkers tends to exhibit these tendencies, which can also double as heuristics in terms of being about the way we engage within complex systems. My discussion below about the origin of the Ecological Episteme reveals the performative aspect, how thinking in wholes and relationships can help us to see a new reality.

The idea of using the term episteme comes from my reading of Foucault’s *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things*, as well as Hawk’s *A Counter-History of Composition*. In forging his classical episteme, Foucault faced an issue of the proliferation of divergences relating to the classification of living beings. Hawk goes on to specifically describe that:

[R]ather than form oppositions between vitalist and mechanistic views, Foucault sees the different Classical perspectives as

providing different answers to the same fundamental problem: ‘the possibility of classifying living beings’. Linnaeus feels that nature can be organized into a taxonomy. Buffon argues that nature is too heterogenous to be in a taxonomy; others focus on the generative process and range from those who espouse mechanistic preformation to those who focus on the specific development of germs. Still others look to analyze and organize functions: circulation (after William Harvey), sensation, motivity, and later respiration. But at root they all emphasize the classification of living beings. (131)

As a researcher, my immediate problem in this study was to find a way to consider the varying interpretations and classification of Emerson and Thoreau. Like Foucault’s classical situation, the Ecological Episteme grows out of my study and sense of cognitive dissonance about such a huge proliferation of scholarship that springs almost mechanically from the legacy of both men. Both had also been appropriated in myriad ways that seemed to suit researchers. The difference from the above example is that while Foucault’s classical episteme covers a temporal issue, the Ecological Episteme has the possibility of transcending time and revealing models that exhibit similar ecological modes of thinking. Thus, instead of dead, mapped categories, the Ecological Episteme resembles a curriculum in that it is viscous enough to move when someone comes up with a sufficient reason for it to expand, contract or branch off. Also, much like the situation in Foucault’s above-discussed work, in which

oppositional histories are seen as a problem, my categorization does not strike out against opposition; rather, it finds connections between scholars who would perhaps disagree with one another while discussing Emerson over coffee. The Ecological Episteme allows people to channel their ideas through their actions, whether these actions are represented through words or deeds.

These heuristics are focused on understanding certain factors such as the relationship of 1) Dualism and Holism; 2) Holism embracing mechanism; and 3) circulation and recirculation as well as subgroups that emerge. While I discuss all of these below, I will only place in-depth focus on the first because it acts both as a frame and basis of the other factors.

### **Dualism and holism<sup>8</sup>**

In composition, reductive dualist assumptions can cause great harm. For instance, arguments striking out against Romanticism have inhibited writing theorists from fully understanding how consciousness can help us to write. As Paul Kei Matsuda has shown, while we can discuss composition theory in terms of discursive boundaries, such as current/traditional, neo-platonic, process, and post-process, the boundaries between these rhetorics are far from being linear or tidy. Post-process should not be looked upon as somehow doing away with process but simply as an acknowledgement of the complexity of the field (78). Thus, in that practitioners are more than likely using numerous rhetorics, the idea of holism recognizes that all aspects of writing are important.

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<sup>8</sup> Holism is a difficult concept because, in a sense, what appears to be whole is simply a larger categorical assumption. For instance, an ecosystem gives way to a larger ecosystem that gives way to a bioregion, landmass, *ad infinitum* (See Morey).

Additionally, there are ways to guide writers into a holistic rather than dualistic vision, helping them to better understand certain complexities. Looking at topics from an either/or perspective often impedes an understanding of that topic. To illustrate, I would like to present a hypothetical situation wherein a student is writing about the phenomenon of Wal-Mart. A student who wishes to write about Wal-Mart in terms of sustainability might bring pre-judgments that Wal-Mart is essentially bad. This writer would benefit by questioning and looking more deeply into this issue. In "Helping Writers to Write Analytically," Ben Rafoth's advice to writing center tutors gives insight into how peer group members might help each other puzzle over topics. Rafoth encourages tutors to become more thoughtful about how they "read and respond" to students' texts in order to enter into what David Coogan calls an "intellectual partnership with the reader." Further, Coogan guides tutors to help students see complexities by centralizing "definitions and explanations, rather than solutions" (qtd. in Rafoth 110). Rafoth feels that since academic writing "calls for analysis of some issue or controversy, a key move is to define and explain problems, not to solve them" (110).

In my above example, the student may have a number of prejudices toward Wal-Mart. Perhaps such prejudice is rooted in the fact that the Wal-Mart parking lot has displaced a vacant lot where she used to play, or perhaps she or one of her family members is a disgruntled employee. Whatever the case may be, the peer group can raise issues that encourage the writer to puzzle over her positions, after which the issues can be brought to the entire class. The student



who is deepening her thought process may write of mitigating factors such as the January 7, 2007, *New York Times* article discussing how Wal-Mart is pushing low fluorescent bulbs that use a fraction of the energy of conventional bulbs (Barbaro). Further questions might pertain to what the motives are behind Wal-Mart's decision. As James Howard Kunstler notes, Wal-Mart has 12,000-plus miles of supply lines wherein these bulbs would be shipped. Taking into account the fuel and other resources used in such a process, one might ask, is their green behavior to compensate or mask their supply-lines, which are already unsustainable? Does their persuasive clout in selling bulbs somehow compensate for all petrol used in these 12,000 miles? Certainly this type of puzzling into the complexity of the problem will help students understand the complex interrelationship that a classroom of sustainability is founded upon. How, though, do we help a writer to be invested in this process? One way to do this would be to let the sustainability topics flow out of students' own writing. Telling stories or composing what some call expressivist discourse plays a large role in the Ecological Episteme when it can be extrapolated into larger socio-cultural issues.

Helping writers avoid the rigidity of dualistic thinking can also be beneficial. Thinking about sustainability "requires a shift from compartmentalized to holistic thinking" (Owens 29), which would seem to deepen a student's understanding of what she or he can draw from. We live in an era of specialization where disciplinary boundaries can cause a false sense of separation. At times, I inherit freshman students who seem more concerned with

writing about what / want to hear rather than with responding to some rhetorical exigency or telling their stories. They simply do not make the connection between their stories and what they seek to write, or they are stuck in the compartmentalized “rigid rules” that Mike Rose discusses in his essay “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language.”

After examining the writing habits and processes of ten “proficient students” in a class that involves a great deal of writing, Rose finds that the rigid rules and plans of five writers not only impeded good writing but led to debilitating writer’s blocks that “usually resulted in rushed, late papers” and “grades that did not truly reflect their writing ability” (123). Conversely, the students who employed “the least precise rules and plans have the least trouble composing” (Rose 131). While the blocked writers followed perfectly sensible rules, such as “grab your audience with a catchy opening,” or write the perfect opening sentence, they treated these rules or plans as rigid algorithms “rather than the loose heuristics they were intended to be” (132). In this way, writers who are able to see themselves as part of ecologically “dynamic interlocking systems” (Cooper 187) would be more able to adjust their ideas to comport with the writing task at hand. Rose mentions that “non-blockers” operate with “fluid, easily modified, even easily discarded rules and plans.” Additionally, “the goals these non-blockers have are quite mutable” (131). This fluidity and mutability is fostered by a classroom where students feel comfortable about their writing—a classroom that falls very much in line with the literacy of sustainability. Again, a developmental perspective where students are helping one another would tend

to foster these conditions. Further, these ideas also call to mind theorists such as Roskelley and Ronald who, in *Reason to Believe* break through such dichotomies into an understanding about the holistic nature of writers who are also embedded within dynamic social systems.

### **Holism and Complexity Embracing Mechanism**

In the film *The Last Samurai*, the Japanese army uses machine guns to kill the last group of Samurai warriors, extinguishing the great tradition. Hollywood glitz aside, this is an excellent metaphor for the coming of a machine age: relatively untrained warriors with highly mechanized symbols of the machine age, gunning down highly trained and focused Samurai. Suddenly, their focused lives of concentration, meditation, and perceiving life in moments that the average industrialized citizen could not dream, or could only manufacture through simulation, was all but gone. We can observe similar “progress” in agriculture. We live in an age where the guise of “food science” tends to replace real food<sup>9</sup>, and the economics of agri-business have caused corn byproducts to be included within virtually all processed foods. Once a sustainable and supportive practice, farming has become a process devastating to the land and cruel to the animals and humans that it affects.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, we seem to have reaped benefits from mechanization; anyone who has used a wooden rather than plastic bucket would attest to this. But I argue that we always maintain our

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<sup>9</sup> When I say “food science,” I echo Michael Pollan who describes our reductive understanding of the complexity of micronutrients as well as the principles of biodynamic farming.

<sup>10</sup> For an extended treatment on the effects of mechanization on the American Psyche, see Chapter 5 of Leo Marx’s *Machine in the Garden*. For lengthy discussions on the effects of modern factory farming, see John Robbins’ *Diet for a New America*. For a balanced and more recent discussion of the problems of factory farms and alternatives to this system, see the film *Food Inc.*, Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* or *Acres Magazine*.

understanding that our lives exist in holism, and being immersed in mechanisms tends to limit our experiences.

In light of the above, rather than create a dualism where the mechanistic works against the ecological, I will detail how mechanisms and the ecological are engaged in a relationship, with the mechanistic playing a narrower role in the existence of an ecological holism. Mechanisms have their place. A five paragraph essay is very useful when one needs to convey a specific argument in a brief manner. However, it tends to be a very narrow and rigid application that cuts out the richness of literacy. It is when we get caught in our mechanism that we tend to lose the greater value of the activity. Emerson and Thoreau, progenitors of what Roskelly and Ronald call a Romantic Pragmatic rhetoric, understood very well the function of both dualistic and mechanistic thinking.

### **Circulation and Recirculation**

“Daddy, bats eat bugs, and now bugs eat bats.” My son made this observation when he was five while accompanying me on the back deck to help bury a bat that the cat had killed the night before. To me, it was a perfect metaphor for the cycle of life. In many ways, our lives, which we count in linear time, are part of an immense system of recirculation. “You have your fathers’ mannerisms,” someone might say. Yet so much of our lives are focused on point A to B—the linear furtherance of careers, the growth in relationships, the progression of our writing ability—that some failure to progress at a certain time causes people to be left with a needless sense of loss and unfulfilled dreams.

However, a simple change in perception from that of linearity to recirculation can serve as the renewing hydraulic energy of our lives.

Perhaps we need to step backwards to the beginning, be a beginner—do something with a loved one that we haven't done for years, for example. It seems that we get trapped in our own egos when we begin to think we are beyond a certain phase, which creates the sensation of being alone at the top. Thus, the Ecological Episteme recognizes the recirculation of life in the teaching of literacy, the understanding of theory, and the negotiation of academic life. In "Understanding Composing," Sondra Perl has found that individual writing processes tend to be recursive rather than linear. Roskelly and Ronald and Matsuda have shown us that new theories involve a great deal of recirculating of the old. Recirculations are also at work in the cutting edge assessment models of Michael M. Williamson and Brian Huot and have helped to engender the current discussions relating to the ideas of sustainable assessment. Thus, contemplating the idea of recirculation can help to retain ecological thinking without being chained to progressions that work against a literacy of sustainability.

### **Chapter Summary**

The focus of this chapter has been to review the recent history of ecological thought in composition and determine how this history can promote ecological thinking. Such thinking points toward a way of knowing that I have termed the Ecological Episteme, which recovers an ecological thread that has been obscured and obstructed by human activities. Here are some key points about the Ecological Episteme:

1. Building upon the ideas of Cooper, Dobrin, Weisser, and Owens, the Ecological Episteme (EE) recognizes that writing is based on constant dynamic interrelation with place, culture, identity, and social networks, interrelations of which tend to be constantly shifting.
2. Building on the work of Coe, our writing classes need to consider more complex ecological modes of thinking about relationships and interconnectivity. In this case, the writer's consciousness is vital.
3. Story-telling, personal writing, or self-expression is a vital component in helping students to perceive how they are related and inter-connected to the world around them. This idea will be deepened in Chapter Three.
4. The EE recognizes that there is no reified process of writing but that individual writers often have varying processes.
5. Drawing from Owens and others, an EE writing pedagogy is based on various local needs of the students. Writing ecologies are constructed to local needs, which include students' having a better understanding of their own place as well as other places.
6. Cyber-technology is recognized as a tool that can help to foster ecological thinking. This idea has been covered in many quarters—the ideas of the interconnectivity of the web, hypertext, blogging, and complexity theories are embraced by the Ecological Episteme.
7. While some of life is indeed linear, the EE recognizes, as ecologists do, that life is also based in many complex ways upon circulations and interconnection that affect not only our physicality but our psychology.

8. Different discourses work together rather than competing with one another. Thus, a teacher wrapped in the EE honors competing theories and helps her students to see such how theories can work together as a synthesis or to create something new in a third space.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ECOLOGIES OF EMERSON AND THOREAU

Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of universal being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

The true understanding is that the mind includes everything; when you think something comes from outside it means only that something appears in your mind. Nothing outside yourself can cause any trouble. You yourself make the waves in your mind. If you leave your mind as it is, it will become calm. This mind is called the big mind. —Shunryu Suzuki Zen Master

#### **Introduction**

One of the main purposes of this study is to reach into the past to uncover the historical and theoretical strands, assemblages, and circulations that locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum. An examination of such a recent history reveals an Ecological Episteme that works to uncover our ecological thread. While the last chapter covered composition's recent ecological history, this chapter moves deeper into history as well as into composition scholars' engagement with such a history to evidence that ecological thinking has been part of composition from the very beginning.

To reveal the deep roots of ecological thought in composition, I perform a meta-review of the ways that scholars conceive of Emerson and Thoreau, splitting this review into two sections. The first section discusses two composition and rhetoric scholars, Berlin and Anthony Petruzzi, who both feel that Emerson and, to a lesser extent, Thoreau spring from a "post-Kantian" tradition. I then review two pieces of scholarship, one by Cornell West and the other by Roskelly and Ronald. All three authors feel that Emerson's and Thoreau's epistemologies



flow from their home place. Moreover, this chapter reveals generative aspects of the Ecological Episteme. Viewing the scholars from an ecological epistemic lens tends to expose rigidities in scholarly thought, as well as to reveal the holism of Emerson and Thoreau.

I review Emerson and Thoreau because of their connections to writing and the natural world, as well as the fact that they are looked upon as progenitors of American pragmatism. Berlin and Petruzzi interpret Emerson and, to a lesser extent, Thoreau to be connected with nature, rhetoric, and democracy in powerful ways. These triadic influences merge to reveal a lineage that becomes relevant to many aspects of composition. In the second half of this chapter, I discuss the way that Cornel West sees Emerson and Thoreau as organic philosophers who evaded continental philosophy so that they can work on the unique problems of the new world. Roskelly and Ronald build upon West's theories to form a Romantic/pragmatic rhetoric that breaks through traditional theoretical dualities. I review scholars from both perspectives because eco-studies in English has grown from them both. Thus, this chapter gives a very complete review of the ecological value of both perspectives. Taken together, this discussion will reveal the transcendentalists to be important progenitors of what later has been called ecocomposition.

### **Why Emerson and Thoreau?**

I analyze Emerson and Thoreau for three reasons. First, the progenitors of "ecomposition," Dobrin and Weisser, describe Emerson as the "father of modern ecological thought" (47). At the very least, Emerson and Thoreau derived

power from the natural world. This chapter tests the suggestion by Dobrin and Weisser that this nature-fueled power connects with the act of writing. One seeming connection is that the idea of writing and ecology seem inextricably intertwined in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau in that writing is an expression of the natural world. Regarding Emerson, Weisser notes that “Emerson believed that language functions as a reflection of the natural world, and that the diversity and interconnectedness found in nature serves as a ‘vehicle of thought.’” Further, he writes, “For early transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau, there was no separation between words and nature, and their writing suggests that each word and phrase can ultimately be traced to some *original* source on land, sea or sky” (81). This merger, Weisser argues, has passed to contemporary writers, such as Gary Snyder and Barry Lopez. Indeed, the idea of finding a language to discuss the natural world has been broached by the likes of Susan Griffin, Annette Kolodny, and many others.

Second, Emerson and Thoreau understood the consequences that came with industrialization, the cost of an increasingly mechanized labor force, and the increased psychic reliance upon technology that has in the modern world wrenched humanity away from the earth. Thoreau, in particular, saw with some horror around the materialist bend of industrialization. It is important to recall Thoreau’s horror because over time his and Emerson’s writings have “so often . . . been included in textbooks and anthologies, their rebellious reaction against scientific Enlightenment has been sanded down and softened” (Wilshire 18). I intend to once again elicit their excoriating qualities to expose and eventually

work toward reaching a situation where scholars and teachers are grasping at more optimistic realities, evoking an Ecological Episteme in their practice.

Third, though they are not perfect exemplars of a modern social consciousness, the American Transcendentalists were arguably among the most progressive people of their time. Thoreau and Emerson, along with the other transcendentalists, were egalitarian abolitionists who would be at home with many of principles of modern-day feminism and social justice movements and, thus, would likely also be at home dealing with many of the complexities relating to twenty-first century composition. They would also likely rail against some of the addictive, dehumanizing, and invasive aspects of internet technology. At the same time, they would embrace the cyber-avenues for social justice and democracy created by blogging and email.

Thoreau's and Emerson's reach is exemplified by Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, which set off thought that traveled in an intergenerational recirculation from Gandhi to Martin Luther King. Most importantly, both were intimately connected with nature. Just prior to rematerializing as a "transparent eyeball," Emerson propounds that "the lover of nature is he [*sic*] whose inward and outward senses are truly adjusted to one another" and that the intercourse with "heaven and earth become part of his [*sic*] daily food" (10). Emerson could have been gazing upon and intimately connecting with each leaf clattering in the wind, or at least that is how I imagine it while sitting on the bank of a Pennsylvania stream, a place where vehicle noise has been eclipsed by the shush of water hitting rock. By an account filtered through poet Robert Bly,

Thoreau would stand mesmerized for hours simply watching frogs in his parents' pond and knew the exact day when wildflowers would bloom (77). Thus, Thoreau and Emerson are vital progenitors of American ecological thought and connecting their thinking with that of composition and writing studies is a vital way of showing these curricular and ideological connections.

### **Emerson and Thoreau as Post-Kantians**

#### **James Berlin**

Though there are seemingly millions of literary and philosophic appropriations of Emerson and Thoreau, Berlin is one of the few appropriators who deal directly with the field of composition and rhetoric. Also, while Berlin's trenchant and instructive mapping of Emerson as social and democratic clearly illustrates the fusion of Emerson's Romantic and pragmatic vision, Berlin's analysis simultaneously illuminates a problem of an overreliance upon categorization. Thus, I use the phrase "categorical entrapment" to convey when an author becomes blinded by a category and generally employs it to dismiss, reduce, or distort a phenomenon. Such categorical entrapment has been seen in a number of ways that illuminate what is ecological in the history of composition.

Beyond categorical entrapment, a holism arises from Berlin's Emerson, one that clarifies his transcendence beyond categories that were in part neo-Kantian but also sprung from the exigencies of a new country. In this light, there are four major points to consider in a meta-analysis of Berlin. First, in identifying two camps of Emerson scholars, Berlin abides by mapped categories of post-Kantian and Neo-Platonists that serve as unintentionally divisive binaries,

pointing toward overly mechanized thinking that has been problematic in composition. These forces have served to reify and trivialize the ecological aspects of what has been categorized as the process movement. Paradoxically, his discussion illuminates that Emerson understood the function of categories and classification without embodying them. Second, Berlin's Emerson possesses an ecological or Eastern<sup>11</sup> version of the social and democratic, as these qualities are embedded within the individual. In other words, Emerson sees no binary between society and individual. Third, regarding audience, Berlin's Emerson reveals an epistemic fusion between Emerson's ideas about ignoring audience and theorists such as Peter Elbow, who give primacy to the idea of honest writing that conveys a deep sincerity. These are ecologically-oriented practices that in a sense seek to carry, rather than ignore, an audience. Further, these methods allow students to convey ideas that are their own, rather than reclassifying existing opinions that they have appropriated to please the instructor. This honesty is an idea that process pedagogies are founded upon (Lindemann 293). Fourth, the overall discussion reveals the importance of Berlin's convincing portrayal of Emerson as a thinker whose Romanticism dovetails not only with the Ecological Episteme but with the type of cultural criticism that becomes evident in the work of later scholars.

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<sup>11</sup> Specifically, ecological thought relates to certain aspects of the philosophic aspect of Buddhism in its ability to move beyond the individual into the larger group as well as the holistic aspects of Buddhist thinking.

**Berlin's categorical entrapment illuminating Emerson's categorical awareness.** Writing about the “double-edged sword” of our natural tendency to separate into categories by creating taxonomic tags,<sup>12</sup> ecological philosopher Paul Shephard describes how when people fail to see beyond the tags, the formation of categories can cause thinking to cease (78). Failing to see beyond the tag is another way of presenting the idea of categorical entrapment. In his chapter on Emerson, Berlin fails to see beyond the tag. The paradox here is that while Berlin becomes ensnared by the categorical tags, he reveals an Emerson who has an ecologically holistic understanding of what is behind the tag, which illuminates both what is ecological in the history of composition and the implications of ecological thinking. First, I will describe how Berlin becomes entrapped. Second, I will discuss the paradox and Emerson's ecological understanding of the matter.

Berlin's rigid analysis of the post-Kantian and Platonic Emersonian camps causes him to become entrapped in categories that do not comport with the more complex, holistic thinking indicative of the Ecological Episteme. In his reading of previous scholars, Berlin's divisive categorical entrapment becomes evident in the way that he manages to appropriate Emerson, abiding by certain reductive categorical assumptions about Platonism. By arguing in a persuasive way that Emerson's rhetoric is social and democratic, concerned with poetics, and adjustable to audiences, Berlin extracts Emerson from those scholars who would place him within a neo-platonic tradition where a private vision serves to deny the

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<sup>12</sup> A taxonomic tag is essentially the name given to a particular component in a taxonomy. For instance, I am a human in a taxonomy of mammals.

possibility of public discourse. In performing this extraction, Berlin filters several treatments of Emerson's rhetoric into two camps: the Platonist camp, where numerous previous scholars had placed Emerson, and the post-Kantian camp, where Berlin argues that Emerson should fit. Those in the first camp see Emerson as a Romantic individualist, consciously or unconsciously rooted in a rhetoric that is "within the Platonic tradition that denies the possibility of a rhetoric of public discourse" (Berlin, *Writing* 43).<sup>13</sup> Berlin cites Robert Cushman, Roberta Ray, and others who hold this first view, in which Emersonian rhetoric sees that a person is brought to truth by inner reflection rather than being persuaded by outside rhetoric. In this realm, rhetoric is seen by many to encourage a person to break free of their "ordinary perceptual set, to become free of the bondage to the material world and past error" (44). As seen by "Platonist" constructions, rhetoric is subversive.

While Berlin feels that these "Emerson as Platonist" constructions are misguided, he identifies Ray as having the closest Platonist characterization of Emerson's true epistemology, noting that Ray's characterization calls to mind "Ken Macrorie, William Coles Jr., Donald Stewart and James E. Miller" (45). Ray constructs an Emerson who feels that truth cannot be communicated directly through language but can be elicited by an orator. Further, this orator has access to the truth through communion with a reality-pervading oversoul. While Berlin finds such a communion to be a compelling example, Ray's repeated assertions

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<sup>13</sup> What Berlin really means here is that the denial of public discourse is a neo-platonic interpretation that sees rhetoric as preparing an individual for a truth that he or she later can only discover for him or herself in a private vision.

that Emerson has no interest in “social and political matters” ring false (45) as Ray and Berlin become boxed in by the reified assumption that the Platonic forecloses the ability to carry out any sort of public discourse. Such a foreclosure is seen as reductive in philosophical circles (See Petruzzi). In other words, both Berlin and Ray seem to be forgetting to look beyond categorical tags. Trapped in their categories, they are unable to see the full bloom of their own analyses.

Berlin’s treatment, clearly landing him in the second camp, equates Emerson’s romantic rhetoric with the social and the democratic, as he aims to “show how Emerson fuses a post-Kantian philosophical idealism with democratic social theory, placing rhetoric at the heart of the democratic experience” (46). Claiming that Emerson departs from common sense realism in the supersensory by attempting to find the real in the sensual and ideal, Berlin finds that Emerson’s ideas are closer to such modern process philosophers as Susanne Langer and Ernst Cassirer. Berlin further points out that Emerson found that “reality is a human construction, joining the world of ideas to the material object in an act of creative perception” (46). Such an observation foretells the post-modern perspective that reality is socially constructed.

