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Bringing ecocomposition to a multimodal composition course: critical literacy and place at work in English 250

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**Bringing ecocomposition to a multimodal composition course:
critical literacy and place at work in English 250**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how the interaction between ecocomposition and (eco)feminist pedagogy can create generative spaces for critical literacies and reflexive thinking in the multimodal composition classroom. A review of scholarship in ecocomposition praxis reveals a need for further inquiry into ecocomposition as a multimodal experience. This research study seeks to better understand how ecocomposition and multimodal communication can encourage the acquisition of critical literacy in foundational composition courses by examining student work on two communication assignments: a personal narrative essay about a meaningful place and a multimodal documentary photo essay about a local place. The analysis in this study shows that incorporating multimodal assignments into an ecocomposition course will help students engage in critical thinking about the ways in which human discourse and environments interact as well as the extent to which concepts of place, space, and environment are human constructions worthy of critical inquiry.

Introduction: A Localized View of Composition

The Rootless and the Uprooted

For many of the students who enter our first-year composition courses, the university and its academic ways of living are new and strange; from the imposing architecture that usually houses administrative offices to the controlled chaos of activities transpiring within the Student Union, many first-year students find their new academic environment a little disorienting, a little dislocating. This dislocated feeling is, to some extent, a side effect of the student's initiation into the sometimes overwhelming expectations and responsibilities of academia, but it is also a symptom of rootlessness; students uproot themselves from their homes and try their best to transplant themselves in foreign soil.

For the professors who work in the halls that stand atop this foreign soil, rootlessness is also a problem. Eric Zencey muses on this problem in his essay "The Rootless Professors" and argues that "professors are expected to owe no allegiance to geographical territory; we're supposed to belong to the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular world of watersheds, growing seasons, and ecological niches" (15). However, awareness of the ecological particulars of one's surroundings, Zencey suggests, "is a key aspect of an integrated life, the life that is, after all, a primary goal of a good liberal arts education" (16). And when the rootless attempt to welcome the uprooted into a liberal education, Zencey fears some potentially negative results: We risk losing our "connectedness to place" (16), advancing an "ignorant and exploitative relationship to nature" (16), and suggesting that citizenship in an abstract world of ideas might be preferable to citizenship in a localized community. Perhaps we might achieve a meaningful balance between the local

and the global in academic life by thinking critically about the extent to which our connections to local places are necessary parts of the global whole. Zencey suggests that this connection between the local and the global is necessary in the university classroom if we hold that critical turns of thought are central to a liberal education:

If education involves making the student's world by turns problematic and comprehensible, puzzling then scrutable, local content will also increase teaching effectiveness. Transforming the world immediately outside the classroom in to a laboratory will tend to erase the artificial boundary between the roles of student and citizen, thereby encouraging in the latter the habits of the former. A citizenry that is curious, skeptical, and reasonable, one that takes little on faith and is accustomed to carrying careful inquiry into the world, is a citizenry that more nearly fits the mold that democracy requires.

(19)

Helping students become critical thinkers who can flourish within and sustain democratic communities is but one goal of a liberal education, and scholarship in rhetoric and composition has had its eye on this goal for some time now. However, connecting the democratic ideals of liberal education to a localized pedagogy creates a space for further discussion of the extent to which place, communication, and citizenship are connected. Furthermore, our heightened awareness of environmental degradation calls for critical thinking about the ways in which we relate to the world around us, and recent scholarship in composition studies is beginning to answer that call.

Local Ecology, Global Ecology, and Ecomposition

Ecological sustainability as a topic for argument and investigation is present in several frontiers; currently, discussions about the environmental impact of human activity can be seen in political, social, and cultural contexts, and media attention to these issues is on the rise due to increased interest in global warming and the connection between social justice and environmental justice. With such an array of contested positions on matters of civic importance, it is imperative that academic discussions in rhetoric and composition remain attentive to the implications that environmental issues pose for students in composition courses. Recently, scholarship in ecomposition has engaged rhetoric and composition in the environmental issues of our time. However, ecomposition, according to Arlene Plevin “is more than smuggling in an essay about trees” (148). Dobrin and Weisser echo this sentiment in their definition of ecomposition: “Ecomposition is concerned with rhetorical analysis of environmental/political issues, the effects of language on those issues, and on the ways in which ongoing debates or conversations affect the ways in which writers write” (579). At its core, Dobrin and Weisser’s definition articulates the connection between the rhetorical shaping of discussions about environmental issues, but extends the work of ecomposition to include a discussion of how culturally constructed ideas about place can affect writers. Furthermore, Dobrin suggests that ecomposition’s relationship with rhetoric is more profound:

That is to say then, ecomposition not only identifies the ecological aspects of rhetoric and composition as a discipline, but *suggests metaphors and methodologies through which we can better understand the relationships between rhetoric and composition*, for instance, when we use terms like

nature, wildness, site, location, habitat, and environment, we are identifying ideological labels; naming with such terms represents local ideology. That's what rhetoric is. (23, emphasis added)

As Dobrin suggests, the process of naming and attempting to understand the places in which we live is a rhetorical act that carries with it a set of ideological assumptions. Unpacking and interrogating these ideologies, I argue, is necessary for critical civic engagement in issues of environmental significance. Furthermore, ecocomposition as a theoretical approach can help us understand the connections that exist between identity and the socially constructed places in which we live. To further our understanding of these connections, I developed a qualitative research project in which I taught an ecocomposition-informed syllabus in two sections of a foundation communication course at a large Midwestern university.