What can be learned from the idea that one group of scholars sees Emerson’s rhetoric as personal and another as social and democratic? I would suggest that Berlin’s version of Emerson’s epistemic vision includes a complex mixture of the personal and the social, exhibiting all the factors of the Ecological Episteme , as will be shown below. However, Berlin’s divisive categorical



entrapment not only lies in his analysis but with the reduction of Emerson's thought to a certain camp.

The interpretation of Emerson as being Platonist on one hand and Post-Kantian on the other is an example of scholars getting trapped inside their maps to the point where the reality is no longer clear. Moreover, while Berlin lends credence to the idea that Emerson does not sense dualism, that he does not distinguish between inner and outer experiences, and that some of his understandings give off a Platonic essence, Berlin fails to make the larger point about the previous scholars' failures to sense Emerson's holism. Berlin might have suggested that Emerson's thinking formed a sort of fusion that generates from something beyond a Hegelian dialectic, something new, which of course leads to a new and inescapable dialectic. Rather, Berlin is staunch in his position that Emerson was not a "Platonist." Berlin, thus, falls into the trap of his categorization in siding with the social and democratic camp when he could have argued that the fact that Emerson fits so well within many categories represents strong evidence of his holism and of an inner life that fired the embers of his social and democratic tendencies. That Berlin's *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures* includes a subsection entitled "Dislodging the Binaries" (84), and that others such as Hurlbert see Berlin's project as a reuniting of poetics with rhetoric ("National" 9-10), furthers the point that all of us have the capacity to interpret things in a less than holistic way and leads us to have a greater understanding of how an ecological concept such as the process movement can become reified and

narrow. Thus, the recognition of ecological epistemic thinking can provide understandings of how we perform our scholarship as well as our teaching.

Beyond giving sheer evidence of the subjectivity of various scholars, one might ask, what is the point of this discussion? It is here that I would ask readers to question the composition histories that they have read, especially the ones that dismiss an idea such as Romanticism as a private vision that forecloses the social. Or, consider those works that label expressivism as self-indulgent rather than looking more deeply and holistically into the context. I would further ask readers to consider the questions that arise from a holistic and ecological inquiry, such as where does the *social* come from? What were the factors that contributed to the mechanization of the process movement? Who defines this kind of thing? What is the role of the personal, the poetic, the story? When do students benefit from learning certain forms, or having a model for writing? When compositionists ask these very Emersonian questions, as many have, they are pursuing a very ecological and sustainable mode of epistemological inquiry. Thus, the ecological epistemic can serve as a lens through which to view the world.

Moreover, although categories are obviously necessary, dualist assumptions behind categorical entrapment obscure the ecological thread and take us away from ecological thinking. We all know that the “social” and “personal” spring from a flurry of biological functions working together, circulating between an inner reflection that is fostered by one’s socio-cultural milieu. However, categorical entrapment contravenes the presumption. Philosophers

and scientists are now questioning the Cartesian notion that consciousness is centered in the brain.<sup>14</sup> Western society is just now determining how interconnected ecologies, those with which many indigenous cultures are intimate, appear to heal societal, interpersonal, and ecological wounds. The path to an ecological way of thinking about composition can be seen to be embedded within the prose of every ecological thinker who writes. Deep down, we are all ecological thinkers, our thoughts susceptible to reification, obscuration, and obstruction, no matter our cultural or philosophic background.<sup>15</sup>

Emerson's ecological holism is embedded within his prose, which includes both his individual vision as well as his social and democratic stirrings. Further, Emerson understood the conundrum of dichotomies inherent in the limitations of our language and used them for classification:

The external world . . . suggests ideas to the individual: "Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position, apprizes us of dualism." At the most elementary level, for example, nature leads to the discovery of physical laws, themselves ideas that arise in our experience of nature. (Berlin 47)

Clearly, Emerson, like Berlin, knew the benefit derived from creating dualisms, such as the efficiency of classifying and categorizing. However, Emerson was

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, somaesthetic practices focus upon how ideas are embodied, thus dealing with consciousness of the body.

<sup>15</sup> I am thinking here of the book *Collapse*, in which Jared Diamond traces the fall of indigenous societies such as the Maya to questions of sustainability. I am also thinking of the Buddhist psychologist Jack Kornfield, who, when dealing with the subject of rigid thought, writes, "There can be fundamentalist Buddhists, fundamentalist scientists, fundamentalist psychologists" (146).

simultaneously wary of categorical entrapment, aware of losing sight of the much larger sphere lying outside the narrow realm of the category, and, thus, he did not become imprisoned in his language. He explains this awareness in "The Transcendentalist." In this essay, he labels a person who is reliant on the narrow path of the mechanized as a materialist who "takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man [sic] as one product of that" who is "secure in the certainty of sensation, mocks at fine-spun theories, at star-gazers and dreams" (89). Yet, while our world is controlled by materialist systems, Emerson issues this reminder: "We adore an institution, and do not see that it is founded on a thought which we have" and not some natural order. Emerson's understanding that the underpinnings of institutions are created by human thoughts and dreams is a recognition that such structures can and should be altered when the time is right. Further, in making statements that we "can only love Nature" (200), Emerson affirms that it is the ecological where the growth in our epistemology occurs. Even though forms are useful, becoming entrenched in mechanisms of form serves only to narrow our possibilities. I am reminded of William Blake's criticism about the closure of perception, that "man has closed himself, up, till / he sees all things / through the narrow chinks in his cavern" (26). Thus, another consequence of the above discussion is the realization that Emerson understood that the functions of mechanisms were encompassed by a broader ecological whole that can be influenced and invented by a person's thoughts.

Thinking in wholes leads to two important conclusions in the understanding of ideological strands of ecological thought germane to composition and writing studies. First, through his malleable conception of classification, Emerson exhibited an understanding of ecological epistemic thinking. Specifically, he was capable of seeing beyond the categorical tag. Second, Berlin's brief entrapment in categorical thought shows that even the best of us can become ensnared in mechanistic thinking. This type of thinking brings with it unintended implications extending into classrooms and infiltrating into broader waves of thought, such as the reification of the "process theory," mechanizing a previously malleable set of ideas into a "lock-step" set of processes.<sup>16</sup> Being awake to this potential, which is inherent in all theory-building and interpretations, is vital to understanding my research questions of what is ecological in a writing curriculum and what are the implications of this thinking in composition and writing studies. Third, whether it takes the form of interpretation or invention, the mode of thought known as the Ecological Episteme has value as a lens to illuminate thinking that has begun to devolve into reification. Thus, ecological thinking that sees beyond the categorical tag enables one to see theories as open systems, allowing for the crafting of theories that thrive in varied, ever-changing environments.

Beyond his categorical entrapment, Berlin moves on to extract several points about Emerson that are directly relevant to what is ecological in composition. Thus, just as we can learn by negation and critique of Berlin, we

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<sup>16</sup> Post process theories are also susceptible to reification as well, as I show in Chapter Five with my critique of Post Composition.

can also draw from his valid points regarding the ecological sense of how Emerson is social and democratic, has a malleable sense of audience, and possesses a holistic outlook on life. These points act as departures to reveal the following ecological realms of thought that are evident in composition.

**Berlin's Emerson as embracing an inter-being version of the social and democratic.** Berlin's Emerson understands that the self and others are intertwined and interconnected, and this deepened perception of self has implications for how expressivist discourse can work in social ways, evidencing an ecological connection in what will later become the process movement. What emerges from Berlin's analysis is an Eastern conception of self that encompasses the social, a holistic and expansive way of viewing the self that ameliorates dualisms. In terms of the self and other, Berlin's Emerson sees that "the inner and outer have no meaning apart from one another" (47), further evidencing that Emerson has managed to escape categorical entrapment. This collapsing of dualities leads to two larger points. First, an ecological understanding of the self conveys a thought process that has deep implications for composition. Second, ideological connections circulate not only through Western metaphysics but in and around both Eastern and indigenous ideologies.

By describing the inner and outer as having no meaning apart from one another, Berlin aligns Emerson with the concept that Vietnamese scholar and monk Thich Nhat Hanh calls interbeing. Interbeing is Hanh's term for the profound interconnection with all living things and how what we call "the self" is constantly changing and impermanent. In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*,

Hanh conveys this impermanence by describing to a younger monk how when he eats yogurt before a dharma talk, he understands his interconnected relationship with the cow that provided the milk for the yogurt: “Somehow, the cow will offer today’s Dharma talk. . . .The Buddha recommends we live our daily lives like this, seeing everything in light of interbeing. Then we will not get caught in our small self” (126). Appropriately, Hanh notes that “interbeing” is at the heart of the deep ecology movement (127), referenced in Chapter One, in its respect for “the air, the water, the forest, the river, the mountains, and the animals” (126). A form of interbeing is also represented by Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki who discusses an Emersonian realization that the inner creates and holds the outer as the “The Big Mind” wherein “[t]he true understanding is that the mind includes everything; when you think something comes from outside it means only that something appears in your mind” (34-35). In the beginning of his essay “History,” Emerson writes:

There is one mind common to all individual men [sic]. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent. (3)

Indeed, Emerson and Thoreau had perceptions similar to the concepts of the big mind and interbeing and have been called first wave American Buddhists by

theological scholars, though there is much argument on this point. But, beyond arguments whether or not these two qualify as Buddhists, it is the striking overlap with a Buddhist sense of self that should interest us, because it implicates reductive attacks on expressivism and reveals the self as being wrapped in the social<sup>17</sup>. In other words, instead of attacking the idea of personal writing, perhaps theorists should be asking what exactly is the personal or the “I,” and how can it help us to understand the “whole” of composition?<sup>18</sup>

The discussion above describes the same sort of expanded version of the self that William Coles seemed to be reaching for when he wrote *The Plural I*, wherein the semester of writing moves students to begin to have an “enlarged awareness of themselves” (Larson ix). A version of this enlarged awareness is also included in the idea of Elbow’s “Believing Game” wherein Elbow describes that belief in each other’s work fosters connections that allow one to expand awareness into another’s world (182). In this sense, writing itself can be seen as an expansion of the self, a manifestation of the big mind.

An understanding of the big mind can also counteract arguments of those who dismiss expressivist writing as Romantic. Steve Fishman and Lucille McCarthy write:

[Elbow’s] work challenges the transactional and defensive character of current exchanges. His emphasis upon believing—the

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, this expansive sense of self is not solely Buddhist in nature. However, Buddhism provides a contrast to the constricted, materialistic sense of self that seems common in present day United States (See discussion of Coles, Elbow, and Thurman below).

<sup>18</sup> This notion of self seems to problematize the idea of ignoring the writing subject. I do, however, see the benefit in thinking about both stances. Perhaps the writing subject could be seen as part of a larger organism.



sympathetic hearing of diverse languages, public and private, professional and nonprofessional, personal and philosophical—is rooted in a romanticism that seeks not isolation but new ways to identify with one another and, thereby, new grounds for social communion. (Fishman and McCarthy 654)

Fishman and McCarthy describe how it was paradoxically the economic issues of the day that caused this group to be categorized as Romantics. It is the unraveling of this history that allows us to see that the Romanticism that critics blame is a reductive example of categorical entrapment. Drawing from Raymond Williams, they suggest that the retreat of poets such as Blake was not due to any sort of abhorrence of humans but was due to their reaction against the onslaught of industrialism. It was a protest. In the United States, this Romantic social protest is seen as far back as Thoreau. In “Solitude,” Thoreau writes about how “society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having time to acquire any new value for each other” (119). These criticisms are not from a person who hates society. Rather, Thoreau is someone who celebrates deep interaction within his society and his world, and looks upon the efficiencies and transactions within them as paramount to a deep and conscious understanding of life. Thoreau is described as an engaging person by those who know him (107). Poet Robert Bly also comments on Thoreau’s concerns about efficiency by discussing how Thoreau felt society has devolved into an insincerity that is ruled by the clock (25). Further, he adds that Thoreau saw with disdain how many people moved through life in a sort of sleep (26).

Moreover, much of the misunderstanding of “Romanticism” and the devaluing of personal writing is rooted in a blind acceptance of the post-industrial Western version of the self. Buddhist scholar and the first Westerner to become an ordained Tibetan monk, Robert Thurman terms this as a “totally pathologically, flawed, Eurocentric perception.” The United States, he says, is founded “on a frontier-thesis mythology of American individualism; it’s a fixed identity that seems to create a sense of the dichotomy of society being outer; whereas Buddhist philosophies understand that everything is temporal and that life is change” (qtd. in Valpy). I contend that an understanding of this change is a realm of thought that was passed through Berlin’s trenchant, undeveloped observation that Emerson harkens “moderns” such as the process-influenced philosophers Cassirer and Langer (46). This point deserves elaboration in a number of ways and helps to expose ecological connections among intercultural thoughts. Much like Buddhists, process philosophers see an interconnected world that is in constant change. In short, it is ecological epistemic thinking that causes Emerson’s universal mind and Suzuki’s big mind to fall in line. Both involve malleable, holistic thinkers that see the rest of society within the self and recognize that this self is in a state of flux.

Given the exponential rate of technological advancement, change seems to be the only constant. The formats for our writing and many of the ways we communicate through writing have changed, but within this flux, one could also make the point that certain ideas or ways of communicating or persuading through writing remain the same. An ecological epistemic sees no need to

proclaim foundations or constant flux but could draw from both perspectives as well as help writers access the big mind, which would be a most fruitful plural “I.” Along with an expansive and ecological version of the “I,” Berlin’s Emerson also has an ecological understanding of audience. Thus, the broader understanding of self through an awakening to the world is an ecological link in composition’s history that helps one to understand the role of what many would refer to as personal writing.

**Berlin’s Emerson’s closed-eyed perception of audience and honest writing.** The expanded ecological version of the self, discussed in the previous section, is embedded and interconnected with other selves. Falling into line with this vision is Emerson’s dynamic idea of a shifting audience, a recognition that prefigures the shifting foundations of postmodern thinking and calls to mind Cooper’s vision of a dynamic composing process. The interrelationship and reliance understood in a social ecology necessitates writers who are not simply writing to please others but who are expressing themselves in honest ways. Emerson’s view of audience points toward the writer being able to set forth an honest vision that is not only this dynamism but relevant to early process theorists as well as the Ecological Episteme.

When he was at his best, Emerson escaped the trap of embodying supposed Cartesian dichotomies. Since he felt that there is no dichotomy between the inner and outer worlds, it follows that Emerson’s notion of eloquence is tied to audience. Eloquence, for Emerson, springs from an occasion that arises in democracy, what today would be “called the rhetorical exigency, compelling

reason to speak or write” (Berlin 53). This idea of audience obviously mirrors numerous studies such as Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki’s conclusion that “good writing . . . grows out of a writer’s sense that the work he or she is doing matters, both professionally and personally” (136). Berlin writes that Emerson wishes to engage in a “dialectic with the audience, allowing its unique characteristics to stimulate him [sic] to discover his message” (54). Emerson’s well-developed sense of audience includes an ecocomposition-like fluidity by noting “an audience is not a simple addition of the individuals that compose it. Their sympathy gives them a certain social organism, which fills each member, in his own degree, and most of all the orator, as a jar in a battery is charged with the whole electricity of the battery” (Berlin 54). Contrary to the spirit of the present times as well as the Zeitgeist theories in the 1800s, in which a “speaker should adapt to the listener,” Emerson argues that the audience-rhetor interaction is more complex and “that the audience must be made to adapt to the speaker.” He also argues that “the orator must carry his audience with him [sic], instead of being directed by it” (Berlin 54).

Emerson’s notion of audience cuts into the heart of how the ecology of ideas relates to composition theory. Some will find readily evident connections between composition theory and Berlin’s construction of the above Emersonian rhetorical ideas as his views on audience and the social democratic seem aligned with broad categories of expressivism and social epistemicism. However, from an ecological epistemic perspective, I would like to specifically explain the connection of how Emerson’s ideas about audience melt into confluence with

ecological composition theory. To accomplish this explanation, I would like to take a bit of a rhetorical leap to ruminate upon the ideas of vision and blindness. More specifically, I would like to employ the ancient trope of the blind seer to illustrate how honest writing flourishes from turning away, for a time, from the audience, and why this is natural.

From Homer's Tiresias to Neo in *The Matrix*, I understand the stance of being blind as a metaphor for those who see beyond mundane description and recitation of facts to find insight. This idea of closing one's eyes to the audience to achieve insight connects Emerson's sense of audience with composition and process theorists. Emerson's idea of orators bringing the audience with them, rather than adjusting to an audience, is akin to Elbow's message in "Closing my Eyes as I Speak."

In this essay, Elbow describes how ignoring the audience in early written drafts produces better writing in certain circumstances. Thus, both Elbow and Emerson rely upon the cultivation of an inner image. To Emerson, language is a natural phenomenon that is independent of nature. "As we go back in history," he writes, "language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy when it is all poetry" (38). Emerson equates the purity of language with nature and the corruption of language with "secondary desires" that relate to materialism and ego issues. Audience can be seen to represent the ego-related aspects of these secondary desires, and thus, it follows that the metaphoric closing of the eyes, the blinding, takes us back to our original natural thinking, which in a sense can be seen as the truest form of writing. Similarly, Elbow uses the fairly common

phenomenon of a struggling writer's journal being untangled and strong. He reasons that it is the closing of the eyes to the audience that fosters expository and expressive journal writing that is often stronger than if the writer kept the audience in mind throughout the entire drafting process. Here is a passage from Elbow that appears particularly close to Berlin's version of Emerson:

When we examine really good student or professional writing, we can often see that its goodness comes from the writer's having gotten sufficiently wrapped up in her meaning and her language as to forget all about audience needs. . . . It is characteristic of much good writing to be, as it were, on fire with its meaning.

Consciousness is burned away; involvement in subject determines all. (145)

Thus, Elbow's perception of audience is also one that is also uncorrupted by ego-driven secondary desires. Writing that springs from such a place would seem to be honest and genuine; writers who are in touch with this aspect of themselves are less likely to write to please their instructor. By bringing up "honest writing," I am not referring to the avoidance of plagiarism. I am instead referring to writing that emerges from those who are discussing something important to them, a topic or idea that expresses a writer's very essence.

There are unforeseen benefits to such honesty. College writers who establish a habit of moving beyond audience expectations in early drafts may be better able to maneuver in the working world. More important is the hope that these writers would be more honest and less likely to capitulate to potential

unethical demands of superiors. Also, given that these writers would have the ability to express themselves, they may have the confidence and rhetorical ability to honestly approach superiors about how they believe, for instance, that a certain chemical discharge will poison a stream. Honest writing that a writer learns in a college writing class has much value as an ecological concept. Emerson would very much agree with this concept as his rhetoric was “not restricted to securing a desired effect on the audience, [and] was attempting to restore the search for truth to the composing act” (Berlin 57) by blinding himself to the audience when envisioning his speech.

Of course, by saying “blind,” I am not at all suggesting that we should physically blindfold students, nor am I trying to make light of the physical issue of blindness. What I am suggesting is that ignoring audience in the early phases of writing is a wholly natural tendency that tends to foster honest writing. The question remains, what are some other activities that might serve as metaphoric blindfolds? Emerson sees nature as a way to elicit insight. To Emerson, a retreat into the natural world helps his ego to vanish. Perhaps, however, there are many metaphoric conduits to alleviate the problems created by audience.

**Emerson’s ecological thinking.** Berlin’s Emerson is revealed to be a social and democratic thinker whose perception is very much immersed in the principles of the Ecological Episteme. His understanding of categorization and the coming of the “machine in the garden”<sup>19</sup> mentality would attest to this.

Additionally, these connections and his idea of audience appear to link Emerson

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<sup>19</sup> This references Leo Marx’s book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, which in part presents a literary examination of how the pastoral ideal was affected by the forces of industrialism.

to an ecological form of expressivism that grows into the social. To show this link to the social, it is worthwhile to quote a large portion of Berlin's last paragraph, which allows Emerson's rhetoric to be seen as an idea that synthesizes writing and ecology:

Emerson's rhetoric, not restricted to securing a desired effect on the audience, was attempting to restore the search for truth to the composing act. Truth, moreover is organic, is a holistic product growing out of the entire situation—reality, speaker, listener, and language. All are involved in discovery and each changes in response to each. These are not static entities to be considered through mechanical calculation. In its emphasis on truth, in its comprehensiveness, and in its social orientation, Emerson's rhetoric rivals Aristotelian rhetoric. (57)

Thus, the father of environmental rhetoric, through Berlin's lens, appears to be a social, democratic, non-Platonist who holds the search for truth in high regard.

This review of the Berlin chapter reveals a great deal. First, Berlin shows the implications of ecological thinking by describing how Emerson worked holistically beyond dualisms. Also, Berlin's categorical entrapment, which leads to an understanding of how movements, such as process, can become reified provides a beginning point for theorists and practitioners to promote sustainable, viscous writing programs as well as visions for the study of writing. Second, Berlin's Emerson provides an understanding of a broader conceptualization of the consciousness of the writing subject. This conceptualization includes the Zen



concept of “Big Mind,” which is a broad ecological version of the self that contains the social. Third, Berlin’s Emerson has an ecological notion of audience that fosters honest writing by accessing the ecology of the mind. As a whole, what emerges from the Berlin conversation is that expressivism is a vital aspect to the ecology of student literacy, but only if it allows individuals to understand the way in which they are embedded in the culture.

### **Petruzzi—Disclosive Nature of Truth**

Petruzzi separates Emerson from the social constructionist influences of Cassirer and Langer by relating Emerson to Martin Heidegger. While Petruzzi agrees with some of the major aspects of Berlin’s analysis, that Emerson is social and democratic and not a Platonist, for instance, he has a different analysis on why he is not a “Platonist.” Petruzzi, as it turns out, channels Heidegger to show that Emerson’s resemblance is much stronger toward the German philosopher one hundred years his junior.

Petruzzi finds connections between Emerson and Heidegger to argue that “the disclosive theory of truth presents a more complete and richer way to describe Emerson’s rhetorical theory than either the enlightenment rhetoric of ‘commonsense’ or the Romantic theory of ‘self-expression’” (51). Further, Petruzzi agrees with Berlin’s idea of Emerson being a social constructivist and the relational nature of Emerson’s view of truth but takes issue with Berlin’s theory that for Emerson a constant and consistent truth is regenerated through new metaphors (52). Rather, Petruzzi holds that, like Heidegger, Emerson has a relational understanding of truth, as follows:

A human being “studies relations in all objects” because he is in the midst of the world: “He is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man” (1940, “Nature,” 15-16). Understanding exists as a relation between Daesin and the world. For Emerson, the theory of correspondence does not imply that truth is a mode of correctness of representation; rather, it implies a field of relations. (53)

To Heidegger, the term “Daesin” translates loosely to “human being” or “mode of being human” (Jones 286). Petruzzi’s Emerson holds a “disclosive” nature of truth that is embedded and found within his reading of Plato, which is quite different than the Platonists’ view of Plato. Simply put, the Platonists view is very mechanistic in that they look for systematic order and “actually conceal the way the texts of Plato operate; rather than participate in the covering up of the truth in Plato’s texts” (Petruzzi 55).

On the other hand, rather than reduce Plato’s ideas to a mechanistic system, Emerson’s Plato is an ecological thinker who sees a world made up of “a thing of shreds and patches” in what Petruzzi perceives as a disclosive nature of truth. Petruzzi’s Emerson finds that truth emerges in different ways, as he cites Emerson as noting that ““one man thinks this, another that; he has said one thing in one place, and the reverse of it in another place.”” (55). Petruzzi further draws upon Emerson’s essay on Plato to reveal that ““whatever [Plato] looks upon discloses a second sense, and ulterior senses”” (55). To Emerson, “Plato’s

thinking stands on its power to reveal the world and each new revelation contains possibilities that in turn disclose new expansions” (56). Petruzzi concludes that, like Heidegger, Emerson understands the limitations of consciousness and fragmented nature of knowledge (56).

As shown above, Petruzzi sees Emerson’s and Heidegger’s search for truth as a hermeneutic quest involved with organic interpretation. He also sees that “cultural habits, customs, and old beliefs construct a system of illusions that must be deconstructed by thoughtful critical analysis” (57). From this essay, one begins to gain an understanding of Emerson that is not far removed from the interpretive stances in our field today. Emerson’s use of simile falls in line with Neal’s “ecology as metaphor” (See Chapter One) movement in ecocomposition. First, relating to organic intellectual development, Petruzzi cites Emerson’s simile that “all of our progress is unfolding like a vegetable bud” (61). Second, Petruzzi notes that Emerson’s thought is very similar to Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle when he asserts that the thought process is “[t]o expand in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning” (57). As Petruzzi notes, within these circles, there is a “constant reordering of thought,” a recirculation that “all thinking is a process that equally unifies and disrupts the life of the thinker” (57). In other words, in his use of this organic language, Petruzzi’s Emerson delineates a natural way to construct reality. This natural philosophy is cloaked in the language and holistic reality of the Ecological Episteme. As we see throughout this discourse, overreliance upon the mechanistic tends to

conceal our underlying ecological thread, leading us on a path away from Emerson's endless seeking of what Heidegger would term the authentic being.

In the Petruzzi essay, the fusion of the Heideggerean notion of authentic being with Emersonian epistemology is most relevant to this discussion. Like Bly, who focuses upon Thoreau's desire for individuals and society to have greater levels of awareness, Petruzzi writes that "for both Emerson and Heidegger, forgetfulness, lethargy, indolence and sleepiness all threaten our perception of reality and our understanding of self and are the 'problems' of existence" (57). Like Berlin, Petruzzi sees the reductive nature of those who couch Emerson's readings as simply American individualism. Relating to the striving for authentic being, Petruzzi writes:

Imitation, drills of school education, rules and regulations all operate as existential structures that disguise or, in Heidegger's terms, cover up authentic being. For Emerson, the fundamental relation of human beings (the being or beings or the Many) with Being (the One) is always of primary importance. Emerson recognizes that the covering up of this relationship is co-original with the revelation of truth. The dynamic of the authentic self, the self that experiences the covering up as covering up, seeks to make manifest "the system of illusions" that "shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see." (57-58)

Again, one can see the relation to Blake's metaphor of "narrow chinks" relating to the constriction of human perception. Thus, again, the point is made from

another philosophic construct: over-emphasis on mechanization damages and narrows our lives in multiple ways. In composition, particularly focused activities, such as school drills or assessment activities, are seen as pinpointed or mechanized. The world narrows when we become caught up in mechanization when people fail to see beyond the more holistic purpose of such activities. This narrow focus causes students to solely emphasize outcomes. We must continually be on guard for reified processes of mechanization, which usually spring into existence when there is some form of perceived exigency, such as Berlin's discussion of the current traditional movement springing up after the perceived incompetence of Harvard freshmen at the end of the nineteenth century. Petruzzi's connection to Heidegger has further relevance in that numerous links have been made between Heidegger's metaphysics, Taoism, and Buddhism. Of course, it is well known that Emerson and Thoreau make frequent references to such ideas. Petruzzi's Emerson works to guard against the reification of mechanization. Petruzzi also reinforces Emerson's individual self as encompassing the social. Clearly, Emerson and the transcendentalists were ecological thinkers, and numerous ecological ideas appear to have been passed on by Immanuel Kant.

### **Place-Based Ecological Underpinnings**

The second part of this chapter discusses that while Emerson and Thoreau have been seen as post-Kantians, they also avoided the institutionalized modes of inquiry developed by state-sponsored university philosophers (West 36). West sees Emerson at the base of the American Pragmatic lineage. West

presents an Emerson who eschews concern with rigid, systematized thinking, focusing instead on thoughts and concerns that were more attuned to issues that grew out of the socio-cultural milieu encompassing the interactions and concerns of the new world. Though West is apologetic for Emerson, he suggests that Emerson, for at least part of his life, held racist views. If Emerson in his role at the base of the pragmatic lineage could pass on other avenues of thought, he could have also passed on the implicit racism of the “radical” expressivists that Lisa Delpit and others discuss.<sup>20</sup> What is revealed here is that reified thinking causes teachers to lose sight of student needs.

This inquiry raises various questions relevant to place-based/ecocomposition/ecological writing and will further open our field to consider the sort of rigid categorization of past theory and practice. Such an inquiry will also allow scholars to more clearly discern the areas of composition that have become mechanical, rigid, and reified. As shown in the Berlin discussion, mechanical thinking can sneak up on the best of us. The recognition of how easy it is for those of us in composition and writing studies to become trapped in the cogs of mechanized thinking opens new pathways and reinvigorates tired and overworked thoughts and actions. Such awareness helps teachers to begin to see their profession as once again active, viscous, and exciting, the classroom as a literacy playground. Suddenly, connections arise between student writing and the larger world, as students begin to transform in ways that point them toward their ideal selves, in their actions that work for the

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<sup>20</sup> As will be noted later in the chapter, problematizing this point is that what academics value as the dominant discourse also may be wrapped in racism.

good of the local and global community. Further, when we look upon composition as an ecological phenomenon, we see evidence that some of the recirculation in our thought contains elements of cultures and practices outside of what historians would define as the West, including Eastern and indigenous thought. To understand this recirculation is to allow the Ecological Episteme to enable us to think in more powerful and complex ways.

### **Cornel West**

West clarifies and deepens Berlin's reading of Emerson. He delves into the lineage fueling American Pragmatism, clarifying the role that pragmatists have played in shepherding a new American form of cultural critique that prefigures Martin Luther King and Paulo Freire. Such a cultural understanding needs to be reached in order to gain a fuller conception of how the Ecological Episteme has operated in composition and how ecological thinking can be employed to improve our classrooms and writing programs. This understanding is important because it helps us to determine that Emerson's rhetoric sprung from his home place, not from some abstract construct. Second, the West interpretation shows that Emerson prefigures composition's qualitative mode of inquiry in asserting that he evaded the certainty and essentialism of continental philosophy. Third, West's status as an African-American scholar who has written books about "racism" and "racialized" discourse helps to establish his ethos in regard to some of Emerson's troubling views on race and helps us to see where some ideas within the movements within composition need to go, via Delpit and bell hooks.

As much as Berlin awakens the idea that Emerson's practices and rhetoric were social and democratic, West journeys to find Emersonian metaphysics not only to be post-Kantian but uniquely American as well, pointing toward the social and cultural struggles that have been ongoing since Emerson's time. In this sense, Emerson was very much affected by the idea that writing and thinking are products of place, an idea that Owens explores at length in his work *Composition and Sustainability*. Moreover, in the forest of ideas about Emerson, West envisions Emerson's path as that of an organic intellectual who evaded the more objective Kantian quest for the truth. Nonetheless, West believes that Emerson belongs alongside the great North Atlantic philosophers who are immersed in the tradition of American pragmatism, which West presents as a fusion between American transcendental Romanticism and a spirit of action that arises out of the project that is the United States. One of the foremost scholars of race in the United States, West sees Emerson as a "mild mid-Atlantic racist" of his time. If an implicit pragmatism springs forth, an implicit racism may spring forth as well. As discussed below, such implicit racism may have been passed on to composition. Ironically, though, according to West, Emerson's metaphysics includes the type of cultural criticism that will become vital in forming a society that strives toward racial equality. I contend that these currents and undercurrents circulate through composition as well. This evasion can be seen as an ecological act that reveals an ideological connection between ecological, place-based composition theories and Emerson.



Emerson's evasion itself amounts to an ecological act. West labels Emerson an organic scholar but not in the ecological sense, per se. West employs the term "organic" to depict Emerson as someone who has severed himself from the European philosophic project, meaning that he is a home-grown scholar. While West was not thinking about the ecological movement when he used this term, his word choice helps us to see the ecological in Emerson's thinking. Growing as they did out of the project that was the United States, Emerson's words emerged out of an authentic and organic situation. Both Emerson and Thoreau are thus precursors to ideas of composition and place, such as those forwarded by Owens, Dobrin, and Weisser. Thus, geographic placement fueled Emersonian cultural criticism.

On the cover of West's book, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, is an illustration depicting Emerson at the base of a tree of American pragmatists. However, as mentioned, rather than assuming that Emerson's metaphysics are post-Kantian, West has offered the premise that Emerson strayed from European philosophy. West's Emerson is an organic intellectual who "evaded" Kant and other continental philosophers. He began this evasion in order to "strip the profession of philosophy of its pretense, disclose its affiliations with structures of powers (both rhetorical and political) rooted in its past, and enact intellectual practices, i.e., produce texts of various sorts and styles, that invigorate America's culture and society" (West 37). West depicts an Emerson whose thoughts are tied with the immediacy of place and context, two concepts that are on par with ecocomposition. Thus, West augments and

expands Berlin's work to construct Emerson in such a way so as to allow composition to view him as a central figure in the mechanistic, non-current traditional strand of composition, making Emerson one of the major sources for both the process and cultural movements in composition.

Thus, greater support for Emerson as a social and democratic thinker is found in the realm of the history of American philosophy. In placing Emerson at the base of the tree of American pragmatists, West charts the "emergence, development, decline, and resurgence of American pragmatism . . . as a specific historical and cultural product of American civilization" (4) and presents a trajectory that reveals how "American pragmatism emerges with profound insights and myopic blindnesses, enabling strengths and debilitating weaknesses" (5). What eventually then blooms from West's work is a more complete meta-discourse of the effect of a lineage that begins with Emerson and then drifts through William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, William Edward Burghardt Dubois, John Dewey, Richard Rorty, and, finally, West. West culminates this discussion by bringing forth his own theory entitled "prophetic pragmatism" which appropriates the "Emersonian culture of creative democracy by means of creative intelligence and social action" (212). Thus, West argues that the kind of cultural discourse that we are used to in this country, which would include the race, class, and gender issues of English studies, springs from the pen of Emerson.

Though West holds that Emerson is a worthy enough scholar to be discussed alongside the continental philosophers, he, as mentioned above, also

feels that Emerson is an organic intellectual who departs from the somewhat academic traditions of Kant. West defines Emerson as an “organic intellectual primarily preoccupied with the crisis of a moribund religious tradition, a nascent industrial order, and most importantly, a postcolonial and imperialist nation unsure of itself and unsettled about its future” (11). To expand a bit upon his concept of Emerson at the base of the pragmatist tree, West feels that Emerson’s evasion has to do with wiping the slate clean so that work of the new world can begin:

Unlike European philosophical giants like Rene Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and G.W.F. Hegel, Emerson viewed knowledge not as a set of representations to be justified, grounded, or privileged but rather as instrumental effects of human will as it is guided by human interests, which are in turn produced by transactions with other humans and nature. (36)

In other words, rather than a somewhat rigid quest for truth, Emerson extracted philosophy from the academy and pragmatically applied it to the problems of the day. In this way, Emerson’s philosophy is both ecological and adaptive.

Strengthening this point, West sees pragmatism as “a diverse and heterogeneous tradition.” But its common denominator consists of a “future-oriented instrumentalism” that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action. The result of this evasion allows for an epistemic break in thought which “results in a conception of philosophy as a form of cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to

distinct social and cultural crises” (5). Thus, not only is Emerson the father of environmental rhetoric, but he prefigures the kind of qualitative local inquiry that we have come to rely upon in composition.

West’s portrayal of Emerson’s rhetoric serves to deepen Emerson’s form of cultural criticism. In terms of rhetoric, West portrays Emerson as functioning “in a complex manner” and offers in some ways a more complex and problematized view of Emerson’s rhetoric and philosophy. Like Berlin, West sees Emerson as heralding rhetoric to promote the social and democratic. However, in this regard, West once again goes further than Berlin by writing that “[f]or Emerson, the powers of the nation are inseparable from the powers of rhetoric to construct ‘the nation’ as a distinct object of discourse” (13). West’s Emerson promotes the social and democratic both as a curmudgeon-like gadfly who seeks to awaken those in his country to a certain unwelcome progressive truth, and, on the other side, a cheerleader for the free market and the never-ending expansion of America. Emerson’s letter to his friend and colleague Margaret Fuller, conveying that the “famine in Ireland ‘only’ affects potatoes, the sterility in America continues in men” and that the “country was affected with pervasive ‘selfishness, fraud and conspiracy’” exemplifies his role as gadfly (West 14).

These statements directly fall into line with much of Thoreau’s rhetoric. For instance, in the “Solitude” chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau exclaims, “Society is commonly too cheap. . . . We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of our musty old cheese” (119). It was not that Thoreau and Emerson were anti-social, anachronistic misanthropes. Emerson, and contrary to

popular belief, Thoreau, functioned in towns, the latter by many accounts possessing a magnetic personality that matched his eccentricity. They, like Buddhists, believed in being awake to reality whether this means being awake to a serene evening on Walden Pond or a war that is entered into under false pretenses.

***West's Emerson on race and culture.*** West extracts numerous racist passages from Emerson's journal, some that speculated about Africans being inferior, which, according to West, reveals the unfortunate spirit of the time. Though West balances these statements with other contradictory journal entries, evincing a great respect for the likes of Toussaint L'Overture and Frederick Douglass (30), he stops short of absolving Emerson. Further, West's Emerson appears in many ways to be co-opted by numerous entities, a person caught within the morals of an elite society who comprised the audience for his philosophy and social issues of the day. This is where the Emerson legacy begins to be a bit convoluted, for Emerson seems to twist American individualism to support an idea of "U.S. exceptionalism that posits the invulnerability and unassailability of the American way of life" (West 14). West furthers Harold Bloom's claim that Emerson invented "the American religion"<sup>21</sup> to describe his perspective as a "theodicy" that rests upon three principles (17). The first "assumes that the basic nature of things, the fundamental way the world is, is congenial to and supportive of the moral aims and progress of the chosen or exceptional people, i.e., the Americans" (14-15). The second is that "the basic

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<sup>21</sup> West defines this "religion" as a "theodicy" that "extols human power, vision, newness, and conquest domesticates and dilutes the devastating critiques of American civilization put forward by Emerson himself" (17).

nature of things, the fundamental way the world is, is itself incomplete and in flux, always the result of and a beckon to the experimental markings, workings, and doings of human beings” (16). The third premise is that such “experimental, markings, workings and doings . . . have been neither understood nor fully unleashed in the modern world” (16).

The examples of Emerson’s racist journaling and his dream of a chosen America have caused in me some fundamental cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance is fomented by my idealistic presumption about someone whose thoughts underlie a connection between ecology and composition. It seems that such a person should be synonymous with modern-day concepts such as universal social justice. However, if history was tidy in these matters, there would likely be no reason for me to write this dissertation. Thus, rather than an idealized version of history, West reveals that “the unconscious underside of this Emersonian aim is the setting aside of tradition and the enshrining of the market by which the Saxon race exercises imperial domination over nature and those peoples associated therewith, e.g., Indians, Mexicans, blacks, women” (37). Also, West presents Emerson’s vacillating journalized racial sentiments as the product of maturing out of ignorance. One later entry gushes over the brilliance of Frederick Douglass, expressing his incredulity about how anyone could equate race and inferiority. Indeed, one of the main reasons that I have included West’s analysis is that West’s brand of “prophetic pragmatism” is a multi-cultural, future-oriented theory that draws heavily from Emerson. West writes that Emerson understands that “conversation is but one minor instance of the myriad of

possible transactions for the enhancement of human powers and possibilities” (211) and explains what he would term “an Emersonian culture of creative democracy” (212). That West, a well-known African-American scholar, casts Emerson in this role despite his inability to transcend his culture’s racism lends Emerson much credibility. However, as I reveal in the next section, Emerson’s exceptionalism may have been passed on unconsciously through the process movement, particularly through calcified versions of expressivism, where non-mainstream writers are forced to explore their voice against their best interests.

***The unconscious underside of composition.*** While Emerson’s racist journal entries are disturbing, as well as contrary to what has grown from his own cultural criticism, the residual effect that this brand of racism had on composition is revelatory, clarifying an unconscious underside of composition laced with assumptions that undergirded an important movement. Of course, being founders of a progressive movement, the mothers and fathers of the process movement did not seem racist by any stretch, but could it not be that the pedagogy was perhaps filtered by pragmatist thinking fraught with unconscious racialized presumptions endemic to so many movements? For instance, until recently, the environmental movement has been criticized as a “white” movement, concerned with issues such as recycling and wilderness and far removed from the daily concerns of impoverished masses, though many of the early environmentalists had far-ranging concerns.

In the same vein, it can be said that the whole of Western philosophy has been a movement laced with exceptionalism. These subtle racist infiltrations may

have passed unconsciously through the process movement, particularly through the calcified versions of well-intentioned radical expressivists who, as Delpit noted, encouraged Inuit and other indigenous groups to find their voice at the expense of helping them write academic discourse. This turning away from academic discourse, Delpit argues, served to keep these students disempowered because theirs was not the dominant discourse. Looking at this through the gaze of the Ecological Episteme, it is evident that context is most important in recognizing student needs.<sup>22</sup>

It is indeed the ecological aspects of the process movement that opened spaces for expressivism to evolve with the assistance of Rose and hooks. As Lad Tobin notes, “Early process pedagogy offered a view of composing that was not fixed or static” and was not “linear but ‘recursive;’ that is, writers did not think and then neatly transmit that complete thought; instead the writing helped them to clarify their thinking” (11). Thus, much like nature, the ecological in the process movement reveals that writing relies upon natural recirculations. Such recirculation is an example of the Ecological Episteme at work. Also, nature tends to be at its healthiest in a situation of diversity. The best of the process movement transcends the reified implicit disempowerment that Delpit describes in *Other People’s Children*. On the contrary, I argue that Delpit indeed observed teachers who drank the reification Kool-Aid. Thus, while in most circumstances I would label expressive writing as an ecological activity, there may be certain

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<sup>22</sup> See also the case made by other scholar teachers who have had success teaching students by encouraging them to employ alternative discourses as well as to value home discourses. See David Holmes “Fighting Back by *Writing Black*” and Kermit Campbell’s *Gettin’ Our Groove On: Rhetoric, Language, and Literacy for the Hip-Hop Generation*.



times where this is not the case. The context here trumps the action. At the same time, it could also be argued that the type of linear writing that institutions hold in high esteem is the result of a racially-biased linear discourse. There could be a colonizing aspect to teaching the dominant discourse that can be disempowering for certain groups and can result in ideas of race and multiculturalism being treated in a reductive fashion. Thus, perhaps it could be seen that the racially-exclusive, privileged discourse of Emerson's time drifted into the privileged discourse of the modern university. In any case, I contend that a class embracing the Ecological Episteme would embrace all discourses and rhetorics.

Around the same time *Other People's Children* was published, mechanistic reification had narrowed process thinking to a rigidity that would eventually be attacked by emerging post-process theorists in numerous ways. With this milieu in mind, it is clear that West's work is valuable to composition in that it serves to uncover some important stones along the recirculating river that is composition's history by understanding that the concern for place is rooted in the soil of this land. The aquatic life uncovered from the removal of these stones perhaps takes the form of an ecological thought process that combines the work of Romantics and pragmatists as revealed by scholars such as Roskelly and Ronald.

### **Roskelly and Ronald**

I bring Roskelly and Ronald to the discussion for three reasons: first, their theory of a Romantic/pragmatic rhetoric nicely melds with West's analysis by illustrating how Emerson and other romantics merges the private with the social

and how this merger strikes out against cynicism. Second, Roskelly and Ronald offer an example of recirculation by showing how the evolutionary idea of one theory choking off another is short sighted. Third, they examine the way Emerson, Thoreau, and other American romantics viewed themselves in a relationship with the mechanistic realm, a point which I will nuance to show that Emerson and Thoreau also understood the narrow function and limitations of the mechanistic realm.

Roskelly and Ronald bring West's prophetic pragmatism into the realm of composition by nuancing and renaming it Romantic/pragmatic rhetoric. Their fusion illustrates how the American Romantics' holistic merger between the private and the social can be used in composition as Roskelly and Ronald believe that both praxis and rhetoric spring out of action. Drawing from theoretical history and the practical concerns of the battles of composition, their first chapter is devoted to the idea that teachers should know and understand their intellectual roots, especially those in Romantic/pragmatic rhetoric, so that they may have the weight of authority behind them. They write that "teachers who do not know the roots of their own beliefs and methods cannot act as persuasively as they might if they recognized their connections to a richly complicated past and examined how that past is used in current concepts" (x). In this light, they examine the under-theorized arguments by Jane Tompkins, in "Pedagogy of the Distressed," which continue the process-oriented call to democratize the classroom but provide little evidence of theoretical underpinnings to do so. By pairing this discussion with

Miller's overly theoretical approach in "Death of the Teacher," the authors show how practice can and should work together with theory and history.

By clarifying the stereotypical differences in reified categories in composition, Roskelly and Ronald offer expansive epistemic possibilities for composition theory. They emphasize that during Emerson's time there was no dichotomy between thinkers or between disciplines. Over time, scholars became categorically entrapped in theories, which created dualisms. They also describe the cynicism that corrodes holism in our profession. For instance, Roskelly and Ronald find that Stephen North radically narrows his idea of a writing center from a place of openness, possibility and hope in "The Idea of a Writing Center" to a place of rigidity in "The Writing Center Revisited." They reveal that North's categories leave no room for teachers who are both theorists and practitioners (8-12). They go on to discuss George Will who, in a 1995 article, berated compositionists to forget about race and class and stick to teaching "possessive pronouns" (12). These two examples are both fueled by a reliance upon an over-mechanization of approaches that close off avenues to the wide circulation of literacy.

It is in this milieu that Roskelly and Ronald strive to avoid the dichotomous opposition between pragmatism and Romanticism by illustrating their idea of a Romantic/pragmatic rhetoric. They describe how terms such as Romantic and rhetoric have reductively been seen as oppositional. The stereotypical, private, self-glorified vision of romanticism as anti-rhetorical grates against the anti-Romantic idea of intending to persuade another. Further complicating matters is

the idea that “the popular conception of pragmatism, which casts itself as a ‘commonsense,’ or atheoretical stance,” causes it to be reduced to practicality (Roskelly and Ronald 31). It is Roskelly and Ronald’s work to “collapse and elide all three terms into one” and show that throughout history the theories have worked as one (31), a stance very much in line with ecological epistemic thinking.

Like West, Roskelly and Ronald argue that place has fueled the Romantic visions of both Thoreau and Emerson and enhanced their ability to act in a social and democratic way. They build on Emerson’s statement that we need imperfect (messy) theories in order to grasp, or grope, toward hidden truths. In building their own messy theory, Roskelly and Ronald distill the qualitative aspects of pragmatism that filtered from Emerson and Thoreau into such thinkers as Peirce and James, a method that included the following tenets:

- The most important subject of inquiry is human experience;
- Inquiry is a process of observation, hypothesizing and experimenting;
- Human experience is always the test of conclusions;
- An idea is defined by its consequences;
- Inquiry into underlying principles brings opposing ideas into relationships;
- This process of inquiry leads inquirers to contingent truths.

(84)

This distillation reveals numerous ideas that serve as modern connections with literacy studies and composition theory. These ideas reveal pragmatism to be

very closely related to what compositionists do. One can readily discern how the ideas of human experience and inquiry relate to qualitative studies in writing. Additionally, we see how similar contingent truths and broad sights of inquiry translate into the literacy theories of those of Brian Street and the New London Group. Most of these literacy theorists would agree that the idea of bringing opposing ideas into a relationship is fundamental, rather than be caught in reductive and rigid dualisms. But perhaps due to our almost constant reliance upon the certainty of machines, compositionists tend to gravitate toward reification. As seen with the students in Delpit's study, a teacher who approaches her students with a rigid mindset may very well be damaging them as writers and learners.

For these reasons, composition seems to *need* a new way of thinking about its theories. When I think of the questions people might ask to such a proposal—What are you getting at? And how exactly do you propose for the field to think about itself?—I call to mind the work of the mythologist Joseph Campbell. Campbell describes being at a conference that brought together devotees and scholars of many world religions. In particular, he recalls a Shinto priest's response when asked to describe his religion's theology and ideology: “‘We do not have an ideology,’ he said. ‘We do not have a theology. We dance’” (476). This interpretive mental dance is thus the perfect analogy of the mindset of an ecological educator, to merge with the rhythms of malleability and mutuality. When dealing with demands of a classroom full of students with disparate needs and ways of knowing, it is time to dance. Within this mental dance in the

classroom our ecological thread can emerge. The following is an analogy that illustrates such a mental dance.