Purpose and Structure

The purpose of this research study is to explore the ways in which the interaction between ecocomposition theories and (eco)feminist pedagogy can create new, generative spaces for critical literacies and reflexive thinking in the multimodal composition classroom. The significance of this research purpose might be best understood if we consider the recent body of work on ecocomposition theory and practice. There is much to be said about the theoretical connections between ecocomposition, critical literacy, and feminist pedagogy (Cooper, 1986; Dobrin and Weisser, 2001; Owens, 2001; Gaard, 2001); however, the space for research into the relationship between theory and practice in this field is open and in need of study. Furthermore, scholarship in ecocomposition would benefit from a focused look at

the extent to which multimodal communication might work with ecocomposition theories to help students develop critical thinking skills. Here, I suggest that (eco)feminist pedagogical approaches can help forge stronger connections between multimodal communication, critical literacy, adult development theories, and the aims of ecocomposition.

In order to explore how ecocomposition, (eco)feminist pedagogical approaches, and multimodal communication can help students develop critical thinking skills, I developed two composition assignments that formed the first unit of my ecocomposition syllabus—two assignments that would help me focus on how students critically navigate issues of place, identity, and multimodal communication. Therefore, this research study focuses on the following research questions:

- What communication challenges might students face in a composition curriculum focused on place and environment?
- To what extent did these challenges result from the presence of an ecocomposition approach, and how did students attempt to navigate these challenges through multimodal communication?
- What types of responses and reflections emerge that can help us understand the variety of challenges faced by students?

The following paragraphs summarize how I will contextualize these research questions and provide a summary of each thesis chapter.

Chapter One, “Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework,” explores how the ideologically complicated nature of the connections between identity and the places in which we live provides the bridge between ecocomposition and work in critical literacy theories and adult development theories. These three fields of study—ecocomposition, adult

development, and critical literacy—provide the conceptual framework for my research study. For the purposes of this study, scholarship in adult development models (Bizzell, 1984; Ignelzi, 2000; Mezirow, 2000) will help me articulate the extent to which liberal education in the composition classroom can engage students in transformational learning, a process in which students develop increasingly complicated ideas about the rhetorical nature of knowledge. Scholarship in critical literacy offers students a way to problematize the meaning-making process by offering pedagogical approaches through which students are called to critically and reflexively engage with a variety of texts in the composition classroom. In my study, I rely on the work of Freire (2003), Goldzwig (1998), hooks (1994), and the New London Group (1996) to foreground the importance of critical thinking in an ecocomposition course with respect to issues of power (subject/object and authority) as it affects issues related to identity (race, class, and gender).

Additionally, feminist and ecofeminist pedagogical theories informed the construction of my ecocomposition syllabus, and I rely heavily on McAndrew (1996) and Gaard (2001) to illustrate the extent to which feminist concerns about social justice are connected to ecocomposition. Specifically, the work of social justice activists like Mies and Shiva (1993) and hooks (2004) illuminates how important it is for an ecocomposition curriculum to turn a critical eye toward the ways in which oppressive ideologies are imbedded in the connections between place as a construct and issues of race, class, and gender.

Chapter Two, “Methodology and Data Collection,” details the qualitative research theories that informed the design of my research study. I contextualize my research study by providing a sketch of the ecocomposition syllabus I designed, noting how the data collection

instruments I used fit within the semester scaffolding. Furthermore, I use the work of Harris (2004), Lee (2000), Qualley (1997), and McComiskey (1997) to explain how reflexivity and critical thinking are at work in the ecocomposition syllabus that informs this research study. It is also important to note that the aims of my ecocomposition syllabus—critical literacy operating responsibly and sustainably in civic/community/local matters—parallel the vision and mission of the ISUComm Foundation Communication Program. Students participating in the ISUComm Foundation Courses are asked to think critically across modes of communication; the goal of this curricular endeavor “is to prepare our graduates to communicate with confidence and integrity in the varied contexts of their academic, professional, and civic lives” (*Instructor Guide*, pp. 5-6). Consequently, the ecocomposition syllabus I designed features multimodal communication as a key element in each of the assignments.

I present the data that I collected from key research instruments in Chapter Three, “Data Analysis and Findings,” as well as my rationale for the analytical approach I used. Finally, Chapter Four, “Conclusions and Lessons Learned,” contextualizes my findings with student responses to two questionnaires, explores lessons learned during my experience with ecocomposition, and suggests possibilities for further research in ecocomposition.

Chapter One.

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

Ecocomposition

Recent scholarship in ecocomposition owes much to the insights that Marilyn Cooper offered in her 1986 College English article, “The Ecology of Writing.” In this essay, Cooper argues that writing is an ecological “activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (367), and she attempts to show how an ecological model of composition bridges the gaps that exist between communication models that compositionists have developed over the past forty years. Beginning with a short history of composition’s movement away from a focus on form and toward an expressivist concern with content (364), Cooper suggests that the emphasis on process advanced by theorists like Elbow and Murray helped compositionists broaden their conceptions of how readers perceive and construct texts (364-5). Furthermore, a more nuanced focus on the reader’s experience with a text led theorists like George Dillon and Linda Flower to observe that some writing errors resulted from the writer’s inability to reconcile writing as something that happens in both the real world (with readers) and in the mind (365).