Picture twenty 19-year-old students sitting in a circle. Student A tells the class captivating, hilarious stories, weaving in specific vignettes between reality and dreams. These vignettes culminate in a larger and profound point about unforeseen connections between archery hunting and ballet; but when writing, her stories become terse and distant, as if she is afraid to tell them. She reveals to me in our teacher-student conference that such distance and brevity is caused by her fear of making mistakes.

On the other side of the circle sit three students who have expressed that they do not feel connected with writing, nor do they enjoy writing. Yet, despite this ambivalence, they have mastered the ability to write acceptable-sounding, intellectually dishonest, five-paragraph essays simply to please teachers. Across from them, an *underprepared* student finds that writing stories is easy, but sometimes he has trouble repeating ideas when trying to persuade.

If the above descriptions of the disparate literacy needs in the one-room school house generally named college writing has led me to any conclusion, it is that I need to be malleable about how to approach the ensuing situations caused by these class-related interactions. Such malleability, which many “good” teachers instinctively possess, is the result of ecological thinking, even if the teacher had never considered ecology as part of his or her classroom. The thinking that recovers this ecological thread often involves more of a letting go, a stepping back, an acceptance of what the situation demands rather than any sort

of contrived action. A writing teacher needs to be able to react to varied, ever-changing conditions and circumstances of the ecology of the students, balancing their individual needs with the perceived needs of the institution, not to mention understanding the exponential change in cyber-technologies.

Breaking dualism is one way to bestow upon us the ability to tune in and dance to diverse rhythms of the classroom or to grasp the universal mind of a writing program. This is where Roskelly and Ronald step in to theorize, pointing out that pragmatism “is a set of philosophical practices that promotes a rational, experience-bound, communal basis for belief and a method for connecting individuals and the societies which they operate within so that each might act on the beliefs they hold” (90). Thus, the merger of the Romantic vision with this communal basis is emblematic of the ecological epistemic thinking that both Emerson and Thoreau were immersed in.

Second, Roskelly and Ronald describe how, since the beginning of the twentieth century, theorists have been pierced by the arrow of linearity and progression, which assumes that new theories choke off the old. They describe this type of thinking as a sort of mistaken appropriation of Darwinian thought, an evolutionary model in which the old dies off, a position to which Darwin himself would not subscribe. This perceived need to replace old theories with what is new indeed is one of the issues that impede the rhythms of our dance as evidenced by the arrow of “progression” from process to post-process. The authors write the following:

Since the end of the nineteenth century, one model of development, replacement, adaptation, and success has dominated not only science but also business, education, politics, and the humanities. The model centers on the notion of change and critique based in Darwinian evolutionary perspectives on transition and displacement. (101)

Biologist Stephen J. Gould places the term evolution in a more proper context. The evolutionary model has its roots in biologic systems. Gould describes how diverse characteristics of Wolcott's 1909 discovery of the oldest fossils defied all existing systems of categorization. In fact, Wolcott's immersion in conventional systems caused him to wrongly categorize and misapply all of the fossils. With no language to deal with them, anthropologists had packed them away for years (Roskelly and Ronald 115). The reason that these fossils confounded scientists is that they met all the criteria for success in evolutionary logic that would hold that these organisms should become more complex as time went on; yet, instead, they became extinct.

There are two lessons here. One is that Wolcott, along with the others involved in the project, were engaged in reified thinking that caused in them the inability to think creatively about the situation. The second is that the biological assumption of progression is flawed. The flawed thinking has carried over to other disciplines, and, of course, this process has not spared composition. Terms such as post-process suggest a leaving behind of the old and outmoded. Sometimes, perhaps, in the case of theories developed in response to the digital



age, these theories are justified. However, other times people tend to forget what worked in the past in favor of some sort of fashionable zeitgeist, and they move on in a flurry of “posts” while failing to truly look at and build upon the theory before them. In composition, such a failure could be analogized to the way the field views a writer’s processes. The Ecological Episteme places emphasis, then, on the importance of invention and new theories while at the same time recirculating the wisdom of the past.

Third, Roskelly and Ronald are the only composition scholars to make clear that the true nature of Thoreau’s *Walden* was both a Romantic and pragmatic experiment that delved into the dialectic with society and its surroundings. In this light, Thoreau’s call to simplify during the beginnings of the industrial revolution is prophetic because it brings to mind the very essence of modern-day sustainability. Thoreau’s devotion to the social is evidenced by his action on the Mexican war, his helping escaped slaves along the Underground Railroad, and most of all his writing of “Civil Disobedience.” Unfortunately, most other treatments in composition have dealt with the alienation that students feel in trying to write retreat narratives (Kellar 203-207), or perhaps about how urban students cannot relate to Thoreau’s sense of finding solitude in nature. Again, Thoreau’s project was not solely about physical retreat into nature. Rather, it was about understanding that there is a deep space within each of us, no matter where we are. Such an inner place becomes quite evident in his essay “Solitude” wherein he describes how students in the “crowded hives of Cambridge” have as much solitude as a farmer in the field. Solitude is clearly a state of mind not

unlike the kind of inner capaciousness of any spiritual person. Thoreau has a profound and deep understanding of an inner capaciousness that we all could share.

While there is no doubt that Owens, Kellar, Killingsworth and Palmer all understand Thoreau's social concerns, they talk about him more as a source for student reading rather than a pragmatic theorist whose rhetoric truly sprung from his actions. Perhaps this is where composition's zest to rid itself of literature's canonized authors creates a blind-spot. Thoreau's experiences at Walden Pond have been stereotyped as a retreat from society, or as that of being an overgrown Boy Scout. But, in actuality, this Boy Scout had a huge impact on numerous disciplines. His assiduous recording of the blooming of wild flowers and hours spent in his family pond observing the actions of frogs (Bly 77) are currently being used by botanists. In fact, many call him the first botanist. But this man who was captivated by nature was also able to move a man like Gandhi into civil disobedience and to provide fuel for the civil rights movement. In this light, Thoreau's message is contemporary, perhaps having more in common with a modern-day activist like Van Jones than many people of his time, and thus, composition has much to learn from Thoreau's message.

Roskelly and Ronald further describe that dualistic ideas cause scholars to tend to reduce or misunderstand Thoreau's message: "When teaching and theory organize philosophical history into categories, usually in categories of opposition, hierarchy, or linearity, readers can easily forget the philosophical position that guided the writing of both *Walden* and *On Civil Disobedience*" (62-

63). Ecological epistemic thinking must consistently seek to move beyond categories, thus the above described dance must also take place in the intellectual and theoretical realms.

Fourth, Roskelly and Ronald do an excellent job articulating their view that Emerson and Thoreau held a symbiotic stance toward mechanization. However, upon closer inspection I would go a bit further to show that Thoreau and Emerson understood the narrowed possibilities as well as the potential catastrophe of placing too much emphasis upon the mechanized. Roskelly and Ronald feel that American Romantics differed from the stereotype of “averting their eyes from the mechanical or the industrial” but rather attempted to reconcile the two (69). Roskelly and Ronald discuss how Emerson, Thoreau, and other Romantics, such as Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, viewed the railroad. They find Emerson’s statement that “to diminish friction, he paves the road with iron bars, and, mounting a coach with a shipload of men, animals, and merchandise behind him, he darts through the country, from town to town, like an eagle or swallow through the air” (73) connotes an intermingling of the natural and human-made. Interestingly, without belaboring it, they make a fundamental point of the Ecological Episteme by writing that “the answer for Emerson lies not to renounce technology but to subordinate it to the imaginative and moral life” (73). This subordination is an understanding of the narrow possibilities of the mechanized and a deeper understanding, if not misinterpretation, of the ability of the mechanized to colonize and seduce our hearts, minds, and thought processes.

Roskelly and Ronald's discussion of Thoreau is less convincing. They gloss over his criticism that "We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us" (61-62), which they feel shows that he understands the danger of the train to the natural world and for communities. I would agree with Roskelly and Ronald's understanding. However, I would travel a bit further here to note that, unlike Emerson, Thoreau also understands how the train as metaphor for the mechanized had taken over the American consciousness. Thoreau was a keen observer of such a consciousness and, according to Bly, he saw how the men and women who were caught up in the rushed, newly formed industrial culture began to live meanly, which meant the "opposite of living sincerely" (25). Thoreau observed people being put in a sort of slumbering stupor by piece-meal work. His poem "What's the Railroad to me?" deepens this point:

What's the railroad to me?  
I never go to see  
Where it ends.  
It fills a few hollows,  
And makes banks for the swallows,  
It set the sand a-blowing,  
And the blackberries a-growing. (qtd. In Bly 69)

The railroad is thus defined in terms of how it affects the natural world, which is his primary concern along with inward and outward reflection. Thoreau, thus, has no use for it since he has no need to see where it ends. Of course, he knows very well that he is making a radical statement. He is refusing with all his

consciousness to be hijacked by mechanization, much like we as practitioners of composition can embrace the mechanized for what it is, so as to get from point A to point B but at the same realize the extreme constriction of this linearity. Bly notes that the metaphor for both Thoreau and Emerson embraced the newly translated Hindu and Buddhist works from the East because this literature stressed meditations that would allow us to awaken from our slumber.

In its practices, including student-centered methods such as peer review, composition has awakened to numerous ecological processes, but we need the ability and the heuristics to remain awake and to gain new levels of awareness in our teaching, assessment, and studies of writing.

Roskelly and Ronald work toward such a wakefulness with their careful research and development of a Romantic and pragmatic understanding of writing, revealing how during Emerson's and Whitman's time, there was no dichotomy between thinkers or between ideas such as Romantic and pragmatic. Instead, these dualisms were the work of scholars who created them in an effort to classify ideas. Though Roskelly and Ronald make serious attempts at dissolving the dualisms, I would argue that since the terms "Romantic" and "pragmatic" are enmeshed in and reduced to stereotypes, I offer the Ecological Epistemic as a new way of dissolving these categories.

Nonetheless, Roskelly and Ronald's reassessment of the past is the product of viewing a lineage through an ecological lens and, much like Emerson and Thoreau, their thoughts are uniquely American. But what is known as "American thought" is in some ways a confluence of many disparate ideas. I

believe that what most people would call the “1960s” era had many spin-off benefits, such as the spread of Eastern wisdom to the West. However, the American Romantics, progressives of their time, had access to and were pursuing many similar activities, including communal living and farms. The patriarchal hindsight view of Emerson being the leader is also highly questionable, as Fuller seems to be the dominant force in many of their conversations. Along with lineages, we also need to consider how non-linear assemblages of contemplative people can think in ecological ways at different times.

### **Chapter Summary**

The meta-review presented in this chapter reveals that the Ecological Episteme was at work in the lives and work of both Emerson and Thoreau in the way that they were able to see beyond dualisms and understand the mechanistic. Also, it is clear that ecological ideas come from Post-Kantian and pragmatic lineages. What we can learn from this chapter is that much of this ecological work perseveres in our classroom with the recognition of how these ideas work together. Specifically, it becomes clear that by understanding the ecological in composition, we begin to gain deeper understanding of the function and use of mechanized practices, of when to recirculate ideas or curriculums, of what constitutes honest writing, and of how dualisms can constitute mergers. These thoughts are the bedrock for a literacy of sustainability. This chapter revealed numerous key points that will be helpful in carrying out the rest of the study. These points are set forth as follows:

- Categorical entrapment can effect educators, as in the Delpit example, as well as scholars such as Berlin. Both Emerson and Thoreau understood how not to be entrapped by categories and dualisms.
- Personal writing that causes students to situate themselves within a larger context is an ecological form of writing that fosters a sense of honesty.
- The Ecological Episteme is evidenced by both post-Kantian and place-based thought processes, and thus what is ecological in composition can be tied to both of these traditions.
- Thinking that considers the way contexts are in a constant state of flux is constantly shifting and is less likely to become reified and stale.
- Compositionists must be concerned with new theories that attempt to choke off other theories.

In the next chapter, I will build off of this discussion by examining educators who were influenced directly or indirectly by Thoreau and Emerson.

CHAPTER FOUR

ECOLOGICAL EPISTEME IN ACTION: THE REVERENCE OF ALCOTT,  
SCOTT, AND BUCK

*“A composition is regarded not as a dead form, to be analyzed into its component parts, but as a living product of an active, creative mind.”* (Scott and Denny iv).

Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villers Denny wrote the above in 1897, during what has been mapped as the current-traditional period. Scott and Denny’s process-sounding holism evidences a key line of thinking for understanding the ecological basis of composition studies. At times, it seems we forget that such figures existed in a current-traditional age of mechanized writing. Yet, despite this collective amnesia, Scott and Denny’s concern hints that their time held as much theoretical complexity as our own. That this type of thinking has been around for such a long time raises the question of what new contributions have been made by previous mappings of the process movement. Thus, perhaps we should judge this movement in terms of scale by seeing the shift to process as an epistemic break that fueled various social movements of the time. With the widespread emergence of process-centered theories led by Murphy, Bruffee, Emig, Elbow, and many others, a greater awareness of and receptivity to holistic and ecological modes of being was ushered into the world of composition studies. Suddenly, writers were encouraged to celebrate recursivity, pursue early failures, find their voices, and understand their writing as a text. Rather than rely upon mechanistic forms, students were encouraged to take risks and to approach literacy as holistic, rather than a series of steps.



Writing classrooms became ecologies of thought and action, places that celebrated the sort of rhetoric that sprung from that action.

My movement from the theorists in Chapter Three toward individual teachers in this chapter is meant to support the premise that ecological thinking has been a part of educational thinking since the time of the Transcendentalists. By examining how three practicing teachers were embedded in the Ecological Episteme, this chapter continues to clarify the elements and situations that illuminate or obscure the metaphoric ecological thread that runs through each of us. What follows accomplishes such a clarification by responding to the research questions: What curricular or ideological strands in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum, and has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum? This chapter responds to these questions by moving from the idea of how composition theorists view Emerson and Thoreau toward an historical examination of individual holistic educators with connections to the ecological epistemic ideals of Emerson and Thoreau. The historical examination of Alcott illustrates how ecologic thinking has always been embedded in American education from the beginning, and the examination of Scott and Buck illustrates how ecological thinking can operate in a rigid current traditional milieu.

Specifically, I respond to the research questions by first looking at a way to negotiate the affective dimension of ecological thought. As this study moves from how composition theorists view Emerson and Thoreau toward an understanding of individual teachers who are embedded in the Ecological Episteme, it is first

appropriate to think about how human tendencies and the affective dimension relate to how people think in ecological ways. As one way of examining how the affective dimension relates to ecology, I promote a model that involves the lenses of exigency and reverence. Through the lens of exigency and reverence, this chapter expands upon the premise that the ecological ideas that sprung forth during the time of the process movement were not new. I do this by first setting forth a way for compositionists to understand and account for the affective level of what is ecological in composition. Exigency and reverence work in tandem as a frame to help educators sort through the problem of being co-opted by other entities. I will demonstrate this by exploring the ecological thinking of three alternative voices who have connections with the Romantic and Pragmatic lineage: Bronson Alcott, Transcendentalist and friend of Emerson and Thoreau; Fred Newton Scott, and Gertrude Buck, progressive educators. Thus, this chapter will clarify that what we have called the process movement emerges as a widespread recognition of holism through ecological thinking; such holism can be seen as a naturally occurring phenomenon that links human beings in deep ways.

What is also important in fully understanding the intersection of composition and ecology is that this study of Alcott, Scott, and Buck depicts three teachers whose praxis transcends the prevailing thought of their times. This thought was marked in Alcott's time by ill-prepared itinerant educators and the productive but classicist or current-traditional mindset of those associated with Horace Mann and, in Scott's and Buck's time, by teachers prepared via the

current traditional movement. That Alcott's, Scott's, and Buck's transcendence is achieved through a reverence to literacy is evident in their work. To connect Alcott, Scott, and Buck with the work of those immersed in what is ecological about the process movement, I examine each educator through the lens of reverence and exigency. In this examination, I clarify their relationship with the previously discussed heuristics comprising the Ecological Episteme, as follows: First, the recognition of the narrow function of mechanisms within an ecological whole and the problems created by a misplaced emphasis on the mechanized; second, the malleability in understanding the relationship between linearity and recirculation; and third, that a rhetorical mindset of honesty is fundamentally a natural phenomenon. This lens clarifies a broader understanding of ecological ideas in the process movement and helps us to understand the value of ecological epistemic thinking in a composition classroom. Thus, this chapter's purpose, in terms of the overall aim of the dissertation, is to depict three ecologically-minded teachers, all of whom could have fit easily into the process movement.

### **Exigency and Reverence: A Heuristic Frame**

#### **Exigency**

Much is lost through implicit or false exigency that is imposed upon us by a specific entity in power. This is true in both education and the larger world and in both the present time and during Alcott's, Scott's, and Buck's time. One illustration of this phenomenon is contained within the *History of Madness in Western Civilization*, wherein Foucault uncovers that the hidden agenda behind

the sudden proliferation of insane asylums in the 1700s in Europe was due as much to the curing of leprosy than the false exigency that was given as the official reason. Patrick Hartwell relates such hiddenness to literacy in “Creating a Literate Environment in Freshman Composition” by reminding us that there is often a “hidden curricula”<sup>23</sup> in the way we do business” (8). In his defense of a malleable theory of literacy wrapped in metacognition and meta-linguistics, Hartwell gives further reasoning for this:

Studies of the professions—Richard Ohmann’s study of college English, Frances Fitzgerald’s study of changing values in American college English, Jean Anyon’s examination of the idea of “work” in high school social science classes—remind us that things are not what they seem, that there are hidden curricula in the way we do our business. Consider, most obviously, Michel Foucault’s insight that three cultural institutions developed in the eighteenth century—prisons insane asylums and schools—share common underlying purposes: to observe, discipline, and punish. (8)

We need ways to discover such underlying purposes and hidden agendas. It is the unnatural primacy given to mechanization that often gives rise to the implicit or false exigencies that are spawned from such hiddenness.

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<sup>23</sup> In “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work,” Jean Anyon presented her findings of a hidden curriculum from a study of fifth graders from varied social classes. She found that curriculums in working class districts tended to be focused on more vocational tasks; whereas those from more affluent areas tended to be immersed in more complex activities. This hidden curriculum represented a “tacit preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way” (91).

The idea of exigency has been considered as part of the rhetorical situation since Aristotle. In “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer describes exigency as the first of three “constituents” of a rhetorical situation. He defines an exigency “as an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6). To Bitzer, an exigency becomes rhetorical when there is the possibility of positive change. Germane to this topic, he gives the example of air pollution as an example of a rhetorical exigency, in that it calls for public action, education, and other activities (7). However, it is his definition of a false exigency that most interests me. In this light, Bitzer writes that:

Real situations are to be distinguished from sophistic ones in which, for example, a contrived exigence is asserted to be real; from spurious situations in which the existence or alleged existence of constituents is the result of error or ignorance; and from fantasy in which exigence, audience, and constraints may all be the imaginary objects of a mind at play. (11)

I would add to this list certain hidden agendas that at times may rise to the status of outright duplicity. A post-digital-age example of this hiddenness would seem to be the zeal with which university administrations are promoting online education, which too often masks the true exigency of the need to cut costs.

The very root of the term, *exigent*, which the *OED Online* defines as an “urgent want; pressing state (of circumstances)” comes as a demand in law, a warrant occasioning “the sheriff to summon the defendant to appear and deliver

up himself upon pain of outlawry.” Thus, the etymology of the word seems to place a legal demand on us. Those whose mechanized activities are fueled by greed often pursue these activities with the full force and command of laws written specifically to protect them. For instance, it has been perfectly legal for mining companies to blow up mountains in the service of an urgent need for electricity, even though such a process destroys or changes forever local watersheds and causes countless health problems for people living near such activity. Our world abounds with destructive examples of false or supposed exigencies.

In composition classes, there is a supposed exigency for students to write in a certain way that is considered academic, and, of course, there exists a great deal of disparity as to how to help students attain this ability. At times, exigency caused by large, rigid administrative or departmental mandates causes teaching to devolve into mechanized practices that subsume a great many creative ideas about the teaching of writing, and narrows the act of writing into a skill devoid of epistemic possibilities. And who knows how many people are turned off of literacy because of these sorts of teaching practices, such as will be described later in this chapter. There are times, as in the case of Delpit, when students may benefit from mechanized approaches to learn discourses that will help them gain access to power structures. Most of the time, our writing classes are filled with students who have disparate literacy needs—as in a sort of one room schoolhouse—and, thus, the writing conference becomes vital. Further, because of a supposed exigency relating to funding, many of us deal with class sizes of

over twenty-five students and a total of well over one hundred students each semester.

At the turn of the century, when Scott was describing the process of writing “a composition,” he was, as Kitzhaber has noted, “ahead of his time” but his “ideas were smothered by the demand for correctness” (Stewart and Stewart 5). According to Berlin, such a demand sprung from the exigency and concern of the Harvard’s committee of three (*Writing*, 60-61). In education and elsewhere, the crux of the problem lies not within the intention of those who promote an exigency. Rather, it lies within a complicity in the result of the activity. Is the mining of a nonrenewable resource worth the permanent desecration of a mountain? Or is a university budget crisis worth increasing class sizes and sacrificing student learning?

## **Reverence**

This misunderstood virtue silently wisps through the ideas of those who seem to have an organic and holistic conception of the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic, so much so that perhaps we could call it a fourth R, or the hidden R. Hartwell lays out a metalinguistic and metacognitive understanding of literacy that he called “the smart view” (9). Of course, much has happened since 1988: process has been remapped into post process, alternative theories have emerged, and these theories have been adjusted to deal with the way in which the third apparatus of the digital world supports our social fields of writing. It is, thus, my contention that the more natural way to reach the “three R’s” of reading, writing, and arithmetic is to avoid the two parallel Rs of rigidity and reification,

and understand another R, that of reverence. For, once the forces of rigidity and reification begin, we get carried out of our natural rhythm, we forget about intuition, and we adopt a “cut our losses” mentality with our theory and classrooms. We can, of course, forgive ourselves for these transgressions—to err is human, remember. Moving beyond the ERR (exigency, rigidity, and reification), then, is not necessarily divine in this instance, but it is evidence of ecological thinking. The educators discussed in this chapter were able to move beyond the ERR to counteract such rigid forces by drawing upon their reverence.

The deeper one sees into an idea such as reverence, the more clearly one sees it playing a vital role in avoiding the categorical traps and mechanistic thinking discussed in the previous chapter, and the more one senses how it works in conjunction with exigency. According to Paul Woodruff, reverence was heralded by Greek poets but downplayed as a virtue by Plato, perhaps due to Plato’s concern that leaders would use it to abuse their power, causing the true meaning of reverence to also be deemphasized for centuries (9). However, as Woodruff shows in his work *On Reverence*, its ancient origins in the West and East have more to do as a check on power, rather than as an opportunity to abuse it. Simply put, reverence works to “keep humans from acting like gods.” Woodruff begins from a schema of the term, which he describes as the “well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when those are the right feelings to have.” He gives examples of feeling awed by “a great whale, a majestic redwood, or a range of tall mountains” (9). Woodruff finds that reverence has more to do with power than religion. Yet, because people



mistakenly equate reverence as something involved with blind ritual or dogma, Woodruff separates and defines various aspects of this virtue. This separation includes irreverence, which he notes is often misused in the place of boldness or subversion. In so doing, Woodruff describes a modern American society that has misconstrued the idea of irreverence, in that satirizing or criticizing a corrupted official or institution is held up as being irreverent. This misconception could not be further from the original intention of the idea of reverence. Rather, this person's boldness may have been occasioned by irreverence on the part of the entity in power (Woodruff 36). From Woodruff's perspective, the bold, the creative, or the subversive often act out of reverence. In contrast, those in charge during the scandals at Penn State and within the Catholic Church were being irreverent by abusing their powers.

These understandings of reverence and exigency can help to fully comprehend the Ecological Episteme and those thinkers, particularly Alcott, Scott, and Buck, who were and are immersed in it. Also, it can help composition scholars to examine how ideas of sustainability and ecology can be co-opted. Thus, the questions might be asked, how I will equate reverence and exigency with the ecological, and how should this ecological realm of thought identify distinctions between certain exigencies, such as those that tend to promote or dissolve a literacy of sustainability?

In order to support a literacy of sustainability, reverence needs to comport with other aspects of the Ecological Episteme. The application of Frederick Taylor's efficiency models to education certainly works to obscure our ecological

thread and, thus, would tend to dissolve a literacy of sustainability. This is the case, despite the possibility that Taylor and others may have had reverence for efficiency models that “effectively broke the power of the skilled craftsmen who had built nineteenth century industry” causing “workers to be able to exert less power over the owners” (Russell 103). How can this reverence for such anti-ecological policies be reconciled? This is where the idea of reverence and exigency, working in synchronicity with the Ecologic Episteme, would have clarified that the application of Taylor’s ideas to education would have been seen as misguided. In some cases, however, it might take quite some time for us to sort this out. This sorting out is why assessment scholars call for continuous and ongoing assessment of writing programs; such assessment needs to be sustainable, comporting with the provisions of the Ecological Episteme .

Simply put, reverence acts as a rationale for applying ecological thoughts in a writing classroom. Woodruff describes in his last chapter that in an ideal classroom, teachers and students would have reverence for one another. It follows, then, that in an ideal writing classroom, both teachers and students ought to have reverence for writing. This said, the Ecological Episteme is rooted in a reverence that promotes a broad array of values. With such values in mind, exigency and reverence act as a heuristic that fuels pragmatic action toward sustainable ideals. Moreover, exigency and reverence work as a frame for this chapter, and this frame also acts as a rationale for applying ecological thoughts in a writing classroom.

Thus, the ecological connections that I discuss in this chapter relate to teachers who had such reverence for the educational process that they were willing to subvert, move beyond, or simply ignore the factors that drove fearful or overly efficient pedagogues of their time to be ruled by exigency. I also want to move beyond these connections to express not merely a link between transcendental thought and the lineage of ecological thinkers that runs through Scott and Buck—these links are fairly obvious—but to show that ecological thinking has also been part of the major movements in philosophy and other realms and is necessary for the health of the theoretical and practical aspects of composition and writing studies. Thus, the phenomenon that I am describing has links in terms of lineage, or, perhaps, “assemblage,” a term better utilized within my discussion since we cannot be sure of a lineage here.

One could identify ideas that run through great teachers and thinkers who exemplify admirable qualities throughout recorded history. Most of them sneak through their lives as relative unknowns except to those lucky enough to have them as teachers and colleagues. Thus, the well-known people who I describe herein have no doubt influenced others. It is also true that these loud voices are emblematic of a microcosm of anonymous assemblages of like-minded ecological thinkers. Anonymous Peter Elbows and Donald Murrays and Janet Emigs can be found in English departments across the United States. To recognize this anonymity is vital for historians because in this discourse we must interrogate and call into question certain hierarchies, not simply to condemn or overturn them but to more fully understand their meaning. Thus, the ability of

exigency and reverence to illuminate what is hiding in the shadows of agendas, and to detect the values that are vital within them, is important in revealing and understanding the ecological milieu surrounding Alcott, as well as Scott and Buck, in that each of these educators' reverence for holistic, ecological thinking eclipsed the supposed exigencies of their times.

### **Bronson Alcott**

The study of Alcott can work in many ways, but I wish mostly to focus on how a discussion of a holistic educator can illuminate the Ecological Episteme . Specifically, I will discuss, first, how his ideas of classroom structure and activities closely align with process and systems theorists, and, second, how his reverence for truth mirrors the ideas of Elbow as well as indigenous thought and how this counteracts the more “fact-based” exigencies of his time. These ideas work together to display how a pedagogy that embraces a literacy of sustainability through the Ecological Episteme can operate in the milieu of a classroom. Alcott was immersed within, and in many ways propelled by, the ideas and milieu of the transcendentalists. A well-known contemporary and very close friend of Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne, Alcott was an innovative yet controversial educator who managed to transcend the supposed exigencies of his time. He was, according to Dorothy McCuskey and others, the embodiment of Emerson's personality and philosophy. Alcott's journals and guidance greatly assisted Emerson in his writing of *Nature* and other important pieces. In *Eden's Outcasts*, John Matteson writes that “Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne all would have been great if they had never met Bronson Alcott. But none of them

would be precisely the same” (6-7). Thus, by all indications, any educational discussion involving the Transcendentalists needs to involve Alcott. Though not successful in a material or outward sense—shunned by numerous powers that be including Horace Mann—Alcott remained true to his principles, namely his reverence for holistic education.

In my discussion of Alcott, I will start with two questions. The first is simple: If I had spent such a great of time studying Thoreau and Emerson, why did I not know more about Alcott? This question can be answered in part due to the fact that he has published very little, preferring, much like his heroes, Socrates and Jesus, to share his ideas in conversation rather than in writing (Harding viii). Other critics, including Emerson himself, have said that though he was an eloquent conversationalist, Alcott lacked the same eloquence in his writing ability. Alcott also failed, along with Thoreau, to manifest outward markers of success and is often conveyed as kind of a brilliant bumbler who lacked common sense, having given himself over to uncompromising and idealistic visions. For instance, he moved his family and took part in a communal living arrangement known as Fruitlands, which has been called a transcendental experiment in collective farming. This experiment almost caused his family to starve due to bad soil while he was off trying to raise money. Indeed, some felt that Alcott let his idealism separate him from common sense. His Temple School was shut down after the publication of his book *Conversations on the Gospels* when some of the conversations, one in particular about procreation, were deemed by Bostonians to be too controversial for young students. He had

previously been warned of such controversy by the recorder of the conversations, Elizabeth Peabody. However, in the end, his reputation suffered a great deal due to his need to convey a complete and authentic record reflecting the integrity of his process (Shepherd 202-205). These outward failures do much to mask his progressive pedagogical and philosophic vision and his need for honesty. Alcott's idea of honest writing is another place where his ideas fall into line with the process movement and the Ecological Episteme , as will be shown.

### **Alcott's Spirituality**

The second question is the one that is most surprising and fruitful, and the response leads us into the first understanding of an ecological connection between Alcott and process theorists. In my perception, which has been shaped very much by the separation of church and state, the question "How do I reconcile the idea that Alcott thought of himself as the embodiment of Jesus while Emerson and Thoreau were pantheists?" seems vital, especially from my perspective as a secular person who was not brought up in any particular religious tradition. Moreover, how does this bear upon our largely secular field? In this country, this issue is politically charged. To bring up religion in a classroom is to invite scorn from the people with whom I most often agree. Yet the idea of spirit or spirituality runs rampant through our every act and when one begins to peel away layers, one finds such spirituality in a non-dogmatic sense running throughout the Ecological Episteme . In fact, the reverence that is very often associated with spirituality seems vital. Alcott's spirituality involves the equation with earth and its processes as an expression of the divine, regardless

of spiritual tradition. In fact, once one delves into Alcott's theological grounding, one finds that Alcott was no dogmatic Calvinist puritan. Rather, Alcott was rooted instead in the holistic and generous teachings of Jesus and Socrates. In fact, he patterned his life after the teachings of both (Matteson 41). Consider these ideas as they comingle with those of Emerson and Thoreau and perhaps therein we see that Alcott could have been the catalyst in what could be seen as an epistemic break, a porthole separating those known as "transcendental" thinkers from those caught in the mechanisms of a nascent industrial revolution. Thus, the questions one could raise are, how important are Alcott's ideas of ecological education in the thought process of Emerson and Thoreau? And, how much did Alcott's educational theories come into play when forming the system of thought from which so much of American thought springs? The answer to these questions will in part be looked at through Alcott's educational vision. Now that we have a cursory understanding of big questions about Alcott's relative obscurity and his understanding of spirituality, I wish to delve further into Alcott's educational epistemology.

### **Educational Theories**

Along with Thoreau and Emerson, Alcott witnessed the transformations at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Education was immune to these changes. Faced with the exigencies that the likes of Mann dealt with, Alcott's idea of education did not waiver. Alcott's "uncompromising vision" could thus be seen as far-sighted and progressive, a holistic view of the way mainstream education could be if American society was not collectively sleepwalking in

reification and mechanization, as witnessed in modern times by the results of “No Child Left Behind.” This history illustrates that throughout time there have been pockets of teachers who were reverent about the teaching of literacy and, beginning with the process movement, the field of composition has broadly sought to counteract the rigidity of mechanized thinking. Below are examples of how Alcott counteracted such conditions in his time and, when applicable, how such counteraction relates to some of our more modern Ecological Epistemic perceptions of education. This is revealed, first, by showing how Alcott’s reverence helped him to deal with exigencies of the time, including those presented by educational reformer Horace Mann. Second, this point is further revealed by my showing how Alcott used metaphor to understand a holistic vision of literacy and embrace the mechanized, and third, by Alcott’s process-sounding holism.

**Alcott and Horace Mann.** In the face of the mainstream exigencies of his day, Alcott’s refusal to alter his approach reveals the level of his reverence for holistic education. This reverence for teaching practices that mirrored what might today be called “student-centered,” “constructivist,” or “process” led him to be shunned by the likes of Mann, who declined, “without thanks,” Alcott’s offer to address an 1847 convention of school teachers (Shepherd 211). The differences here illuminate an important aspect of how reverence and exigency bring about the way a literacy of sustainability can operate within the Ecological Episteme . Though the two shared a “puritanical moral earnestness concerning the improvement of education,” they were apparently so different in terms of



personality that McCuskey describes them as “mutually exclusive” (129). While Mann was the very practical administrator who focused on large scale improvements of education, Alcott directed his efforts toward his students’ inner lives. Alcott was given to long conversations about philosophy and founded his praxis on the likes of Socrates and Jesus, whereas the active Mann was satisfied with phrenology<sup>24</sup> as a valid mode of thought (McCuskey 138). Alcott, who attended the conference despite the snub, found some positive methods being discussed but for the most part understood them to be educational band-aids. Like a true Romantic/pragmatic, the healing, he felt, must start with the self.

The contrast between Mann and Alcott reveals how the mixture of reverence and exigency comports with the other aspects of the Ecological Episteme in order to engender a literacy of sustainability. Both men were reverent about what they believed in. Alcott, however, was given to holism and would not yield while Mann made such concessions so as to change his religious denomination in order to accept a job at Antioch College. While Mann’s results-oriented approach was wrapped in the mechanisms of the day in order to fulfill exigencies, Alcott clung to his far-sighted principles in a steadfast way, whether in relation to his enrollment of an African-American student or his honest methods of talking with children about procreation, both acts which caused him to be shunned and yet are no longer an issue in modern society.

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<sup>24</sup> As described by the *OED Online*, phrenology is in part described as “the study of the external conformation of the cranium as an index to the position and degree of development of the various faculties.”

Alcott's mixture of spirituality, cultivation of inner vision, and social consciousness leads one to have a deeper, non-stereotypical understanding of Romanticism. With true spiritual realization of the self, then, comes the awareness that all of us crawl, jump, or fly out of the same river that we could call sentience. In this situation, society and culture can be seen to grow out of the self (Suzuki 64). Once this very Eastern realization of self can take place, true and authentic social action can happen, change happens, and writers develop agency. If we do not achieve this broader and deeper conception of self, we are left with a shallow, selfish perception of our inner selves and are left with a world of people groping for answers and forcing solutions like they would a zipper on a jacket. Thus, until this expansive self is recognized, the implementation of programs is simply a "band-aid." Then, many times, what appears to manifest as social action really is a veiled example of personal or selfish gain. Sometimes whole governments pursue this course—witness the U.S. government's duplicity during the build-up to the war in Iraq. I believe that Romantics were one manifestation of an inter-cultural capacity to understand that the social lies within us all. Often the "I" is used as a point of connection with people. There lie many pathways or ways of knowing that can lead into this capacious realm. Teachers such as Alcott and, as will be seen below, Buck, can promote such an understanding by understanding that true literacy can be accessed through holism.

**Metaphor, Indigenousness, and the mechanized.** Looking at Alcott's body of work reveals that his faith in metaphor was of primary importance in his teaching and in helping students develop their minds. I contend herein that metaphor is an expression of ecological epistemic thinking as a reaction against overly factual, mechanized thinking. I describe such metaphoric thinking below by connecting Alcott's work with students in helping them to see Biblical stories as metaphor with the way the Cherokee nation views stories. I then contrast such metaphoric thinking with the way more mechanized cultures digest stories. Thus, what will emerge is how ecological thinking can perhaps transcend cultural orientation.

As mentioned above, one of the major documents associated with Alcott's teaching is a book called *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, in which Alcott's assistant Elizabeth Peabody recorded various classroom discussions between Alcott and the pupils of the Temple School. In these conversations, a reader can find the spirit of what would now be called constructivist or student-centered pedagogy, in which students are invited to create meanings within certain parameters. While delving into the *Children in the Gospels*, one finds that Alcott is a man committed not to fire-and-brimstone, Puritan dogma but to negotiating complexity in terms of metaphor and to identifying how the larger meaning of scriptures could help children to live. In other words, he was asking the students to interpret the stories of their birthright as a code of conduct; simply put, they were negotiating the language of their tribe.

During these talks, Alcott intermittently would ask the children questions about whether certain miracles actually occurred. Alcott's suggestive questions no doubt had a great deal to do with the fact that Alcott was both branded a heretic by many Puritans of his day. In contrast, in modern day, Alcott has been held up as exemplary to a current group of Jungian scholars who published a recent edition of *Conversation on the Gospels*. One needs only to flip through the pages of the conversations to find examples of Alcott's empowering teaching style and of the implicit idea that he wanted his young students to derive reverence from the texts that were their birthright. That the conversations related to the Christian gospels and not Hindu *Vedas*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *The Torah*, or any other religious text is immaterial. Examples of how these conversations engendered a non-dogmatic spirituality ring true throughout. For instance, when analyzing whether Jesus turned the water into wine, Alcott asked: "Was the miracle worked upon their minds or upon the water?" Half the students felt that the former was the case, suggesting that the miracle was the metaphor (*Conversations* 168), an understanding that would be more in line with Joseph Campbell's mythological approach than with the Puritans' strict construction of the Bible. In another section, the children sounded as if they were citing from the gnostic gospels, perhaps even Pantheistic sources, by concluding that God can be found everywhere, including in the rocks and stones (105).

These stories are relevant because not only do they show that Alcott had a malleable ecological understanding of texts, they also show that his reliance upon metaphor allowed his students to come away with the larger holistic

message of the stories. As described above, this metaphoric understanding reveals Alcott to be more in line with examples of the ecological thinking of indigenous societies rather than the valorization of facts by those wrapped in mechanistic societies. An example of the interplay between native cultures and the overly mechanized post-industrial thinking can be exemplified by the story-telling of Cherokee, Marilou Awiakta who implies that telling a story is a natural form of discourse in a number of ways. She explains that in many traditions, story-telling is meant not for immediate intellectual processing but to percolate into one's consciousness throughout one's lifetime, whereas the kinds of "academic" essays wherein students are asked to write a thesis are generally meant to be understood, consumed, responded to, and acted upon immediately, with notable exceptions of course.

For instance, Awiakta tells the rendition of the Cherokee story of the "corn mother" that a tribal elder shared with her when she was a young girl. The story describes the origin of the corn plant. As with most tales in the oral tradition, this story has been passed down through generations, and changes have been made to suit changing conditions which allow for younger generations to understand the story. Briefly, two grandsons are preparing to go hunting one day, when their elderly grandmother tells them that upon their return they will have a great meal made of meat and this wonderful substance called corn. Curious about this corn, which they have never seen, they go out to the woodshed where the grandmother was preparing the meal and spy her shaking the corn off of her body. When the grandmother discovers that her two grandsons have learned her

secret and now have knowledge that the corn comes from her body, she realizes that it is time for her to die. She wanders into the cornfield where she burrows under the soil and sprouts as the corn plant. Thus, a tradition is created in which a plant has the sacred and revered significance of a grandmother (Awiakta 12).

Western society has an entirely separate, mechanized version of the corn-mother story as told eloquently and sardonically by Michael Pollan in the *Omnivore's Dilemma*. As with Awiakta's Cherokee creation myth, this new myth once again holds corn out to be the hero. Pollan tells the story of a plant that could not have survived without humans. In fact, in order to spread the seed, the plant demands the use of opposable thumbs. Pollan thus reverses our preconceptions to discuss how we have become so dependent upon the corn, and how our dependence, in turn, has begun to use us as a pawn for its survival. Through what he calls a "plant's-eye view," he depicts humans being used by a plant rather than humans being in control. Through a bit of stretching and storytelling, Pollan conveys corn as using humans to reproduce, prompting us to capitulate to its demands by succumbing to the profiteering of agribusiness (Pollan 45).

While the story of the American farmer is one of pride and perseverance, the story of agribusiness operations is one of environmental degradation and huge profits. What was once a family business has drifted into the profit-motivated, large-business enterprise. This story has been detailed by Pollan, Eric Schlosser, John Robbins, Francis Moore Lappe, and many others. Alcott, too, understood the value of food as he showed in his mid-19<sup>th</sup> century experiment in

organic and collective farming called Fruitlands (Matteson 116). Since the 1970s, large chemical corporations such as Monsanto have only strengthened their foothold on the industry by, for instance, patenting seeds, which due to natural pollination, virtually forces farmers to use them or risk lawsuit (*Food Inc.*). The origins of this food monstrosity are the mechanisms of our thinking that were evident in Taylor and numerous others. It turns out efficiency can destroy the earth.

Thus, we have the emergence of two very different corn stories. The modern industrialized story is ultimately about the domination of the mechanized forces of science to create unnaturally large yields which, in turn, has caused big corn, big oil, and huge profits and has led to many of our problems from the draining of the Ogallala aquifer, to the virtual desertification of land. Films such as *Food, Inc.* or books such as *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Fast Food Nation* have detailed the huge costs of industrial food. I would posit that the effect of industrial education is every bit as detrimental.

To take this discussion a bit further, may I suggest a new chapter of the story, that of connecting with the corn plant through story-telling and understanding this story through an indigenous, or at least Cherokee, perspective. Awiakta uses the way that people share the “corn mother” creation myth to illuminate her point about story-telling differences between cultures by describing how stories are told in many different ways. For instance, an older version has the grandsons stringing their bows, while a subsequent version has the grandsons cleaning their guns. People of Euro-descent often become hung

up on the facts and tend to ask questions such as, if this is an old story, then how can the grandsons be cleaning a gun? (15). Awiakta stresses that mechanistic, overly fact-based readings can cause people to lose the overall point of a story and become caught up in its factual minutiae, such as whether the boys were cleaning a gun or bow. Awiakta blames this on a society that overemphasizes scientific and technological facts endemic in mechanized thinking. She also realizes that such readings result from the differences between the way native and non-native peoples view and digest stories. I should add here that an understanding of story is in no way a denial of science or technology but an embrace. It represents a way to look at science in an effort to see a broad forest of understanding. Writers like Bill McKibben,<sup>25</sup> who began his career with a reverence for nature, have used science to warn about oncoming climate change for decades. Beyond a Westerner's mechanistic interpretation, the divergences in the stories themselves bear repeating. The first story is a biocentric creation story told by a tribal elder and meant to be carried for life by the recipient. The second is a sardonic and ironic creation, a biocentric myth that depicts an out-of-balance plant, which, as in a "B" movie, takes over and monopolizes all of the world's resources, placing the environment and the people who depend upon it in a stranglehold.

What emerges is that Alcott's way of helping his students understand Biblical stories is different than that of his post-industrial, Euro-centered descendants. But how does this have bearing on Alcott's situation? Much like the

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<sup>25</sup> Since writing his original work *The End of Nature*, McKibben has been a well-known advocate for the reduction of carbon emissions to 350 ppm.



Westerners in the Awiakta story who get hung up on the gun, in Alcott's case the fundamentalist Puritans are hung up on the dogma, which in this case can be compared to an over-reliance on facts. Such an over-reliance can be exemplified by the seeming multitudes who, out of fear, rely upon teaching students in a rigid, standardized way despite widespread adoption of the diverse methods growing in the so-called process and post-process theories. Often when I ask my students to share their previous school-related writing experiences, stories such as "My teacher said my essay would have received an 'A,' but instead I received a 'C' because I didn't do an outline" are common. Such tales are no doubt the product of a process movement that "has been reified into a rigid, linear pedagogical practice" (Hawk 192). This brings up numerous important questions. How does a theory that started out as a reaction to the mechanized, homogenized aspects of current traditional rhetoric become reified in a similar mechanistic fashion, and what can we do about it? In my 2010 CCCC presentation, I asked the question: should we just keep moving on in a seeming never-ending linear fashion to theoretical groundings of continual "posts," or should we attempt to revisit, rethink, and renew past theories, melding the best of past ideas with newer theories that account for ever-changing technological and cultural landscapes? I am confident that Alcott would agree with the latter.

***Alcott's "process" pedagogy.*** Now that it is apparent that Alcott was wrapped in ecological epistemic thinking, as were Thoreau and Emerson, I turn to the idea of his teaching philosophy. Alcott was known as a teacher with infinite patience whose "heretical" nature followed him into the teaching of writing. This

leads me into the second comparison, one between Alcott and so-called “expressivist” thinkers, such as Elbow. Alcott taught during a time when the lack of skilled teachers caused many schools to rely upon rigid and often ill-prepared school masters. Thus, while most teachers during his time taught rigidity and formula, Alcott was taking a more holistic stance.

Predating Hartwell’s “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar” by over a century and a quarter, Alcott favored decentering the learning of grammar and parts of speech, popular at the time, and used a sort of journaling focused on freedom of expression, even though “Free expression of original thought was rarely encouraged at the time” (McCuskey 30). McCuskey writes the following with regard to the older school students’ journals:

At first, they put down what Alcott considered “dry and uninteresting” facts but by and by more thoughts came to be mingled. His aim was to get the children to think vividly and consecutively and he was content to let the style follow after. For that reason he made no comment on mechanical details, feeling that that would interfere with the thought. Teaching some of the diaries aloud occasionally served as a stimulus to clear thinking and vivid expression. (87)

In terms of allowing his idea of letting the writers go, this passage brings to mind Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*. Alcott clearly understands the importance of ungraded journaling in the integration of thought and is apparently looking upon these students as writers. By not commenting on “mechanical details,” Alcott

gave primacy to students' ideas, allowing for students to develop the vividness of their thinking. Again, Alcott is ignoring an assumed exigency to pursue a way of teaching that comported with his inner vision, a holistic vision which falls into line with the Ecological Episteme.

**A situational similarity.** Another similarity between Alcott and the milieu surrounding early process theorists is situational. The “one room school house” teaching situation in Concord in the 1850s is analogous in a microcosmic way to English departments in the 1960s. In both cases, people with limited or no experience in teaching resorted to mechanizations and punitive measures to teach students. I am referring to, of course, the teachers who felt that teaching writing was the “intellectual shit-work,” those teachers who focus only on why a student cannot write; such teachers tend to long for the days when only “elite” students attended college.

In his study of Alcott's educational perspectives, George Haefner notes that the teaching situation in Concord in the 1800s was less than ideal. It was common for teachers to be vagabonds who knew little or the bare minimum about their topics. Worse, not only was it common for these practitioners to know very little about their chosen field, they knew nothing about the ways to effectively convey information to their students, as they had no teacher training. Sternness compensated for these shortcomings and did much to mask their ignorance. As Haefner puts it, “All too often the teacher in the district school was ignorant and ill-prepared in subject matter, innocent of any adequate means of presenting this content, and frequently, as a result, harsh and unsympathetic in

his attitude toward his pupils” (60). The teacher’s ill preparation would generally lead to the dissolving of student respect, which, in turn, would spiral the flustered teacher into attempting to “force, through fear of physical punishment, a semblance of respect which he had failed to gain by preparation and a sympathetic attitude toward the children” (61). This harshness was supported throughout the educational landscape of the times and “was condoned and even encouraged” by those in power (62). From this milieu, Alcott emerged like a spring breeze.

In this thought experiment, replace Alcott with the process theorists of the early 1970s and the inept school-house teachers with those teachers who thought little of teaching writing or saw in a current traditional way “composition as boot camp.”<sup>26</sup> It is interesting that if we work past composition theory, we tend to begin to find that certain rigid practices are alive and well. In contrast, by asking that writing be the text for the class, teachers such as Donald Murray reinvigorated the imaginations of writing teachers by heralding and learning from student writers (“A Writer” 6-8). Such reinvigoration is the sort of the ecological milieu that both Alcott and those immersed in the original process movement shared. It indicates a sort of reverence that strikes out against the exigency of the times. Thus, from our discussion, it becomes clear that the number of teacher-scholars we lump together under process theory formed an epistemic break in composition, the kind of ecological thinking that, mixed with reverence and exigency, was present within the teaching and theories of Bronson Alcott. A few

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<sup>26</sup> In his 2010 web commentary for the John William Pope Center for Educational Policy, R.V. Young longs for the days when composition was taught by reluctant but “dedicated” young literature scholars as a sort of boot camp.

decades later such ecological thought processes were evident also in the composition teaching of Scott and Buck.