Understanding the writing process as a form of thinking or something that happens uniquely within the author’s mind—the cognitive process model of writing—anticipates Cooper’s conception of writing in terms of an ecological model because, as she argues, the cognitive process model “obscures many aspects of writing we have come to see as not peripheral” (365). In other words, Cooper suggests that while the cognitive process model accurately describes one portion of the composing process—the writer alone in her head—it

does not adequately account for the extent to which writing is a necessarily social activity, one that she argues is embedded in a dynamic web of identities and social actions. In this ecological model of writing, however, Cooper suggests that the dynamic web in which all communication is suspended is not merely a stand-in for what we might call “context”: “The term *ecological* is not . . . simply the newest way to say ‘contextual’” (367). Instead, an ecological model of writing looks beyond the contexts in which we write and attempts to describe the extent to which the systems within which writers compose are “causally related to other systems” (368). Furthermore, an ecological model of writing considers how writers’ communications with other writers constitute systems in and of themselves. Here, Cooper makes an explicit connection between composition and the ecological metaphor with which she is working:

An important characteristic of ecological systems is that they are inherently dynamic; though their structures and contents can be specified at a given moment, in real time they are constantly changing, limited only by parameters that are themselves subject to change over longer spans of time. (368)

The ability to critically engage with these parameters as they change is one characteristic of the engaged writer—someone for whom “ideas are not so much fixed constructs to be transferred from one mind to the page and thence to another mind” (372). Rather, the engaged writer sees her ideas as the result of a dialogic exchange in which the voices of writers and readers are interdependent and co-creative. To this end, the interdependence of ecological systems allows writers to develop a more complex vision of purpose; instead of thinking about purpose in terms of the individual writer’s needs, an ecological model of the

writer/reader relationship allows writers to let their purpose “arise out of the interaction between their needs and the needs of the various groups that structure society” (373).

The increased awareness of the interconnectedness of writers and readers that Cooper’s ecological model of writing describes serves as one of the foundational elements of ecocomposition pedagogy. Sidney I. Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser, in their article “Breaking Ground in Ecocomposition: Exploring Relationships between Discourse and Environment,” affirm the idea that her work “introduces composition to the notion that writers interact with systems that affect their writing” (568). As scholars who have worked to develop ecocomposition as a theoretical perspective, Dobrin and Weisser have incorporated aspects of Cooper’s ecological model of writing in their theory of ecocomposition as well as Cheryl Glotfelty’s foundational work with literary ecocriticism. According to Dobrin and Weisser, Glotfelty’s conception of ecocriticism as a “study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty qtd. in Dobrin and Weisser 569) informs ecocomposition to the extent that ecocriticism positions “place” as a category of critical inquiry alongside race, gender, and class and also to the extent that it necessarily turns a critical eye toward problematic divisions between nature and culture (569).

Critiquing the ways in which our ideas about nature and culture are necessarily rhetorical is at the heart of both literary ecocriticism and environmental rhetoric, a branch of rhetorical criticism that, according to Dobrin and Weisser, directly informs ecocomposition as a theoretical perspective. From environmental rhetoric—specifically the work of M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Jacqueline S. Palmer, Carl G. Herndl, and Stuart C. Brown—ecocomposition gains a key insight: ecocomposition embraces the idea that “human thought

and conduct are (most likely) always mediated through language” (Dobrin and Weisser 570), and this mediation informs the ways in which we think about, discuss, and affect our environments.

Given the current climate of global discussion on issues related to environmental degradation and sustainability, ecocomposition’s emphasis on critical inquiry and environmental relationships has garnered exciting attention in the past few years. As early as 1999, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) began sponsoring roundtable discussions to address the importance of environmental concerns in English studies. Ecocomposition and its emphasis on the importance of place in composition studies emerged in these ASLE discussions as early as 2000 (567-8), and Dobrin and Weisser affirm the ASLE’s formative role in the advancement of ecocomposition as a viable theoretical perspective.

One important voice that contributed to increased academic discussion of ecocomposition is that of Derek Owens, a compositionist whose Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for A Threatened Generation provides a thorough review of the provocative ways in which composition, place, environment, and sustainability are intertwined. By exploring the interconnectedness of these terms, Owens intends for his book to achieve a few broad goals. However, his primary goal is to “bring sustainability further into the conversations that define composition and English studies” (xiii) while broadening our understanding of what it might mean to enact an attitude of sustainability in all aspects of our academic endeavors. For Owens, “*sustainability* means meeting today’s needs without jeopardizing the well-being of future generations” (1); however, he is careful to note that sustainable thinking requires us to “envision ourselves less as autonomous individuals than as

collaborators who are not only dependent upon but also literally connected to our local environments in complex ways” (1). The complexity of these connections, Owens argues, do not challenge the progressive standpoints that work in composition has embraced in the past; rather, a truly sustainable approach to composition instruction and research involves seeing how matters of ecological justice are related to issues already at the heart of critical pedagogical approaches—issues of race, class, gender, consumer culture, and civic participation (3-4).

A Place for (Eco)feminist Pedagogy

In “Where Writing Takes Place: A Response to Annette Kolodny,” Lynn Worsham highlights specific ways in which compositionists are uniquely positioned to address how complex issues of race, class, and gender are related to issues of ecology, place, and language. She begins by reflecting on the idea that “the process of composing a text involves a kind of spatial thinking—thinking in terms of space, place, and location” (31), and she argues that the ways in which power relationships are constructed through language have important implications for our understanding of the worlds in which we live (37). Here, Worsham is responding to Annette Kolodny’s observation, in “Taking Back the Language,” that “[l]anguage creates a relationship between people and space, and then the language, the paradigm, the symbolic structure, guides our action in that space” (22). For Worsham, critical reflection on the extent to which ideologically situated language affects how we act in the world is necessary if we are to confront issues of social justice: “Capitalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, classism” (38).