### **Fred Newton Scott and Gertrude Buck**

One could build a study solely on the relationship between Scott and Buck, in terms of the long-term professional respect that each had for the other and their mentor/mentee relationship. Both were extremely influential in their respective fields and did their part to heal the Aristotelian rift between rhetorics and poetics. Both were ecological thinkers who offer refreshing, alternative voices to other current-traditional voices.

#### **Scott**

Regarding Scott, Berlin writes: “At every turn, Scott was consciously formulating an alternative to current-traditional rhetoric, particularly its scientific epistemology” (Berlin, “Writing” 77). In her introduction to her and Donald Stewart’s resurrecting biography of Scott, Patricia Stewart writes that there were “no ‘compartments’ in his intellectual world; his was a boundless world of knowledge, the fences down, the gates open to his restive mind, his thirst for truth” (3). Taken in tandem, the above statements evidence Scott’s ecological thinking. His urge to counter the current-tradition springs from his boundless, holistic impulses as an educator. He also, as it turns out, held a reverence for teaching that transcended the exigencies of the times as he railed against an over-reliance on the efficiency movement. At the same time, his theories drew from science, mirroring ecocompositionists in his understanding of systems. However, like Emerson and Thoreau, his connections also worked to fuse

rhetorics with poetics. In other words, taken together, he seemed to have a deep understanding of the holistic richness of literacy endemic in those who understand the natural thread.

As shown by Williamson, early Twentieth century schools began adopting efficiency models similar to those favored by Taylor (149). In his 1915 essay, “Efficiency for Efficiency’s Sake,” Scott shows that he clearly fears the technocratic implications of such efficiency, writing that because “scientific measurements are of a quantitative kind” so, too, must be “standards of measurement” in education. Acknowledging the allure that certain educators feel about exactness, he notes that “the most efficient things in teaching are not, in my opinion, susceptible of adequate quantitative measurement” (36). He warns that the quantitative nature of efficiency could have even more insidious effects:

It is the danger that under the stimulus of this fascinating idea the investigator, in his rage for measuring everything in sight, may overlook, and induce the teacher to overlook, the true end and nature in education. It is not inconceivable that the teacher, dazed by the brilliancy of the new conception, may be brought to think of himself as part of the production curves of efficiency and of his pupils only as rated in units in the determination of percentages of distribution. (36)

In other words, Scott’s fear is that investigators would over-emphasize mechanisms, which would take the form of quantitative measurement, causing them to lose sight of non-quantifiable values of education.

He goes on to list numerous attributes that are qualitative in nature, such as “personality, sympathy, enthusiasm, intuition of character, taste, judgment, love of truth, tact” (36) and warns against giving primacy to sciences by seeing a liberal arts class “elevated” to that of a science. Similar to Emerson’s understanding of this phenomenon, Scott possessed a holistic understanding of various sides of the issue, including the allure and the traps of the efficiency movement in education. He also knew what was to come, that assessment would become part of our educational system. Despite his criticisms, Scott foresaw the benefits of today’s holistic and sustainable writing assessments, noting that the inquiry will “in the long run” be beneficial. However, he cautioned that the “run may be very long,” and in the meantime educators would need to guard against efficiency becoming a “fetish . . . pursued purely for efficiency’s sake” (36). In the age of “No Child Left Behind” and budget cuts for higher education, we certainly should in present day heed Scott’s cautionary message.

Scott’s concern for the technocratic efficiency movements in education displays his reverence for education, which trumps the perceived exigency of the time. Scott’s essay prompts the Stewarts to write that Scott’s devotion to teaching “borders on the spiritual” (137), as Scott likens being an educator to ministerial work in that teachers are called to their “pursuit by inward promptings, not by caprice or merely material considerations” and that “the schoolroom ought to be a kind of shrine” (39). Scott’s enshrinement not only shows reverence for the classroom but on the human element between the interactions of the students, an interaction that he finds irreplaceable.

Though he was cautious of the quantitative nature of science, Scott was still able to draw from scientific theories to describe writing. In his address to the MLA convention entitled “Genesis: A Poetic Metaphor,” Scott uses Darwin’s theories to describe aspects of gestures that evolve into speech.<sup>27</sup> Particularly, he draws from Darwin’s understanding that a species’ survival is dependent upon intra-species cooperation. This focus on cooperation harkens to Kropotkin’s in 1905 stressing a similar point in *Mutual Aid* (see Chapter Two), in which he reinforces Darwin’s position that cooperation was a vital component in species survival. While the specifics of Scott’s essay are powerful and worthwhile, the important point is Scott’s willingness to use other theories without becoming trapped within them. To forge this genesis he draws from a variety of disciplines to chart the development of speech. By drawing upon groups, he describes these origins as a system. Thus, much like Emerson and Alcott, Scott draws from the quantitative without overemphasizing it. Scott’s work was centered in a reverence that allowed him to buttress his position against the supposed exigencies of the day. That his reverence extended into at least one of his protégées is evident in the work of Gertrude Buck.

## **Buck**

Despite the differences in subject and time period, Buck is a very appropriate companion to Alcott as a spiritually rooted person who taught and thought in very ecological ways. As a protégé of Scott, Buck directly embodied Scott’s ecological thinking and indirectly embodied the ideals of both Emerson

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<sup>27</sup> In that he is not trying to exterminate a prior theory, Scott’s usage of evolution differs from the evolutionary theorizing that Roskelly and Ronald had decried, as discussed in Chapter Three.



and Alcott. In her writing and teaching, she conveys feminist and ecological values that are ahead of her time. Like Alcott, she was a non-dogmatic spiritual person, a Unitarian whose essay “The Religious Experience of a Skeptic” describes an “organic unity of creation” (Campbell 24). Campbell notes that Buck’s spiritual metaphysics sound much like Walt Whitman in “Song of Myself.” In this essay, Buck charts the emergence of her fairly simplistic spiritual life, to the development of a deeper Whitmanesque understanding of the universe “as a single organism” (24). Using her spiritual connection to social ends she connects this unity with women’s rights saying that women should be elected to the “Inlander board” (27), a local equal rights issue. Unlike Alcott, Buck had to deal with various exigencies imposed upon her from society and school administrators and made concessions based on her professional status. Buck’s reverence helped her to maneuver through various exigencies in the way she chose her battles.

Buck described teaching in an ecological way. Not only did she make use of ecological metaphors such as “Organic Curriculum,” but her praxis embodies ecological epistemic values, which are very similar to Alcott’s and her mentor, Scott’s. However, while most of Alcott’s students were children, Buck employs her ecological vision in the teaching of writing at Vassar College. In this realm, she understood metaphors to be central, cultivating a deep relationship between the sort of contemplation so vital to Romantic tradition and social action. In so doing, her reverence for literacy allows her to transcend the overly mechanized

practices of the times, to reach a more contemplative form of rhetoric that centers on collaboration and honesty.

She also was ahead of her time in responding to student work. Indeed, Buck seemed prescient in suggesting the postponement of criticism “‘until the writing-process has thereby gained a freedom and vigor which can defy its paralyzing effect’” (Campbell 98), and she fully understood and respected that each writer has a process. Her ideas of student discourse additionally appear expressivist. As revealed by the title of her course, “Exposition through Description,” Buck believed that “sense impressions formed the basis of knowledge and description was the transference of knowledge to others” (xxxix). In *Toward a Feminist Rhetoric*, a collection of Buck’s essays, editor Jo Anne Campbell writes that Buck’s “organic vision of writing . . . struck out against the more mechanized versions of the time” (xii).

Despite all of her progressive educational views, most of which are shared by Scott, it is in her feminism that Buck synthesizes the ecological epistemic heuristics. Specifically, Campbell describes how Buck’s work altered what had been a very patriarchal rhetorical tradition, arguing that Buck aimed to construct a feminist rhetoric that was focused more on truth, cooperation, and collaboration than on arguing and winning a point. Campbell arranges Buck’s thoughtful essays in such ways so as to comprise an alternative rhetoric and finds that “Buck’s feminism helped her to balance concerns about the individual and society, to analyze the social and institutional forces that prevent people from writing, and to monitor the effects of hierarchy on the balance of power on those

with the least academic authority” (x). It is, then, the connection between feminism and ecology that I wish to draw upon here to show how Buck’s reverence for literacy allowed her to transcend the mechanized current traditional practices.

The topic of feminism and nature has been covered in very thorough and nuanced ways, and the episteme falls in line with the major themes. In defining ecofeminism, Rosemarie Tong writes that:

Like multicultural, postcolonial, and global feminists, ecofeminists highlight the multiple ways in which human beings oppress each other, but these theorists also focus on human beings’ domination of the nonhuman world, or nature. Because women are culturally tied to nature, ecofeminists argue that there are conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic connections between feminist and ecological issues. (237)

While Susan Griffin and others have eloquently discussed the various nuances of ideas relating to the Earth Mother, in his essay “Ecofeminism and the Teaching of Literacy,” McAndrew establishes a number of pertinent connections between the teaching of literacy and ecofeminism. Greta Gaard has also drawn numerous connections between process ideas, liberatory pedagogies, and ecofeminism, stating that strategies of student writing merge nicely with ecofeminism. In fact, she writes that “composition, feminist and liberatory pedagogies” guided her ecocomposition course (166-176). Buck’s praxis is in line with a number of elements of ecofeminism, such as the egalitarian heterarchy that McAndrew

discusses. In *A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck*, Susan Bordelon writes:

Since she viewed society as a dynamic, interactive social organism, Buck's ethics underscored participation, relationships, and interdependence. This perspective was central to her feminism and her rhetoric, which challenged male/female hierarchies, revised social traditional approaches to rhetoric, and sought social transformation. (2)

It is Buck's ecological feminism that helps her to move beyond her mentor, Scott, in terms of an exploration of alternative rhetoric. Moreover, her rhetoric did not include the divisive, bellicose qualities of patriarchal rhetorical traditions. Rather, she felt that speakers and audience should work together to form harmonizing relationships, wherein a shared truth could be found, which is at the heart of what Bordelon calls Buck's Social Theory of Rhetoric (63). Bordelon further relates the way Buck sees metaphor as socially constructed between the reader and writer, which builds an Emersonian big-minded version of the self in that "Built into Buck's view of the metaphor was her emphasis on the social-individual, or the way that the metaphor, like language, was created by the relationship between" (65). Thus, much like Emerson, Buck's rhetoric strove to extinguish the duality between the individual and society. By giving primacy to female writers in her textbooks, Buck worked to counter the male-dominated rhetoric of her time. In this way, Buck's idea of an organic unity never wavered, extending in a holistic way to all of her endeavors (Campbell xvi).

Like Roskelly and Ronald, Buck also shunned evolutionary theorizing, a scholarship of negation in which one theory chokes off another, and yearned instead for theories that work together. Thus, rather than attacking those who disagreed with her, she “built on the work of the past to create something useful and new” (Campbell xlii). Campbell equates this method of theorizing with a feminist way of viewing the world (xlii). Thus, taking her theorizing into account, and adding to the mix Buck’s insistence on listening to each other and to nature, Buck reveals herself to be a very ecological thinker who envisioned a sustainable education and culture. Additionally, similar to Native American stories described by Awiakta, and Alcott’s methods of teaching the gospel, Buck was connected in a reverential way with the importance of metaphor and the importance of writing. In fact, her dissertation, under the direction of Scott, was a long study on the use of metaphor in the English language, focused upon revising a masculine-based rhetoric by looking at the mechanized way that males viewed metaphor. I would like to focus upon how Buck’s reverence for honesty leads her to a deeper understanding of holistic literacy.

**Reverence leading to an understanding of narrow mechanization.**

Much like Alcott, Buck revered language that seemed to grow from her metaphoric and non-dogmatic sense of spirituality. In “Genesis: Poetic Metaphor,” she argues for a psychological rather than mechanical theory of metaphor and that the use of metaphor does not need to be contrived to make language more beautiful but arises out of a specific exigency. This deeper discussion of metaphor elucidates the honest rhetoric that Buck tries to promote.

In a very Emersonian way, Buck believes that “rhetoric had overemphasized the response of the hearer or reader, which made people distrust rhetoric, for it implied that the speaker was not speaking to express her or himself or to speak the truth, but solely to have a specific effect on the listener” (Campbell 31).

Metaphor that is used to make writing more flowery only serves to obscure truth, honesty, and meaning, and, to Buck, this inauthentic creation of metaphor is mechanical. Thus, much like James Britton and others, Buck would have been much more interested in students writing honest prose rather than the disingenuous posturing associated with writing simply to please the teacher. In her concern and reverence for honest writing, Buck was clearly involved with ecological practices.

Similar to Alcott and Scott, Buck’s view of the teaching of writing would be in line with constructivists rooted in process or post process composition theory. In “Recent Tendencies in the Teaching of English Composition,” Buck criticizes and satirizes a rules-based focus in the teaching of writing and details a number of recent composition movements that bear little resemblance to Berlin’s mechanized descriptions of the “current traditional” movement. Therein, she draws upon a “recent” focus—in 1901—on having students write experiential essays to “real” audiences. She describes this focus as a “natural condition” and promotes what she calls the abolition of rhetorical law and in this regard writes that “no real literature, no genuine writing of any kind, was ever fashioned to the pattern of a rule” (92). In other words, she has the very ecological idea that there

exist many different rhetorical forms. Numerous times throughout the essay, she discusses the idea of the process of writing.

Aside from a few sentences dealing with the necessity to criticize, this piece discloses that much of the mapping and describing of the field of composition in the early 1900s covers only a few loud current traditional voices and that the field was then as rich and as complex as it is in present day. For instance, in 1900, Buck labeled the setting up of natural conditions as the newest rage in writing, rather than inventing artificial conditions. At the end of the essay, her summation of the goals of the newest writing rage is as follows:

The trend of every recent reform in composition-teaching has been toward a responsible freedom for the process of writing—a freedom from laws apparently arbitrary and externally imposed, a responsibility to the laws of its own nature as a process of communication. Thus free and thus responsible, composition becomes for the first time a normal act, capable of development practically unlimited. (100)

Moreover, Buck's acknowledgement that the audience was always shifting and the shift to a "real" audience is something that practitioners readily admit is a historical revelation. Further, her discussion of the process of writing preceded what has been called "the process" movement by over 70 years. What then "was" the current traditional movement? Did it exist? Or did educators in the early 1900s have what Hartwell ironically called the smart view (9) and the dumb view (7). And, with this dichotomy in mind, Buck not only resembled a constructivist,

process-oriented, eco-feminist, she was no doubt an educator who espoused the smart view.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I applied the lens of exigency and reverence to explore the research questions, what curricular or ideological strands in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum? And, how has the ecological been embodied in a writing curriculum? Exigency and reverence present affective modes through which one can discover what is ecological in a writing classroom. Together, they can help us to discern false motives or the more implicit “hidden curricula” as Hartwell would have it (8). Through the lens of exigency and reverence, this chapter examined three educators whose educational models are embodied in ecological practices, with Alcott in a general teaching context and Scott and Buck in the specific act of teaching writing. Regarding the Ecological Episteme, this chapter has clarified the following:

- The discussions of Alcott and Scott elucidate how educators can move beyond mechanistic, linear thought. Alcott evidenced this holistic movement by the way he promoted in his students a metaphoric understanding of Biblical scripture. Scott cautions his colleagues against being overly mechanistic in his expressing his concerns about the efficiency movement in education, evidencing his deep understanding of the constrictive functions of the efficiency movement.



- Alcott, Buck, and Scott followed holistic visions of education and were embedded in activities centered in their reverence, which reached beyond the supposed exigencies of the time: Alcott, with his allowance of student personal writing and student-centered approaches unheard of at the time; and Scott and Buck with their determination to move beyond the “current traditional” rhetoric and teaching practices of their time. Thus, my movement from theorists in Chapter Three, toward individual teachers in this chapter, is meant to support the premise that ecological thinking has been a part of educational thinking since the time of the Transcendentalists. This movement also shows that ecological thought at the beginning of American Pragmatism had a clear impact on certain holistic educators.
- Buck’s feminist rhetoric challenges and broadens the patriarchal rhetoric of the time. Her rhetoric resembles ecofeminism in its holistic conception of the social and individual, as well as its concern for new understandings of cooperative social action, and that it was a rhetoric of affirmation rather than negation.
- Alcott, Scott and Buck’s reverence for their ecological teaching methods allow them to transcend the supposed exigencies of their day. That Buck and Alcott were ecological thinkers reveals that ecological thought can arise in the form of lineage or from isolated groups of people who allow themselves to move beyond

mechanistic dualisms, or as is the likely case here, a complex mixture of both.

This history and analysis strikes out against arguments made by those who feel that the progressive reform movements are either ahistorical or lacking in any sort of social basis. There is much to be learned from the way that Alcott, Scott, and Buck illustrated the principles of ecological epistemic thinking, both in their teaching methods and broader educational principles. Each one of these educators exhibits a deeper understanding of how Romantic and pragmatic elements work together, and how compositionists must avoid the temptation to be overtaken by narrowing mechanisms. However, at the same, each one understood the function of mechanisms and when to implement them. Last, they also understood how reverence and exigency helps us to recognize these factors.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDING THE THREAD: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ECOLOGICAL EPISTEME

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. . . . This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.  
--Thomas Merton

The purpose of this study has been to uncover the ways that ideas of ecology and sustainability fall into line with composition and writing studies. To help fulfill this purpose, I have cultivated the metaphor of an ecological thread that runs through all living creatures and have formulated my research questions to reveal the sorts of activities and contexts that could uncover or obscure this thread. In this regard, chapters one through four have largely been devoted to answering the research questions: “What curricular or ideological strands in the history of composition allow English professionals to locate the idea of ecology and sustainability in a writing curriculum?” And “How has ecological thinking been embodied in a writing curriculum?” The previous threads of my discussion--involving past ecocompositionists, composition’s historians, theorists of Emerson and Thoreau, along with the educators Alcott, Scott, and Buck--have evidenced that thought which uncovers the ecological thread has been part of American composition and rhetoric for a very long time. Moreover, those who ushered in the process era, scholars such as Emig, Murray, Elbow, and Anne Berthoff, as well as “post-process” theorists such as Dobrin and Weisser, point to a way of

knowing that will allow those of us in composition to blossom in ecological directions.

Such an ecological blossoming should be able to take place whether we label ourselves and what we do as post-process, Romantic, ecocompositionist, or cognitivist if we pursue these ideas in malleable and holistic ways and avoid past or future reifications of thought. The implication of these holistic practices and knowledge has in part led to an understanding of a way of knowing that I call the Ecological Episteme. This study has identified ideas related to ecological thinking that practitioners and theorists can apply toward a literacy of sustainability that allows compositionists and writing studies theorists to uncover the ecologic thread that runs through all of us. In this chapter, I would like to reveal the implications of this ecologic thread by first recirculating and weaving through major findings contained within first two questions. Such a recirculation will lead to a more extensive discussion of the implications of ecological thinking in composition. Second, I will discuss an important aspect of my third question: What are the implications of such thinking in composition and writing studies?

**What Curricular or Ideological Strands and Assemblages in the History of Composition Allow English Professionals to Locate the Idea of Ecology and Sustainability in a Writing Curriculum?**

This study has uncovered numerous ecological strands and assemblages that run through composition and writing studies. One of these ideological strands begins with the holism of Emerson and Thoreau. As West has noted, Emerson exists at the roots of an American Pragmatism. This study reveals that

Pragmatism is seen as continuing through composition's process theorists into the "post-process" work of Owens, Dobrin, and Weisser. The meta-review in Chapter Three further reveals Emerson and Thoreau to be holistically embedded in the Ecological Episteme, Emerson in his ability to see beyond categories and dualities, and Thoreau in his prescience about the mechanized future of the industrial revolution. Chapter Three also clarifies in two ways how Emerson and Thoreau have influenced ecological thinking in composition: first, their philosophy can be constructed as post-Kantian and second, it could be seen to spring organically from the project that was the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

The organic theory furthered by West and Wilshire supports the work of Owens' and Dobrin and Weisser's place-based ecologic ideas; simultaneously, Petruzzi's and Berlin's varied contentions of Emerson falling into a post-Kantian lineage tends to support the current Derridean efforts to wrest the idea of writing away from hermeneutics in order for the ecologies of writing to be looked at as its own ontology. Both lineages are rife with ecological underpinnings as well as the danger of reification.

As shown in chapter four, the educator Bronson Alcott and Emerson shared ideas and drew from one another. Emersonian holism certainly manifested in Alcott's perception of education and, in composition, with the work of Fredrick Newton Scott and his protégé, Gertrude Buck. Both Scott and Buck held a reverence for holism in education that allowed each to maintain his or her visions despite the pressure of the exigencies of the time. Alcott, Scott, and Buck

describe how educators can move beyond mechanistic, linear thought of many mainstream educators of their time.

Scott, who often sounded like a modern-day process theorist rather than a person who taught during the height of the current traditional period, railed against the overly-mechanized efficiency models that were emerging in education during his time. Buck, who was an eco-feminist more than fifty years before the term was coined, used holistic forms of rhetoric to counter the patriarchal structures of her time and, much like Emerson, held a vision of the individual that already encompassed current social issues. In their holistic understanding of mechanization and duality combined with their reverence for the potentialities of literacy, Scott and Buck show that the ecologic has been part of composition for a very long time.

Also, as shown in chapters two through four, thinking that reveals the ecological thread tends to spring up rhizomatically in places where scholars, thinkers, and educators are engaged in holistic thoughts. In this sense, the assemblage of scholars who worked with pre-reified process ideas can be seen as occasioning an epistemic break from past ways of knowing in composition, in much the same way that Scott, Buck, Denny, and other like-minded scholars of their time could represent a much smaller ecologically thinking assemblage. For instance, compare the similarities between Scott's views of early drafts with Perl's idea of the recursive in a writer's process. Strengthening this idea is the influence of other Eastern systems of thought on Emerson and Thoreau, not to mention modern theorists, who seem to perceive in ways that bring the subject

and object together and that see the self as already encompassing and being interconnected with the social. This big-minded version of “the self” cuts against the Western myth of the individual as a self-sustaining entity and comports Ecological Epistemic thinking.

### **How has Ecological Thinking Been Embodied in a Writing Curriculum?**

In Chapter Two, I discuss the work of ecocomposition and sustainability scholars who suggest various overt ways in which ecological ideas can be embodied in a writing curriculum. Owens writes about how he asks his students to write about their home places, their work, and their futures. Such an inquiry includes students’ consideration of what sorts of factors comprise positive versions of the above as well as the psychological and environmental impact of problems in their communities. Dobrin and Weisser write about how ecocomposition needs to be focused upon the production, rather than consumption, of texts and work toward numerous ideas of reaching toward the Ecological Episteme that deal with varied ecologies. Considering such previous work, including the work of Coe who calls for an eco-logic, this study has moved further into history to explore Dobrin’s comment that “all of the many projects housed in composition are already ecological” (“Writing” 20). In order to identify ecological or ecologically sustainable thought and action in composition, I have drawn upon the ecological thinking of the existing scholarship of composition theorists to forge a set of heuristics that I have called the Ecological Episteme. Such heuristics include the ideas of dualism and holism, holism and complexity embracing mechanisms, and circulation and recirculation, to help in identifying

thinking that uncovers a metaphoric ecologic thread in composition and thinking that tends to obscure such a thread.

In this regard, chapter three compared the Emersonian, big-minded ecological version of the self with Peter Elbow's expanded version of the self. This affiliation reveals that what is often seen as expressive writing is a very important aspect of ecological discourse and certainly comprises more than criticisms of such writing being embedded in self-absorption. The ecological reveals that narrative and multi-genre essays tend to be broader forms of writing that encompass the Ecological Episteme . Additionally, much of what process-minded theorists have discussed in terms of seeing the recursive nature of writing (Perl), being flexible about the writing process to avoid writer's block (Rose), and allowing writers to puzzle over topics (Rafoth) can be seen as practices that reveal our ecological thread. This said, the Ecological Episteme also reveals what has become rigid and reified. An example of this would be my Chapter Three discussion of categorical entrapment, which leads to rigidity in both theorizing and teaching. Moreover, along with revealing the above ecological activities, this study has helped to identify what is ecological in composition and writing studies in its identification of mechanistic and reified thinking by scholars and within trends. Whether utilized in the teaching of students or in an involvement in activism, thought that recovers the ecological thread relies upon wholes, rather than reductive compartmentalization.



## **What are the Implications of this Thinking in Composition and Writing Studies?**

In what follows, I will elaborate on a few specific and important contexts and situations, loosely stitching together the threads of this study by discussing programmatic, Romantic, and pedagogical implications of what is ecological in composition. I use the word “loosely” because I do not seek the reifying influence of past theories, nor am I putting forth any sort of essentialist position. It is important to remember that I am not at all attempting to stitch readers into the fabric of some rigid teaching or programmatic protocol. That would be defeating the purpose of the Ecological Episteme. I do, however, make suggestions informed by the weight of my research and contentions in this study. In this way, I am attempting to help clarify ecological teaching behaviors that help us and our students to retain or recover the ecological thread. The idea of loose stitching will also relate in a final ode to the implications of the Ecological Episteme, the type of thinking and action that is the thread that connects us all in a mutual form of cooperation.

Specifically, I begin this implication section with writing programs because program administrators, along with their departments, offer a great capacity to alter department-wide ecological awareness, which can lead to a greater ecological awareness among people in general. The Ecological Episteme provides clues as to how these changes could be carried out in ways that preserve academic freedom. Second, I move on to discuss how scholars have reductively considered Romanticism and Expressivism. To counter this, I argue

that compositionists need to view such categories in light of the “holism” that is the richness of literacy. Third, I discuss how the ecological theories can fuel pedagogic and theoretical implications of this study. Finally, I close this study by exploring limitations and opportunities for further research and giving my concluding thoughts.

### **Ecologically Sustainable Writing Programs and Pedagogy**

Writing programs are important because ecologically sustainable change at the programmatic level is a sure indication of an ecological curricular cohesion that merges institutional and departmental goals. Also, writing program administrators (WPAs) have a powerful voice in the assessment and curricular process and, thus, have the capacity to effect change. At the same time, WPAs are scrutinized by various stakeholders who at times have conflicting objectives and exigencies. Given these demands, surely administering a writing program is one of the most difficult jobs in the university. I suggest changes that, if done well, could enable writing programs to help create a vital ecological awareness in what appears to be a culture run amok with consumption.<sup>28</sup>

The question is: How could an already sustainable writing program—that is, one that exists in a healthy university ecosystem among and between all stakeholders—be transformed into one that is ecologically sustainable, one that comports with the Ecological Episteme?<sup>29</sup> While a complete and thorough

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<sup>28</sup> According to David Biello of *Scientific American*, “Americans consume a full 25 percent of the world’s energy despite representing just 5 percent of the global population.”

<sup>29</sup> Often when the term “sustainable” is used in front of “writing program” or “assessment,” it connotes a project that is ongoing, continuous, and self-perpetuating in its effectiveness. This is of course no easy feat and should be applauded. However, the use of “eco” terms to describe a writing program does not generally mean that the program is ecologically sustainable.

answer to this question transcends this study, this section responds to this question by, first, identifying and giving examples of both unsustainable and sustainable writing programs, and, second, giving an example of the attributes of a program that could work toward ecological sustainability.

In his 1992 book *Ecological Literacy*, David Orr provides a road map for changing educational curricula to cultivate students who, from grade school on, begin to develop an ecological literacy. More than twenty years later, the exigencies of dire climate predictions<sup>30</sup> would seem to dictate that writing programs and university curricula would move toward ecologically sustainable ideas, not simply on a programmatic level—speaking of the stakeholders as part of an ecology—but on the level of engendering an ecological literacy in students. Of course, while there is a plethora of reasons why such a move might be complicated and problematic, such complications pale in comparison to the millions from island nations who are being displaced by the consumptive practices by those in the U.S. and other “developed” areas.

There exists ample evidence that current assessment theory can accommodate ecologically sustainable writing programs. Liz Hamp-Lyons envisions this “fourth wave” of assessment theory as “technological, humanistic, political, and ethical” (12-13). Brian Huot argues that the first three waves, although varied, focused only upon samplings of “what students produce” (154).

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<sup>30</sup>The Environmental Justice Organization estimates that climate change will cause the displacement 10% of the global population by 2050 (Vidal). In early January 2013, the government-funded U.S. Global Change Research Program released its third report for public comment. The report reaffirms the overwhelming scientific findings that climate change is anthropogenic, or human-caused, and that, if left unchecked, sea levels will rise by three feet by 2100 (Chestney).

He issues a call for the fourth wave to take a deeper look at the unit of analysis that questions what we measure, how we measure, and whether or not our measurements are valid. Most importantly, Huot favors supporting validity through argumentation (157-158). In other words, a writing program's administrators should be able to define and argue for an ecologically sustainable writing program, with the factors that create such conditions varying and being dependent upon local needs. In an ecologically sustainable paradigm, such local needs could involve "eco"-logical rhetoric, narrative, as well as "traditional" or analytic rhetoric. In order to achieve an ecologically sustainable writing program, though, one that will persevere through time and promote an ecological literacy, WPAs need to create sustainable foundations for the system and clearly present subsequent changes. In his presentation at the 2008 Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference, Michael M. Williamson argued for a sustainable assessment that draws from a cyclical model of assessment that includes a cycle of consultation with stakeholders, assessment, and curricular revision. This model honors the constantly changing nature of education, factoring in ideas of society and local needs.

Further, Huot calls for "new methods of assessments that employ qualitative methodologies" which "can provide thick descriptions of the kinds of writing instruction and performances that occur in our classrooms and programs" (152). Further, these methods could provide "rich descriptive examples of student writing and development" to writing programs so they can "ask new questions" (153). Such descriptions can form the basis for community building and for

community review of the achievements of, recognition of problems with, and approaches to gentle change for a writing program. A sustainable assessment model would foster what could be termed a form of curricular coherence, a curriculum that values not only what the university demands but that is interested in the type of writing that would help students to grow in numerous ways.

Writing in the context of how we need disciplines to “cross-pollinate” without dissolving the disciplines themselves, Owens notes that “what is needed is something like mosaic theory applied to our construction of courses and curricula” (140). Huot’s ideas of thick description and Owens’ mosaic theory can be found in the study by Chris Thaiss and Terri Zawacki entitled *Engaged Writers, Dynamic Disciplines*, which details their three-year, inter-disciplinary study examining college writing at George Mason University. In their study, Thaiss and Zawacki found that “good writing, whether it adheres to established conventions or takes risks with form and structure, grows out of a writer’s sense that the work he or she is doing matters, both professionally and personally” (136). They also identify a “productive tension” between “the student, a passionate individual with interests to cultivate—and an academy that imposes expectations on individuals” (141). Thaiss and Zawacki feel that in a curricular model, departments would need compatible visions and institutions “to ensure structures of faculty practice that will help students grow toward the third stage of writing development” (167), the third stage being a student “who builds an organic sense of the structure of a discipline” (139). Also, Thaiss and Zawacki advocate the “integrative, mutually consultive planning of a college or university

writing curriculum” (167). A clear description of requirements and goals would certainly help English departments articulate their goals across the curriculum as well as solve many already existing battles for intellectual turf. Most importantly, clearly defined courses would give students exposure to various rhetorics and allow them to appropriate and grasp the threads of empowerment, allowing for deeper understanding of their writing and of themselves.

As discussed earlier, in fourth wave assessment, it is common for WPAs to employ the terminology of sustainability and ecology movements.<sup>31</sup> In his blog, aptly named “Ecology of a Writing Program,” David Grant writes regarding the local nature of all writing programs:

Now, we know there are often larger issues that play out on the local stage of our own institutions and departments: culture wars, science wars, educational assessment, testing, outcomes, identities, funding . . . These have all reared their head in one way or another in the writing programs of most institutions. Which is to say that WPA work and Writing Programs are inherently ecological.

Grant’s use of the language of and concern for ecology are useful in describing the aspects of his program, which, at the time of his blog posting, appeared to be suffering from a drought of funds. This drought led to his having to rely mostly on adjunct faculty to teach writing classes. Worse, Grant writes that his institution had barely passed regional accreditation standards. Grant further notes that in

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<sup>31</sup> Please note that I do not say “co-opt” as I would if I were referring to, say, the Koch brothers describing sustainable profits of their billion-dollar empire, amid an ecology of competitors. Ecologically minded WPAs describing their programs as such are striving toward what is ecological in composition.

response to this threat of losing accreditation, a liberal studies group has convened to discuss the addition of two more first-year writing courses.

Grant and others in this situation would benefit from a heuristic that would serve as a measure of ecological sustainability. Michael M. Williamson and I once wrote an unpublished draft of an essay wherein we called for employing Derek Owens' six tenets of sustainability to determine whether writing programs were sustainable (See Chapter 2). Applying Grant's program to Owens' tenets, Grant could readily discern that his program fails tenets 4, "non-hierarchical power relations," and 5, "Rejecting conventional notions of work and labor," dealing with unsustainable working conditions (32). Such a heuristic would help highly skilled, knowledgeable, and caring WPAs such as Grant to make persuasive arguments for change.

Others are employing ecological language to understand their programs in a deeper way. In "An Intentionally Ecological Approach to Teacher Training," Peter Blakemore uses the terms "Intentionally" and "Approach" as a "tripod" to support the middle term "Ecological" (140). Blakemore draws upon nature writer Barry Lopez's *Rediscovery of North America* to discuss some of our culture's problems in education. In *Rediscovery*, Lopez's thesis is essentially that many of our environmental problems began with a mindset created by the cultural conquest of the Spaniards and the subsequent Eurocentric imposition on these cultures. Blakemore, the Associate Director of the University of Oregon's composition program, calls for a sustainable teacher-training course in

supporting local practices. While pondering the sorts of ecological questions that he might ask teachers, he writes:

How often, for instance, do we stop to ask ourselves what is unavailable because of the choices we have made? Imagine new teachers-in-training as migratory birds for a moment (graduate student teachers reading this may thank me for making one of the most favorable animal comparisons they have heard for themselves): what birds will not be likely to land or thrive here? Why? What is it about this particular program and method of training that will keep certain kinds of people from finding a purchase here? We are less likely to ask such questions if we do not approach our programs with the relational, ecological, and collaborative points of view in mind. How will we ever really know anything about what's happening where we are if we don't know who the people we hope to train are? How will we know who they are unless we ask? (142)

These are good questions that appear to provide a basis for an ecologically-minded teacher training program, playing upon a student's strengths in a way that is holistic, malleable, and cooperative. But, would the teachers who are trained in this program begin to motivate students who think ecologically?

According to the Ecological Episteme, one doesn't have to write directly about nature to begin thinking ecologically, especially in a college writing course. Yet, it certainly helps to have an ecologically minded teacher to guide students into



understandings of context and perhaps scarcity. But the question remains, how does one foster a program that is rooted in the Ecological Episteme ?

While the pedagogical section of this chapter will include further clues to answering the above question, I offer Owens' program at St. John's University as an example of an ecologically sustainable writing program. In 2006, Owens, as Director of the First-Year Writing Program at St. John's, obtained a grant that allowed the university to hire fifteen full-time writing specialists and open a state-of-the-art writing institute, which houses the first-year writing program as well as the Writing Center. The building was constructed using green technologies and set up in a very sustainable way with faculty offices accessible in common areas. According to the St. John's website, the "first-year writing program strives to strike a balance between a writing program with a common identity and a curriculum strengthened by the variety of faculty interests and backgrounds." The faculty have "autonomy to design their courses and teach to their strengths." However, each faculty member must give the students one common assignment, a "place portrait" or "cultural portrait" defined as "an experiential research project that students work on for four weeks of the semester." The place portrait helps students to begin thinking holistically and deeply about where they live and what makes living in a place worthwhile. Further, in its focus on curricular cohesiveness in terms of having students conduct investigations about place, the St. John's writing program works toward being ecologically sustainable. Other aspects of the sustainability of the St. John's writing program are too numerous

to mention here; I refer readers to the St. Johns “Institute for Writing Studies” website which discusses the program in greater detail.

### **An Ecologic Understanding of Romanticism**

It is vital that the classroom application of the Ecological Episteme include thinking and teaching practices that allow students to celebrate the richness of literacy. At times, certain types of these activities and teaching methods are excluded on the basis of their being labeled “Romantic” or “expressivist,” and, thus, they appear incompatible with the rigors of an academic environment. For instance, recall the earlier discussion in chapter two of how Lindemann excluded personal writing in her ecological model.

Throughout this study, I have used numerous examples of ecological thinkers who, at some point, have been labeled as Romantics. The problem is that in many cases, scholars employ the term “Romanticism” or “expressivism” to connote a sort of wasteland where one disposes of theories and practices that they do not accept, no matter the ideological stance. David Russell describes this wasteland quite well in two separate chapters of *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*. First, he writes of the common current traditional refrain that the Romantic who teaches writing will engender self-involved students who will not be able to respond in a meaningful way to the rigors of academic life (145). Second, in another section called “Liberal Culture on Writing,” he notes that Romanticism was used by those in literature to label writing as an un-teachable mystery only to be discovered through reading great books. Thus, Romanticism was used in this case as an argument against the

teaching of writing in order to grant primacy to courses that focused on literary studies (174). Both of the above constrictive situations no doubt inhibited student writing as well as ecological thinking.

As is indicated by the above examples, there is a long, complex history involved in the definition of Romanticism, and that history, according to Margaret Theresa Crane Bizzaro, is embedded in the social. In her historical study of Romanticism, Bizzaro writes that despite this complexity, composition theorists tend to seek reductive definitions of Romanticism, and its incarnation in composition, expressivism (7). She blames much of this misconception on two well-known essays, Fulkerson's "Four Philosophies of Composition" and Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in a Writing Class."

Indeed, when establishing his social epistemic theory, Berlin pinpoints what he perceives as the shortcomings of expressivism. Specifically, Berlin warns that for all of its supposed "subversiveness," expressivism is "inherently and debilitatingly divisive of political protest, suggesting that effective resistance can only be offered by individuals, each acting alone." Berlin further adds that expressivism is "easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces that it opposes" (30) because of the promotion of individualism, an idea echoed by Greg Myers in his historically flawed neo-Marxist critique of progressive educators. When examined a bit more closely, Berlin's argument seems to be a product of temporary blinders that cause him to fail to see the totality of the context.

The problem with Berlin's reading is that he assumes a solitary writer and does not seem to consider the milieu surrounding the writer. Despite various

criticisms of the expressivist movement from both the right and left, Knoblauch and Brannon “contend that the pedagogies of expressivism are the precursors of critical teaching, despite the fact that they don’t, for the most part, derive from the customary sources of liberatory praxis” (126).<sup>32</sup> Thus, Berlin fails to consider the conditions that cause Knoblauch and Brannon’s precursors, such as what is happening in a writing group or when a class begins to unpack the social forces behind student texts.

Berlin’s failure to elaborate on the social possibility of the classroom causes me to ponder a more specific counter to his contention. I would ask of anyone adopting this argument: How important are the activities and questions that take place in the classroom, hermeneutic or otherwise, as well as the student interaction that takes place after the writing? Here is a hypothetical scenario. In response to a broad “expressivist” writing assignment, where students could write whatever they wanted, in whatever form, a number of students told stories of disparate school experiences. These stories evidenced differences in class and social structure of the students from poor rural and urban areas, as contrasted by the stories told by students from well-funded suburban school districts. Interest was such that income disparity became a popular topic for the next assignment. Could not this expressive assignment transform into a situation in which ideology and class, not to mention rural and urban issues,

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<sup>32</sup> I suppose, then, since I am arguing behalf of expressivism, and I have voted for numerous Green party candidates, this classifies as me as “expressivist left.” It was around 2000 when I first began teaching writing at a local community college where I tried and failed at indoctrinating my writing classes with a steady stream of eco-topics. Along the way, I found that composition pedagogy is a much gentler and lasting version of introducing or perpetuating ecological thought because it allows students to discover topics for themselves, in the common sense of ecological awareness.

become central to the classroom experience? In other words, at what point does this expressivist class become social-epistemic? What I am seeking then from Berlin is an acknowledgement of the fusion of rhetoric with poetics that Hurlbert has helped me to see in Berlin's other work (*National* 6-8). Such an attempt at a fusion is also evident in Berlin's Emerson and Scott chapters discussed in Chapter Three and Four. However, what I gather from this essay is a damaging presumption that co-opts and confuses the vision of many new writing teachers, which is that their students' stories do not matter.

Bizzaro's conclusion is that scholars must understand expressivism's long historical roots, not simply those of Berlin and Fulkerson. The confused and convenient appropriations clarify that theorists can reduce Romanticism to mean virtually anything. In this way, the "smart" view is one espousing a reverence for full historical perceptions not watered down by reductive thought. Roskelly and Ronald convincingly show that individualist visions of Romanticism are intertwined with pragmatism to the point that taking one away from the other would be much like removing a patient's frontal lobe and expecting him or her to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Yet, this theoretical lobotomy has been performed again and again in the spirit of territorializing, mapping, or dare I say, laziness. The question remains, how does the idea of these two forces being intertwined affect the way we teach? The answer to this question would depend upon whom you ask. What is connoted by the idea? Such a fusion would certainly be ecologically based. However, because the ecological relies upon fusions, the misappropriations of what scholars feel are the flaws of personal

writing must be considered a potential obstruction to ecological thinking in a writing program.

### **The Ecological Episteme--Implications for Praxis**

In my theorizing about teaching, I have come to recognize a number of basic ideas as being powerful, in conjunction with Coe's idea of an "Eco-logic," and numerous post-modern theories. One of these ideas comes from Donald Murray's statement that "the text for the writing course is the student's own writing" (5). Another, mentioned earlier in this chapter and coming at the close of their study of writing programs at George Mason University, is Thaiss and Zawicki's finding that "Good writing, whether it adheres to established conventions or takes risks with form and structure, grows out of a writer's sense that the work he or she is doing matters, both professionally and personally" (136). In classes that adhere to these ideas, understanding tends to grow organically from class discussions and writing projects—sometimes from the writing groups, other times from individuals. Owens, whose students work at their own pace on numerous projects, writes that

in giving students a chance to investigate themes that matter to them, it is not hard to create a classroom environment where all of us can reflect on issues directly and indirectly related to sustainability; what makes a neighborhood good or bad; what makes jobs desirable or miserable; and what it means to preserve a culture (30).

Dobrin and Weisser stress that ecocomposition should remain true to its “compositional” roots which are in the “the production of texts” rather than the consumption of texts (*Natural* 40).

Since I view theory and teaching to be intertwined, I offer below a theorized version of an assignment sequence that I use in my composition classes that represents one way for students to begin understanding the world in ecological ways. What follows then is my partial response to a question that could be asked about this study: How does the Ecological Episteme manifest in my classroom? Also, how do I set up conditions to help students to recover the ecological thread? First, my practices spring from the belief that if we examine our teaching practices closely enough, focusing on what is holistic and circular, we begin to understand what is ecological within the work that we do. It is important that writing classes help augment what students already know about writing and work to expand their vision relating to complex situations. In this regard, it is important to recognize when our behaviors begin to reify and counteract our goals or theories. I believe that a first-year college writing class is a vital place for students to adopt a broader vision of themselves, a vision that includes societal influences, a big-minded, holistic version of the self which transcends materialist assumptions. Below I theorize how I help my students uncover the ecologic thread.

The assignment sequence in my classroom has evolved from a banking model, where I tried to impose ecologic texts upon my students, to a place where conditions are met so that students may work toward or discover the Ecological

Episteme in their own way. Though the students do some outside reading on ecological issues, they have much more choice in the matter. Briefly, the sequence in my class begins with us thinking about and doing a short writing on how writing can make the world a more sustainable, habitable, peaceful and sustainable place. Then, within this milieu, the students begin writing the first major text for the class, their “What are you Burning to Tell the World?” assignment. Next, they write a foreword for their writing partners’ pieces, developing a specific theme that runs through their partners’ work. To end the semester, they write a paper or pursue a multi-modal assignment that I call their quest, or what they are burning to know about the world. The idea of the ecologic episteme is enmeshed in the activities that we pursue and the above sequence helps to foster ecological thinking in at least three ways. The first relates to the Darwinian concept called mutual aid as discussed by Kropotkin. In a world of anthropogenic climate change, wherein millions are in danger of displacement, the idea of cooperation and the breaking down barriers the self and others becomes vital. The process of group work and sharing writing as text for the class can’t help but assist one in mutual cooperation that Darwin held as essential for intra-species survival.

Second, because the writing situates the students within social, temporal, and cultural milieus, it serves as the most important “text” for the class from which other topics and understandings grow and develop. This negotiation of classroom ideas begins a process of engagement that has moved students from dualistic, “right and wrong,” views of the world to the more complex



considerations that allow students to build upon and apply their literacy to academic pursuits. In fact, this negotiation opens a space where authentic academic discourse flourishes. Moreover, my classroom is a place where students begin to consider the complex ways in which their stories are embedded within socio-cultural contexts, as well as understand the way institutions have come to affect their discourses.

Third, although my students' writing is the text for the class, I also ask students to keep a journal throughout the semester. Most of these entries are meta-examinations of their writing, but at times, I ask them to explore websites such as *Orion online*, dealing with nature, culture and place and further ask the students to write about articles of their choice. Such exploration allows students to write about issues without the stress of a formal essay. On numerous occasions, students decide to expand on one of the articles to explore a topic in a way that Coe would call ecological. On other occasions, I give the students links to articles that they can read, or ask them to read another work that interests them. Above all, my ecological epistemic classroom is malleable enough to suit the local needs of the students and the institution, while at the same time maintaining that an understanding that richness of literacy lies outside narrow and rigid mechanized goals.

## The Syllabus and Short Writing Assignment

There are numerous avenues toward promoting Ecological Epistemic thinking in a composition classroom. On the first day of my class I ask students to begin thinking about how writing affects sustainability and ecology while reviewing the following language in my syllabus (attached as Appendix A):

**Overarching Question:** Many books are founded upon the pondering of one word or big question. In *The Peaceable Classroom*, Mary Rose O'Reilly focuses on a question posed to her years before: "Is it possible for us to teach English in a way that people stop killing each other?" (9). Individual classes can also be founded upon a question. In this class, the following overarching question will serve as a frame for our class: How can writing help to make Earth a more habitable, peaceful, compassionate, and sustainable place? While this question may not affect the topics that you decide to consider, the ideas that spring from this question will permeate and circulate through our classroom throughout the semester.

Thus, we start the course by thinking about the varied meanings of sustainability and ecology, and we begin writing in this context. Also I make it clear that our classroom is a community where their opinions are respected. Most students are able to grasp how the health of the Earth and its ecosystems represents the broad canvas upon which we write. Moreover, I often begin the semester's writing by asking the students to write a short two-page essay on how writing can

make the world a more habitable, peaceful, compassionate, or sustainable place. Before writing, we often do a topic generation activities wherein students cover the boards with adjectives responding to above question. From this backdrop, the students begin to connect their lives and their writing to the care and compassion that is required to continue to exist on this planet.

### **What are you burning to tell the world?**

After giving my students a brief writing assignment during the first week, I ask them to write at least eleven pages (with no upper-limit page requirements) in response to the question, what are you burning to tell the world? This is an appropriation of an assignment that my former professor Claude Hurlbert has developed (*National* 182). It is important to know that this is not a situation in which students write whatever they want. About the generation of topics, my vision for the project falls in line with Hurlbert who writes the following in explanation of students' topics:

Some critics have complained that my pedagogy is an “anything goes” plan for a composition course, a class where students can write about anything that they want to write, even books about their pets or prom nights. That is a misreading of what I do. During class discussions I make clear to my students that books have to have a point, a tension, a critical question, a personal and social significance—a reason for being that keeps students and their university audience (the class—including me) interested for the entire semester—and beyond. (*National* 188)

The idea that the project must hold the interest of other students and be of value often creates a situation in which my students, I, and their group members negotiate our subjectivities. Writers spend varied amounts of time on invention strategies and consult with me before beginning. Though some students are at first intimidated upon being asked to write such a lengthy essay, having an entire month provides the students plenty of time to explore topics and gain confidence in their work.