Elizabeth A. Flynn responds to Worsham's ideas about language and power and Kolodny's ideas about the connection between communication and place in "Developing Feminist-Environmental Rhetorics: A Response to Annette Kolodny." Specifically, Flynn asserts that the connections between language and power pose specific implications for the ways in which we conceive of ideas like place and environment, and she recognizes a "need for the development of a subfield within rhetoric and composition that attends to relationships among rhetoric, feminism, and the environment" (42). To this end, Flynn provides a brief overview of how Enlightenment and positivist rhetorics hinge on an androcentrism that maintains a dichotomous relationship between nature and culture (44-5), and suggests that postmodern feminist rhetoric is more useful to a critical analysis of the ways in which issues of race, class, and gender are related to issues of environmental importance. Furthermore, Flynn asserts that "[a] postmodern feminist approach to the environment emphasizes that the human and the nonhuman are necessarily connected in complex ways and that any change to one necessarily affects the other" (48). The interconnectedness of the human and the nonhuman—of language, power, and the places in which we live—are important for rhetoricians and compositionists to consider precisely because, as Flynn observes, "problems of environmental degradation cannot be divorced from the problems of women—both have histories of abuse, and the mistreatment of both are closely interconnected" (49).

Ecofeminist perspectives acknowledge the extent to which environmental degradation and issues of social justice are interrelated, and the work of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in Ecofeminism helps articulate a theoretical bridge between Flynn's call for a feminist-environmental rhetoric and the work of ecocomposition. Ecofeminism, as Mies and Shiva

observe, grew from the feminist and peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and their definition of ecofeminism articulates an explicit connection between issues of race, class, gender, and environment:

Wherever women acted against ecological destruction or/and the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature, and that: In defying this patriarchy we are loyal to future generations and to life and this planet itself. We have a deep and particular understanding of this both through our natures and our experiences as women. (14)

For Mies and Shiva, working toward a sustainable future necessarily requires a deep understanding of the extent to which power is inscribed in the oppressive systems that create dangerous living situations for many people around the world—to include women and people of color. The use of language to attain rhetorical power over others and create oppressive social hierarchies is evident in a few examples that Annette Kolodny notes in “Response to Flynn and Worsham.” For example, Kolodny suggests that rhetorical and cultural criticisms might shed light on the ways in which our conceptions of nature are rhetorically constructed in problematic ways: “Here, I am thinking of the fact that in ancient Hebrew the word for earth is *adama*, while the word for man is *adam*” (51). This explicit textual connection between “earth” and “man” seems to suggest, according to Kolodny, “a reciprocal and stewardship . . . relationship between humans and the physical earth out of which they are created” (51). For Kolodny, a language relationship such as this is worthy of investigation because of its potential to illustrate how relationships between human and nonhuman nature

are constructed via language, how those constructions change over time, and the extent to which those changes are problematically gendered.

Thus, an ecocomposition-informed curriculum interested in encouraging students to develop critical standpoints concerning nature/culture dichotomies would necessarily need to turn a critical eye toward ecofeminist concerns such as the extent to which ecological justice, social justice, language, and gender are related. In “Ecofeminism and Ecocomposition: Pedagogies, Perspectives, and Intersections,” Greta Gaard affirms the importance of pursuing ecofeminist goals in an ecocomposition-informed curriculum, and she presents her own experience with teaching an ecocomposition-informed class as an example of ecofeminist principles at work. For example, Gaard argues that ecofeminist criticism of oppressive and hierarchical power systems mirrors the radical pedagogies that have evolved in composition studies over the years (164-5). Here, Gaard notes that an ecofeminist approach to composition instruction helped her naturally incorporate critical thinking about civic participation, democratic policies and ideologies, and student agency in student-centered classrooms—all issues that inform radical composition pedagogies (165-6).

Alternative and radical composition pedagogies require an emphasis on critical literacies to encourage transformational turns of thought, and Donald A. McAndrews in “Ecofeminism and the Teaching of Literacy” points out several ways in which ecofeminism can facilitate the creation of critical composition environments. To begin, McAndrews identifies five major tenets of ecofeminist philosophy, and illustrates how each tenet might be used to encourage critical literacy. Two of these tenets are particularly relevant to a discussion of ecocomposition:

1. “Both the exploitation of nature and of women arise for the same reason” (368).

2. “The reason for the connection of ecology and feminism is the objectification of nature and women” (369).

First, McAndrews argues that social concern for the oppressed positions of nature and women necessarily requires a critical stance on patriarchal systems of power—a critical stance that would encourage consideration of a wide variety of complex texts and perspectives in the student-centered composition classroom. Second, McAndrews argues that “[t]he destruction of the environment and the oppression of women are easy to do because nature and women have been objectified as ‘others’” (369). Here, McAndrews suggests that critical awareness of the dichotomous thinking by which nature/woman is positioned as inferior to man/culture would help composition students interrogate how dualistic thinking can be problematic and how the nature/culture split denigrates our ability to appreciate the interconnectedness of language, community, nature, and the self (369-70).