During this month, the students write in class and hold peer review sessions and full-class discussions. Halfway through the assignment, each student meets individually with me. On days when we are having full group discussions, I ask the students to begin thinking about the various themes that are emerging from each other's writing; the discussion of such themes is often the point where ecologically related ideas arise. Ideas such as wooded areas being bulldozed over to create a parking lot for a box store, hunting stories, or problems created by fossil fuel exploitation are not uncommon. Always, there is an ecology of ideas vectoring around the room.

We spend extensive time talking about peer review. Early in the semester, I ask students to read "Responding, No Really Responding," by Richard Straub, and cultivate mutuality-related activities that help students understand how to write meaningful comments on essays. During peer review, students develop trust in one another and honest writing is a mantra for the course. I tell my students that "This is a 'no bullshit' zone." We discuss, what is honest writing? Honest fiction? Honest scholarship? Further, what does it mean to be honest with

yourself? Or with others? I would describe these classroom occurrences as an ecological fusion of theories and rhetorics. From this process, students tend to see that they are inextricably intertwined with their culture, their relationships, and their surroundings.

### **Ecological Zone of Proximal Development**

A number of models help perpetuate an ecological classroom. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and philosophic hermeneutics both work well in my context. The students' development in relation to one another can be explained by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal development (ZPD). As applied to education, the ZPD can describe how students learn from either the teacher or more knowledgeable peers (34). In his research, Vygotsky observed that a child's development tends to lag behind a child's learning, and the difference between the two represents the ZPD. Vygotsky evidences holistic thinking in his use of the term "whole child" which signifies "a person engaged in a structure of social relations with others" (Chaiklin 5). Thus, as students have varying strengths in terms of writing ability, what they know, and how they know, the activities of peer review and class discussion contribute greatly to students' development.

The ZPD also supports student-centered pedagogy. Vygotsky found that students develop more easily when they are learning from someone else who is in their same ZPD. Thus, the writing as text for the class functions to help students understand, empathize with, and connect to the experiences of others. The sharing of each other's writing is a world-opening experience that connects

us in ways that reach beyond the self and others. Since much fascinating writing springs from the “what are you burning to tell the world?” projects, students help develop one another’s knowledge and experiences. In “A Place in Which to Stand,” Hurlbert shares that while a student of his was writing her semester book project, she discovered that her small hometown was a haven for the Ku Klux Klan: “Her book became a reevaluation of the graffiti on the town bridge, once she understood it as Klan tagging. The book became a road leading away from a place, behind which the Klan met at night” (355). Certainly, the terrible reality of this piece acts as a wonderful precursor to the development of critical thinking for the entire class. Another of his students “researched his family’s farm, tracing its ownership through the colonial era tombstones.” The student further “researched the Native Americans who originally lived there” and related “how he and his father restored the house” (“A Place” 355). These examples support the student-centered idea of a classroom that helps to reveal our ecological thread. These examples of narratives also foster in students an ecological sense of place and a sense of wanting to heal a place.

At times, student narratives can depict deep instances of people cooperating beyond borders. Such narratives work to change perceptions of nationalism and difference. A few years ago a Kuwaiti student of mine wrote about her mother’s reaction to two soldiers who were occupying her village during the 1991 Iraqi invasion. It was the end of the war and for two days the soldiers had been waiting, lingering on the street. When her mother looked out the window at the soldiers, she no longer saw an armed occupying force but

young boys who looked hungry, tired, and scared. Her motherly instincts kicked in, and she asked them to come in for lunch. This beautiful act of compassion, anarchical in the way that it reached beyond government sanctions, was one of interconnection and peace. After the student finished sharing this part of her text, the class carried on a long discussion on interconnections that transcend political borders, a conversation that fostered the roots of inter-cultural compassion, the kind of compassion that is needed in a world of many displaced peoples. This is the sort of discussion that is ecological epistemic in that it allows people to begin to see themselves in others and thus, creates the Emersonian understanding of fusion between the inner and outer worlds.

### **Hermeneutical Inquiry**

After the students finish their draft of what they are burning to tell the world, each writes the foreword for his or her writing partner's essay, a process in which students extract themes from their partners' writing. This theme extraction places the students in conversation with each other's texts, a sort of textual emphasis that falls into line with Timothy Crusius' ideas of using hermeneutics in the classroom and very much helps the students to understand how social, cultural, ecological, and gender situations have affected their lives. This inquiry continues into the students' next assignment which takes the form of a "Quest," or what they are burning to know about the world. Crusius writes that too often, "our students want answers, preferably, the answer, not questions" (79). Crusius would agree that the sense of endless inquiry and self-critique of philosophic hermeneutics are particularly well-suited to an ecological epistemic classroom.

There are many other ways to extract meaning from a student's text. Hurlbert notes that one semester he asked his students to reconsider their texts in light of Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Interbeing*, which revealed to them the numerous ways in which humans are interconnected (202). Though the transition from the students' "what are you burning to tell the world" pieces outward to the foreword is sometimes challenging and not always comfortable, once students begin processing, they begin making vital connections. For instance, in my classroom, while writing her foreword, one student realized the ecological value of her writing partner's hunting practices, contrasting his timeless activities to industrial agriculture. In short, this assignment sequence is just one of the many ways that the ecological can manifest in a composition classroom.

### **Limitations of This Study**

As thinking that involves the Ecological Episteme is as much about certain, mindful ways of knowing as it is about actual knowledge about environmental crises, the argument could be made that one could think in ecological ways without realizing that there are larger actual and pressing problems with which to contend. While this is a possibility, the Ecological Episteme deals with the epistemic processes at their roots, ameliorating the kind of thinking that has been the cause of these problems. It offers a counter to the thinking that feeds into a mass-consuming, individualistic society. Also, a classroom or theoretical context that deals with the Ecological Episteme would be immersed in holisms wherein it would be difficult to avoid the many environmental issues that plague this rapidly warming planet. When thinking holistically, it is hard to avoid topics such as climate change, industrial farming



practices, energy colonization and many other issues that compromise the lives of those on this planet. Because these issues already are embedded in an ecological way of knowing, students likely will begin to have a deeper and more complex understanding of these issues.

A second limitation is that of how one discerns what constitutes a whole in any given context. As anyone who has ever been to a community meeting knows, issues of environment and place are rarely black and white. One of five coal plants near my home spews particulate matter that causes 40 deaths a year according to the Clean Air Task Force. Yet, shutting down the coal plant would jeopardize the jobs of perhaps 1,000 plant workers and coal miners. The plant is in the process of installing scrubbers that could decrease particulate matter by 90% but create another problem in fly ash waste that has to be buried. The teacher who helps students into an ecological way of knowing needs to understand the wholes and complexities of any given context.

### **Further Study**

More studies are needed on ecological thinking in composition, whether they be about acquiring a literacy of sustainability or ecological literacies. Both qualitative and theoretical studies are needed. One such qualitative study could be to compare student acquisition of the ecological literacy in Owens' St. John's students as compared to a traditional writing program at a school with similar demographics. Other studies could track the ecological perceptions of students throughout their college careers, perhaps comparing an ecologically epistemic

classroom to one that deals with writing about ecological or “environmental” issues.

There also exists a great need for theoretical studies that justify the ecological value of composition classes. The work in ecological composition and writing studies seems to be moving toward what Dobrin terms “Ecocomposition Postcomposition,” in a chapter in which he writes that “ecocomposition has failed as an intellectual exercise” (125). However, he then goes on to discuss the massive theoretical potentialities of this newly coined term.

As noted, Dobrin’s “postcomposition” is an attempt to buttress itself against composition. There exists a constellation of scholars doing valuable work surrounding these realms of study. Also, the call to separate writing from interpretation brings up refreshing and insightful possibilities for writing studies. This call, which echoes Sanchez in his *The Function of Theory in Composition*, decenters the writing subject in order to consider how writing circulates through textual and digital ecosystems. This inquiry leads to theories like Morey’s concept of “Ecosee” (discussed in chapter two) that helps us gain a deeper understanding of how images have a persuasive and powerful affect upon our consciousness. In his call for a post-composition that works toward such complexity, not to mention a post-ecocomposition, Dobrin’s goal is to counter many problems with the composition class as it now exists. Such problems, writes Dobrin, include the continuation of certain types of Eurocentric discourses that implicitly privilege white culture and that tend to fuel or support oppressive circumstances for many peoples. His plan is then to disrupt composition studies, to create discomfort that

will challenge theorists and practitioners to invent new ways more appropriate to the time (6-7).

What makes Dobrin's work valuable is his penchant to find and navigate the edges of composition studies and the abyss of what is the big "next" in the field. For composition, and for epistemic theories such as the Ecological Episteme, there are potential problems and potential benefits to Dobrin's plan to move writing studies in a post-composition era away from the implication of the teaching of composition and into the study of the ontological nature of writing as a system. One of the problems is that current scholar-teachers, who may otherwise be thinking about how to apply theory to the classroom, would be siphoned away from composition into postcomposition/writing studies. This siphoning could slowly cause the potentialities inherent in students' having the chance to write on topics that interest them for an entire semester to disappear, which could be devastating, at least for the writing aspect of higher education. The second problem is that postcomposition/writing studies creates yet another hierarchy for those who wish to be deeply invested in the teaching of writing in higher education. After a few decades of composition's modest success at leveling the field of English studies, will post-composition knock compositionists back down into the sub-basement? Perhaps those of us in the trenches can have a chuckle at watching the mad tussles over English's shrinking departmental turf.

Obviously, I am looking at worst case scenarios. Hopefully, a move toward post-composition studies would cause no hurtful turf battles or negative effects on the teaching of writing, digital or otherwise. Hopefully, there would be

research endowments and writing studies institutes. Compositionists could learn a great deal from postcomposition. In his defense of the space program, Neal deGrasse Tyson mentions that some of the greatest improvements in medicine have come as a collateral benefit from the space program. In much the same way, could not composition learn from postcomposition/writing studies? Thus, thinking about further theoretical work, there exists the need for scholar teachers who can translate writing studies' theories to classrooms and writing programs. For instance, in his alternative history of composition, a work now considered primarily by writing studies theorists, Hawk recovers Coleridge's philosophic vitalisms that could have great, largely untapped applications for how composition uses and understands rhetorical invention.

There is also another, more affirmative way to react to the perceived problems in composition. In *National Healing*, Hurlbert issues complaints similar to Dobrin's that there is a "chasm" between the multicultural scholarship of composition and the rhetoric in textbooks that still celebrate prepackaged rhetorical modes (163) and reproduce certain institutional hierarchies (64). However, rather than giving up on theorizing about composition, Hurlbert forwards ideas such as "transnationalism" that will help compositionists and students to understand how to live in an international world. Rather than buttressing his theories against composition, creating a new hierarchy that those in the field struggle against, Hurlbert writes that

[W]e compositionists need to join together to articulate rationales for composition, new reasons for the necessity of writing studies. . . . And we

will, again, need to stop calling for the abolishing of the universal composition class, the default argument of those without a vision for its relevance or the meaning of its global purpose. (235)

Such an articulation can start with conversations about what is ecological in composition and how such ideas can help us to understand and to teach writing in ways that strive toward a just, healthy, diverse, and more inclusive future.

Composition and writing studies needs such inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

Ecological thinkers have always been present to counteract the constraints of time and space that tend to impose linearity upon us. Engendering ecological thought in composition is about much more than simply learning about bland, “save the world” rhetoric. It is about learning a way of being that comports with natural principles of cooperation and learning, promoting a deep reverence for all sentient beings, principles of mutual aid that Darwin thought vital for a species’ survival. In order to survive on this hot planet, humans are going to need to help one another, and this help is going to have to cross artificial borders.

These chapters have shown how to uncover the ecological thread that runs through composition and writing studies. Ecology and sustainability are not only relatively recent “post-process” ideas discussed in chapter one but have been embedded in composition and writing studies all along. From the time of Bronson Alcott, ecological thinking has been embodied in and has provided a paradigm for the teaching of writing.

These chapters have also shown that an ecological writing class does not necessarily need to address topics that relate directly to an ecological crisis. However, in my experience, such topics will usually emerge organically through class discussion. Teachers who are rooted in ecological epistemic thinking will understand the broader implications and can act as a trusted guide by asking thought-provoking questions and promoting conversations of sustainability when they arise. The ecological is synonymous with most aspects of what are considered sound student-centered teaching practices. Moreover, helping students to attain an ecological epistemic way of knowing helps them to have a greater understanding of issues than the commodified and compartmentalized ways in which such issues, from recycling to oil consumption, are usually packaged. From a programmatic standpoint, the Ecological Episteme could work with other departments to achieve a curricular coherence to ponder the various ways of knowing in various programs.

Simply put, the classroom, the writing program, and the theory behind the Ecological Episteme are about a community of people working together. The Ecological Episteme presents a paradigm for doing things in a way that cultivates a sense of self that transcends dualisms to include the social and the sustainable.

Buddhist texts discuss the idea of planting a seed in terms of setting forth an idea and hoping that it will grow into something special. I look upon this study as the planting of such a seed. Obviously, the ecological surrounds us and intra-acts within us. A recent study has shown that greater biodiversity has been linked

to lessened incidences of poverty and disease (Bonds, Dobson, and Keenen). As noted above, for decades people such as Oberlin's David Orr have been calling for an educational system that from grade school on promotes an ecological literacy. Along with learning math, reading, and art, students would learn to embody knowledge of native plants, watersheds, and sustainable energy systems. Imagine what kind of world this type of education could create. Would humans begin to think more in wholes and less in compartments? I envision this idea of biodiversity extending to diversity in human populations and ideas in a combination of biophilia<sup>33</sup> and duende intertwined. We need each other. Human-caused climate change is displacing many, and we are all complicit in the problems that civilization has created.

I have been viewing my classroom as an ecology for a few years now and believe that many surprising, challenging, and wonderful moments occur because of the opening and letting go that is created by an ecological shift in perception. Most importantly, there are moments that produce insight that tend to help everyone in the class to become more thoughtful, caring, and sensitive writers and thinkers. Biodiversity extends into what is best about being human and includes the emotions that sustain us. Call me an idealist, or, dare I say, a Romantic, but I believe our natural impulse is to love and help one another, and in this spirit, I offer this study.

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<sup>33</sup> In his work *Biophilia*, E.O. Wilson supports the idea of an ecological thread that runs through all living creatures in by defining Biophilia as the emotional connection between all living things, a "innate tendency to focus on life and life-like processes" (1). This idea points toward Wilson's optimistic conclusion that "to the degree we come to understand other organisms, we will place greater value on them, and on ourselves" (2).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A-Syllabus

#### **Indiana University of Pennsylvania Course Syllabus**

**Spring 2013**

**English 101--College Writing**

**Brian Cope**

**Office: 209**

**Office Hours:** Tuesday: 11:00-12:30; Thurs. 10:30-12:30, Weds (main campus): 1:00-3:00, or by appointment.

**Email:** b.d.cope@iup.edu

**Home Phone:**(724)465-5341 (leave Message)

**Welcome to College Writing!** I'm very pleased to be your instructor for this course, and until this semester ends, I would rather be in the classroom with you than any other place. If you work hard and follow the rules of the class, you will not only learn how to write in an academic environment, you will begin to see writing as a way for you to open to the world in a way which unlocks wisdom and allows you to view the complexity of life from new perspectives. Also, this classroom will serve as a community, where openness, comfort, and mutual respect are of primary importance. You'll notice that I have a great deal of enthusiasm for the study of writing, and it is my hope that you will develop, if you have not already done so, a similar enthusiasm.

**Overarching Question:** Many books are founded upon the pondering of one word or big question. In *The Peaceable Classroom*, Mary Rose O'Reilly focuses on a question posed to her years before: "Is it possible for us to teach English in a way that people stop killing each other?" Individual classes can also be founded upon a question. In this class, the following overarching question will serve as a frame for our class: **How can writing help to make Earth a more habitable, peaceful, compassionate, and sustainable place?** While this question may not affect the topics that you decide to consider, the ideas that spring from this question will permeate and circulate through our classroom throughout the semester.

#### **Course Description and objectives:**

**From the IUP Catalogue:** "*This course is designed to help you to develop increased writing fluency, clarity, and coherence; improved strategies for considering the purposes of writing and reading; improved strategies of invention, revision and editing; and a unique understanding of writing and reading as both tools for communication and for learning.*" **It is also my goal for you to expand your awareness and continue your progression toward being a more thoughtful, articulate, and insightful person. Further, it is my great hope that this course assists you in your progress toward self-actualization. In our classroom, your writing and the writing of your peers will be considered the primary text of paramount importance to the outside reading for the class.**

**Credits:** 3.00

#### **Required Books**

Mitchell, Stephen. Ed. *The Enlightened Mind*.

\* One loose-leaf notebook for your journal and in-class writings, and numerous folders to keep all of your writings in! You will need to keep all drafts, homework etc. Don't throw anything away!

**Conferences:** This is an excellent way, perhaps the best way, for me to help you with your writing. We will have numerous meetings throughout the semester, totaling at least 1 hour per student. On one or two occasions during the semester, it is likely that I will cancel classes for mutually agreed upon one-on-one conferences. I will also be conferring with you during the days when we are in the computer lab. But please don't wait for me to initiate this process; I'll be happy to set up an appointment or see you at any mutually convenient time.

**Groups and Peer review:** There will be significant group and pair work during class time. Please take seriously the work that you do with your group as well the task of reviewing your peers' work. This classroom will follow a code of civility which, in part, embodies mutual respect and tolerance, as well as discouraging hatred and injustice. Your written peer reviews will be a significant part of your participation grade, which I discuss further below.

**Reading and Preparation:** In order to be effective in this class, you **must read** all of the assigned material and come to class with insights and ideas for discussion. Your journal, discussed below, serves as a wonderful forum for you to develop insights and ideas for discussion. Also, for every class, please bring your journals, notebooks with all handouts and all other relevant books and materials. Please don't throw any papers, books, etc. away.

**Attendance Policy:**

Discussion, in class writing, and small group work are crucial and frequent in this class and your participation in the class demonstrates a dedication to this community of learners and your smaller writing groups. You must be willing to demonstrate your willingness to give and to receive ideas and feedback, to communicate about collaborative projects, and to support peers. Thus, you are expected to attend and actively participate in all classes. You are permitted Three (3) absences whether excused or unexcused. After your fourth absence, every subsequent unexcused absence will lower your course grade by one half of a letter grade, a penalty which will continue build on each subsequent absence until you fail the course. Additionally, when you are absent, you receive zero participation and in class writing points for the day. Excused absences will likely only be granted for extreme family emergencies or illnesses for which you have a doctor's excuse. Please bring in your written excuse the next time you come to class. As you would in a job or other position of responsibility, please call or e-mail me if are going to be absent. Barring severe extenuating circumstances, i.e. hospitalization, if you do not contact me the day of your absence, your absence will be counted as being unexcused.

In addition to physically not being present in the classroom, please note certain other behaviors will result in you being asked to leave or marked absent for the day:

1) Unless I otherwise tell you, cell phones, and other electronic devices should be put away and turned off. Anyone using their phone or other device will be marked absent for the day and given a zero for participation work. Upon seeing you text, I will inform you of this in class. No exceptions to this rule.

2) General disruption, i.e. incessant or periodic interruptions during a time of classroom discussion is a discourtesy to your fellow students. For instance, constant whispering, talking obviously out of turn, doing homework in class (including homework for *this* class), etc., are rude and considered disruptions. Further, “packing-up” to leave before you’re dismissed, standing up before you’re dismissed, constantly looking at your watch and looking longingly at the door—showing any exasperation visibly or audibly—is also considered rude and disruptive. If you choose to disrupt class, I may ask you to leave. You will be counted absent for the entire class. If I ever again have to ask you to leave the class, you will be dismissed from class permanently.

3) Sleeping. If you’re going to sleep in class, you might as well stay in bed because if I find you sleeping I will give you an unexcused absence for that day. We may also decide to sneak quietly out of class and decide on an impromptu field trip, leaving you in class, alone. If this happens, and you wake up alone in class, then you will also be marked absent for the day (this happens at least once a semester)!

4) Lateness. Please come to class on time. Being late frequently will decrease your participation grade and may cause you to accumulate absences and being substantially late will cost you one half of an absence.

### **GRADED WORK**

**The writing in this class will be graded in the form of a portfolio. This means that a large part of your grade will be dependent upon your polishing and submission of a selection of writing in a final portfolio. Specific directions will be given a bit later in the semester.**

### **Breakdown of grades**

#### **Writings :**

What are You Burning to Tell the World	30 or 40
Quest:	20
Short Writings	20-30
Participation, reflective letter and peer review	10
<b>Journal</b>	10

### **Specific**

**Short Book:** As I mentioned above, your writing is going to be the main text for this class. I’m serious about this, to the extent that you are going to draft a book during the first month of class. The short book should at least spill onto 10 pages but may be three chapters spilling onto the thirteenth page. Those who choose the at least thirteen page option can opt out of one of a short writing of their choice. Please note that this topic can be as long as you wish, but length doesn’t necessarily mean a good grade or quality.

## Quest

The purposes of this writing will be to broaden your understanding of various forces that have affected you and your classmates, learn ways in which collectively and individually negotiate meaning, and to familiarize yourself and gain confidence in writing about multiple genres in relation to issues that deeply interest you.

The intellectual fuel for this assignment can and will come from a number of places. You will be surprised at how many social, political, and issues will be raised by your classmates in the course writing and discussion.

**\*\*A final drafts of a collection of your best essays will be submitted in your portfolio for the end of the semester.**

**Multimodal Activity (optional—to be discussed—would take the place of essay one and two).**

Another option will be to do a multi-modal piece, dealing with a topic of great importance to you. We will talk more about this when the time comes.

**Class Participation:** To receive all points in this section (10 points a week), I expect you to attend and be actively engaged in all classes, perform the readings, do all of your homework, and interact with your group as a productive member. Active engagement means that I expect you to function as a contributing member to all group and classroom activities, displaying a level of critical thinking and an ability to make constructive contributions to the class and your group members. As we are a community of learners, your absence or inattentiveness will deprive your group and the class of your important insights and opinions. If it is noted that you are not contributing to group discussion or you are otherwise not engaged, your class participation grade will begin to suffer. You'll also lose participation points for every class that you miss. Please note the above attendance policy. I will give up to ten points a class for all who attend.

Sometimes in-class writings may be given to insure that you are reading. Also, it is vital that give peer feedback as peer review will be very important to this project. During peer review sessions, I will ask your peers to staple your review to their draft which will be turned in with their drafts.

**Peer Review:** While we will develop this as the course moves along, I obviously regard peer review as being important and thus your peer groups are important as well. The work that you do within your writing peer groups can be looked upon as a non-hierarchical refuge, a place beyond the reach of the red pen. I assess the work of your peers by the effort that you put into the work. By grading this, I am attaching importance to the work that you do in the group.

**Journal (10 points):** You are expected to make two journal entries per week (one for each class) totaling 1.0 pages (at one half of a notebook page for each entry—at least 300 words per week. Each entry must be at least 100 words. But if you have written a 100 word entry on Tues., you will need to write 200 word essay for Thursday—no worries about spelling or grammar in these entries). Generally, I will give you a cue for journal entries.

**Revisions and Assessment:** Since this course depends upon revision and assessment of multiple drafts, placing a grade on your initial drafts has been can interfere with the quality of your revisions. Writers who are doing are keeping up with all work and appear to be progressing well

on the major writings can be assumed to have at least a C in the course. I will, however, place a letter grade on your 10 to 14 page book, which you can then revise for a better grade on the portfolio. You will have ample opportunities to revise your work—two formal revisions of your longer work and one formal revision of your shorter pieces. To receive a better grade, revisions generally should go beyond the mere fixing of errors to improvement of high order concerns.

**Late Essays:** points will deducted for late papers—one letter grade per each week for which it is late, and will be pro-rated as per degree of lateness (i.e.  $\frac{1}{2}$  letter grade for three days,  $\frac{1}{3}$  letter grade for two days etc.).

See “Attendance Policy,” above, for the effect of absences on your grade. **Failure to attend class is grounds for failing the course.**

***Final Grade***

A	90-100	D	60-69.9
B	80-89.9	F	< 59.9
C	70-79.9		