Ecocomposition challenges dualistic thinking and its concomitant resistance to critical thinking not only on the subject of so-called natural environments but also in relation to issues of race and class. Amy E. Winans’ work with confronting student constructions of whiteness in a small, rural area of Pennsylvania illustrates the possibilities of a truly localized, ecocomposition-informed pedagogy. Though she does not employ the term “ecocomposition” to describe her pedagogical approach in “Local Pedagogies and Race: Interrogating White Safety in the Rural College Classroom,” she does articulate a few connections between composition instruction, diversity studies, localized studies, and critical thinking. For example, Winans begins by observing that most students in her predominantly white classroom “have had little experience thinking critically about race and their racial identities, in part because their home and school lives have been marked by residential and

social segregation” (253). Here, the structure and segregation of students’ localized space physically and mentally impedes them from achieving one of the main goals of Winans’ composition course: helping students understand that “all ideas and writing emerge from a specific subject position” and “[a]ny stance or position that might appear to be neutral or objective . . . is in fact one whose power and positionality have been naturalized” (254). In order to help students uncover the extent to which their racial identities are social constructions—particularly for white students have not been challenged to think critically about their own whiteness—Winans suggests a localized pedagogy, “one that respects and addresses the complexities of students’ often contradictory experiences of race” (256). For Winans, a truly local pedagogy “entails considering the roles that the campus location, the campus demographics, the demographics of students’ hometowns, and students’ experiences within their families and communities play in shaping what is happening in the classroom” (256). Concern for the complex ways in which students’ identities and ideas about the nature of race are related to the intimate and public spaces in which they carry out the business of their daily lives affirms one of the purposes of ecocomposition; as Dobrin suggests in “Writing Takes Place,” ecocomposition sheds light on the “social construction of identity” (12) that literally “takes place” as it is imbedded in our surrounding environments.

bell hooks, in “Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice,” articulates the importance of understanding and transgressing the extent to which experiences with race and class are imbedded in our conception of local environments. She begins her discussion by sharing a memory from her high school art class; she describes how her “white male Italian immigrant high school art teacher in the segregated South” (395) asked students to complete a project in which they imagine and design their dream homes into existence. At first, the

assignment seemed enchanting as it suggested “a world of unlimited freedom where space, and in particular living space, could be designed solely in relation to ‘desire’” (395). The goal of this project, hooks suggests, was to help students learn to work collaboratively without the interference of difference, prejudice, and division. However, hooks cannot help but think that “[t]his would have been a radically different assignment had we been encouraged to think critically about the actual spaces we inhabited, the neighborhoods and houses that were our world” (396). As hooks suggests, a closer look at the worlds in which we live would beg us to acknowledge the extent to which “racial apartheid and white supremacy” (396) shape living spaces, public spaces, and open spaces. Furthermore, hooks expresses a concern that “we are led to believe that lack of material privilege means that one can have no meaningful constructive engagement with one’s living space and certainly no relationship to aesthetics” (398). Here, class privilege and racial prejudice seem to problematically determine an individual’s ability to claim even a small piece of this world and shape it until it represents whatever they might imagine is pleasing or beautiful. To this, however, I would also add ecocomposition’s concern with the connection between race, class, gender, and environmental health. The desire to dwell in beautiful, productive spaces is certainly connected to the ability to breathe clean air and drink clean water, and ecocomposition encourages us to investigate how the quality of these environmental conditions is related to our ability to socially construct “nature” through discourse.

Affirming Ecomposition's Place

Before I articulate the manner in which my ecomposition-informed syllabus emerged, I would like to take a moment to examine the working definition of ecomposition that Dobrin and Weisser suggested in 2002:

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 (primarily composition, but also including literary studies, communication, cultural studies, linguistics, and philosophy) 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)

Here, ecocomposition is an interdisciplinary endeavor that conceives of “environment” broadly and seeks to unearth the extent to which language and environments exist in a co-creative relationship. However, Dobrin, in “Writing Takes Place,” is careful to note that this articulation of ecocomposition might be better understood as a *description* rather than a *definition*. He suggests that ecocomposition—like ecofeminism—might “be seen as a site for the kind of activism that resists the oppression not just of nonhuman organisms and environments, but of all oppressive structures” (14). For Dobrin, a concrete definition would be an act of “codification and hegemony” (14) that serves to impede the ecological and interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry. In essence, Dobrin argues that ecocomposition as

social action must evolve toward theory by constantly examining how well it is rooted in practice.

To illustrate how recent scholarship in ecocomposition is striving to integrate theory and practice in the classroom, I will turn to three examples of academic work in classroom ecocomposition research that attempt to articulate a position for ecocomposition within English studies. For example, in “Ecofeminism and Ecocomposition: Pedagogies, Perspectives, and Intersections” Greta Gaard describes how she brought ecocomposition into her first-year composition course by organizing assignments and readings around Chris Anson and Lex Runciman’s A Forest of Voices, a reader that helped Gaard emphasize the goal of her course: to help students develop critical perspectives on the development of their own ethical standpoint concerning environmental issues (166-7). For Gaard, ecocomposition helped her engage her classroom in issues of social justice and environmental justice—issues that mirrored her devotion to ecofeminist philosophies (163).

The second body of work on ecocomposition practice that I would like to mention is Derek Owens’ Composition and Sustainability. In the appendix to this title, Owens provides a host of assignment sheets and handouts that he used in a composition course focused on environmental and community or “tribe” sustainability. As a preface to the packet of assignments that he distributes to his students, Owens outlines the communication goals toward which he expects students to work. He extends these goals, however, toward the theme of the course by asking students to consider two questions: “What do you value, and how will you live?” (181). To this end, each writing assignment asks students to turn a critical eye toward places that are important to them and toward communities that they value. In Owens’ ecocomposition-informed syllabus, students are asked to consider environmental

issues; in this course, however, “environmental sustainability” might pertain to a student’s examination of a subculture that they value or a local community’s need for better housing. Although Owens does not explicitly refer to his approach as one grounded in ecocomposition theories, the extent to which Owens’ pedagogy of sustainability asks students to witness and actively participate in local issues that are meaningful to them is compatible with Dobrin and Weisser’s concept of ecocomposition as an “encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment” (572).

Finally, Peter Goggin and Zach Waggoner share their efforts to build on the work of Dobrin and Weisser and Owens in “Sustainable Development: Thinking Globally and Acting Locally in the Writing Classroom.” In this article, Goggin and Waggoner describe how they designed a first-year composition course focused on sustainability as an environmental concern and as a theoretical model of composition. The impetus for their sustainable approach to first-year composition originates in the recommendations produced by the United Nations during its 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. In summary, the Summit produced a report in which it recognized the connection between global action on issues of environmental sustainability and efforts to advocate for justice in terms of “sanitation and health, poverty, education, communication technology, and employment” (45-6). Goggin and Waggoner argue that these issues require not only global action but the participation of citizens in “local, discrete contexts” (46). Thus, the sustainable approach to composition that Goggin and Waggoner developed for their first-year composition course was their way of initiating a “course of action and a mindset that meet the needs of the present while being conscious of, and not compromising the needs of, the future” (46). With an eye toward civic participation in matters of future consequence, Goggin and Waggoner

designed a course in which students were encouraged to question and respond critically to a culture of consumption that complicates efforts to practice sustainable ways of living (52).

Inspired by the work of Goggin and Waggoner, Gaard, and Dobrin and Weisser, I began the work of developing an ecocomposition-informed syllabus that would meet the curricular goals outlined by ISUComm, Iowa State University's communication-across-the-curriculum initiative. The work of this initiative takes place in the ISUComm Foundation Courses which are designed to "strengthen student communication and enhance students' critical thinking skills by creating opportunities for them to practice communication skills throughout their academic careers" ("About ISUComm"). ISUComm's focus on critical thinking and communication across disciplines is particularly compatible with the goals of ecocomposition in that this approach to composition instruction invites students to think critically about the extent to which discourse and action construct our conceptions of place, space, and environment. Furthermore, the ISUComm Foundation Courses can be seen as an ecological endeavor in that the initiative conceives of communication as a social practice embedded in the interdependent webs of discourse that comprise a university education. Therefore, my approach to ecocomposition in one of the foundation courses—English 250—explores how students will benefit from a focused inquiry into the relationship between communication and concepts of place, space, and environment.

I began my exploration of ecocomposition, however, with Arlene Plevin's caveat in mind: ". . . integrating place into the classroom and creating an ecocomposition course is more than smuggling in an essay about trees" (148). To this end, the goals of my ecocomposition-informed syllabus go beyond a discussion of place, space, and environment and seek to help students think critically about the extent to which communication is an

ecological practice that affects and is affected by our relationships with the communities in which we live, work, and play. To help students develop the critical thinking skills that are central to ecomposition, I relied heavily on critical literacy scholarship, a body of work that emphasizes the important connection between composition and critical habits of mind. In the following section, I begin my review of critical literacy scholarship with a focused look at the work of Paulo Freire.

Critical Literacy Scholarship

On the occasion of Paulo Freire's passing in 1997, Patricia Bizzell took the opportunity to reflect on the meaningful ways in which Freire's liberatory pedagogy affected her growth as an academic and as an educator. In "Paulo Freire and What Education Can Do," Bizzell argues that Freire "is one of the most important thinkers on education of our time" (319) primarily because of his ideas about the transformative power of "critical consciousness" (319). Freire's assertion that the development of critical thinking through dialogue facilitates the identification and transgression of social oppression and injustice is, for Bizzell, both encouraging and transformational: "How exciting to find a theorist who believed that the very work we were doing was in fact crucial to progressive social action!" (320). Indeed, the impact of Freire's educational theories on progressive, critical pedagogies within English studies is exciting, and Bizzell argues that the heart of this impact lies in Freire's assertion that "education is a political act. Education can never be the neutral conveyance of information or skills" (321).

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire argues that models of education in which authoritative agents transmit ideas to passive students constitute and perpetuate oppressive

social systems. The tragedy of this oppression, Freire argues, lies in the extent to which it dehumanizes the oppressed, preventing them from what Freire refers to as the “vocation of becoming more fully human” (44). For Freire, finding hope in this tragedy depends upon our ability to recognize how oppression is socially constructed and how it can be deconstructed in a process of liberation (47). For the oppressed, liberation demands the ability to “perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (49). Here, transformation is a mode of action in which the oppressed must “confront reality critically” (51). Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed seeks to facilitate this confrontation through two stages of action in which the oppressed recognize and transform the condition of their oppression and conceive of “a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation” (54).

Our ability to live equitably in a state of “permanent liberation” falters within a system of education that Freire refers to as the “‘banking’ concept of education” (72). In this educational model, students are the passive recipients of information or “deposits” made by authoritative teachers. Freire argues that this educational situation is dangerous because it perpetuates the dehumanization of both the oppressors and the oppressed. For Freire, humanity lies in our ability to pursue knowledge, and “[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). The banking model of education impedes the emergence of knowledge because it conceives of the student as an empty vessel who merely witnesses the world and does not possess the ability to live “*with* the world” (75) in a co-creative relationship. Freire recognizes the dichotomous relationship between people and the world that the banking model supports and argues that

this dichotomy allows for the continued objectification of people (75-6). Therefore, to escape or transform this destructive dichotomy, Freire advocates a problem-posing education in which “students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (81). In the dialogic view of education that Freire proposes, teachers understand that knowledge is not merely neutral content to be bestowed upon a passive audience; rather, knowledge is pursued by individuals—including teachers—who are “in the process of *becoming*” (84) and who recognize the extent to which the act of naming the world is an ongoing, critical human activity (88).

As teachers, the method by which, Freire argues, we should invite students to participate in the co-creative pursuit of knowledge—the act of (re)naming our world—is embodied in problem-posing education and necessarily requires critical thinking. For Freire, critical thinking involves three cognitive maneuvers. First, individuals must escape the nature/culture dichotomy in which people are presumed to exist apart from the world in which they live and learn. Next, recognition of this dichotomy allows individuals to conceive of “reality as process . . . rather than as a static entity” (92). At this point, it is helpful to think about one specific way in which teachers can help students understand the flux of reality; specifically, Freire argues that students should confront problems that are meaningful to them—problems that are unresolved in their local world:

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and

thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings . . . (81)

Freire's invitation to localized, critical inquiry asks students and teachers to participate in the shaping and reshaping of knowledge claims that are problematic within the immediate context of the individual and the communities to which he or she belongs. As Freire suggests, confronting issues of local importance can unearth further challenges, and this view of the world, I argue, is ecological and central to the claims of ecomposition. Freire's claim that dichotomous thinking prevents the oppressed from conceiving of themselves as *of* and *with* the world supports the ecompositionist's and the ecofeminist's claim that the nature/culture dichotomy perpetuates the oppression of not only people but communities and nonhuman nature. The ability to see people, communities, and the problems faced by these communities as ecologically interdependent invites the perspective that critical thinking is a necessary action in the process of *becoming*—a process that ecomposition argues should focus on the sustainability of individuals, communities, and nonhuman nature.

Recognizing that individuals are not separate from the world and that the reality of the world is not “static” leads Freire to argue for the third cognitive maneuver involved in problem-posing education: the ability to embrace risk as a necessary product of thoughtful, critical engagement with the world (92). The risk inherent in critical thinking pertains to the individual's fear of the uncertain and the unknown—a fear that all sentient beings might encounter when faced with the possibility that things are not always as they seem or are more complex and contextual than originally thought. Here, Freire argues that critical thinkers should embrace the flux of reality and move to action “without fear of the risks involved” (92).

In the student-teacher relationship, however, concern and respect for the risks we are inviting students to encounter should inform the ways in which we perform our pedagogy. In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, bell hooks addresses how she approaches student risk in her classroom by first arguing that teachers who are willing to engage in the kind of liberatory education that Freire articulates should also recognize “the aspect of our vocation that is sacred” (13). Here, hooks is referring to the teacher’s call to “teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students” (13) so that we might create a classroom environment conducive to the problem-posing pedagogy that Freire describes. The classroom environment that hooks strives to create is directly related to Freire’s concept of “conscientization” or, as hooks interprets the term, “critical awareness and engagement” (14). hooks argues that working toward critical awareness is only possible when students are fully engaged in the creation of knowledge and willing to incur some risk or vulnerability in the face of challenging lessons; however, hooks insists that teachers must be willing to share risk and vulnerability as well (20-1). To illustrate the extent to which transformative learning and critical awareness can be liberating while painful or generative while uncomfortable, hooks shares a story in which she—a woman experiencing and resisting racism in the south—reads Freire and begins to “think deeply about the construction of an identity in resistance” (46). The process of thinking deeply and struggling with new language that allowed her to describe her experience in new ways, though difficult, was ultimately a “process of critical thought that was transformative” (46).

The transformative experience that hooks shares exists within a rich context of competing ideologies and systems of oppression; understanding hooks’s story and why she feels it is necessary to share such a vulnerable moment might only be possible from a more

expansive or encompassing viewpoint—a viewpoint made possible through critical literacy in light of multiculturalism. Inviting multiculturalism into our critical composition pedagogies, however, is not only a way to engage students in critical thinking; it is also a way to prepare students for the new and complex rhetorical situations that a globalized community creates. In “Multiculturalism, Rhetoric, and the Twenty-first Century,” Steven R. Goldzwig argues that “multicultural issues and concerns will shape our future, and furthermore, rhetorical studies can and must play a key role in these discussions” (273). The role that Goldzwig envisions for rhetorical studies and multiculturalism involves what he refers to as “critical localism”—a “project demarcated toward the realization of democracy in action” (276). In essence, critical localism as a pedagogical perspective invites students and teachers to turn a critical eye toward their local communities in order to discern how some views are marginalized or altogether oppressed; recognition of oppression, as Freire suggests, makes it possible to invite a larger, more inclusive number of voices to critical discussions about issues affecting local communities. Goldzwig argues that inviting critical localism into the composition classroom will require students and teachers to pursue their critical turns of thought as a “cooperative venture” in which “dialogue is transformed into discovery” (282). Here, Goldzwig makes a distinct connection between his conception of critical localism and Freire’s perspective on dialogic interaction within the classroom and with the world—an idea that ecocomposition embraces to the extent that it asks students to think critically about how communities of human and nonhuman nature are interdependent and in creative dialogue with one another.

Arlene Plevin recognizes the dialogic connection between ecocomposition and Freire’s problem-posing educational model, and she further illuminates the connection

between the two in “The Liberatory Positioning of Place in Ecomposition: Reconsidering Paulo Freire.” The most compelling connection between Freire and ecomposition that Plevin asserts involves ecomposition’s call to challenge the dichotomous ways of thinking that make oppression of human and nonhuman nature possible. Where Freire invites students to transform themselves with the world through conscientization or critical awareness of oppressive systems, Plevin extends critical human inquiry beyond the nature/culture dichotomy toward “what Freire does not include: the other who is not human” (152). By asking students to think critically about meaningful local places—an activity Goldzwig would refer to as critical localism—Plevin contends that students develop a greater appreciation for the diversity of meaningful places. Furthermore, Plevin argues that the awakened or newly discovered appreciation of place that students develop in an ecomposition course allows them to conceive of “other ways of viewing human/place relations” (156), particularly when students become critically aware of the extent to which other human/place perspectives—and perhaps their own—allow for the abuse and domination of their meaningful places. Here, Plevin argues that “[t]he students’ desire for place, their beginning belief in overtly honoring it, and then their envisioning their part in oppressing it, provides educators with a position from which to enable critical thinking” (156).

Educators who actively seek a position from which to engage students in the sort of critical thinking that Plevin advocates would benefit from the connections that James A. Berlin crafts between English studies and critical, liberal education in Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies. Throughout this book, Berlin argues that English studies—specifically, the first-year or foundation composition course—provides a

generative site from which teachers can exercise a pedagogy informed by scholarship in critical literacies. Critical literacy, Berlin argues, is central to the purpose of a liberal education, an education that “exists to provide intelligent, articulate, and responsible citizens who understand their obligation and their right to insist that economic, social, and political power be exerted in the best interests of the community” (55). A student’s ability to intervene in economic, social, and political systems that negatively or problematically impact his or her local community is contingent upon the ability to “locate the beneficiaries and the victims of knowledge” (55). Taking cues from Freire, Berlin argues that critical literacy helps students understand the extent to which knowledge is rhetorical or designed and can therefore be actively redesigned along more equitable, just, and inclusive lines (110). However, Berlin argues that the redesign and shaping of knowledge that can occur in composition classrooms informed by critical literacy scholarship should actively consider how “different ways of understanding the world and acting in it” (110) are complicated by difference in terms of race, gender, class, and ideology. Bringing these differences into the classroom, Berlin argues, and treating them to thorough critique moves all of us closer to a better understanding of democratic participation in the classroom and beyond (110-1).

In “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” the New London Group affirms Berlin’s view of liberal education as a democratic enterprise in which teachers are called to prepare students “to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (60). Furthermore, the New London Group argues that a pedagogy of critical literacies facilitates this inclusive, engaged participation in civic life. The diversity of local and global communities, however, demands a broader understanding of critical literacies “to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies,

for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate” (61). The pace at which communication is evolving and the variety of social, cultural, and economic situations in which it takes place leads the New London Group to believe that teachers should begin rethinking and reinventing their approach to literacy pedagogy in ways that will meet the evolving needs of our students (61). To this end, the New London Group argues for a theoretical perspective that they refer to as “multiliteracies”—a perspective that takes “mere literacy” (64) beyond the written or spoken word to include multimodal literacy, cultural literacy, and linguistic literacy.

Bringing a pedagogy of multiliteracies to the composition classroom makes sense to the New London Group because modern businesses and organizations in a postFordism or fast capitalist era value individuals who are capable of thinking critically across languages, cultures, modes, and other areas where difference creates a need for careful deliberation. Students entering the modern workforce are expected to shape company knowledge, work collaboratively in teams, and seek out creative solutions to important problems (65-6). However, the New London Group contextualizes the demands of modern businesses and organizations by describing the extent to which fast capitalism opposes a democratic pedagogy or what Freire would call a “pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation” (Freire 54). When fast capitalist enterprises aspire to goals that educators value—critical thinking, collaboration, innovation—they do so within a corporate culture to which only some are admitted (66). Furthermore, the extent to which the world of fast capitalism is “vicious [and] driven by the barely restrained market” (67) requires students entering the workforce to confront the idea that success in a postFordist era is no longer guaranteed by an undergraduate degree; in other words, where one student manages to climb desirable

corporate ladders, many more will struggle fruitlessly at the ladder's base. This desire for an improved position within the hierarchies of fast capitalist organizations is related to the insatiable nature of consumerism that Goggin and Waggoner place in direct opposition to a culture of sustainability (51-2). When the persistent desire for more creates hierarchies that sustain oppression instead of democracy and sustain environmental degradation rather than a culture of environmental sustainability—when this happens, the New London Group argues that teachers should pursue a democratic pedagogy of multiliteracies grounded in “a vision of meaningful success for all, a vision of success that is not defined exclusively in economic terms and that has embedded within it a critique of hierarchy and economic injustice” (67).

The New London Group argues that this “critique of hierarchy and economic injustice” (67)—to which ecomposition adds environment and place—is central to a pedagogy of multiliteracies—a pedagogy in which teachers help students think critically about the extent to which human knowledge is socially, culturally, and collaboratively constructed through the recognition and negotiation of diverse perspectives (82). I designed the ecomposition-informed assignments and syllabus that comprise this study with the goals of critical literacy and multiliteracies in mind, and scholarship in adult development theory helped me articulate how I would encourage students to engage in reflexive, critical thinking. Furthermore, adult development theories provided me with a useful metaphor of *movement* that allowed me to more accurately describe the manner in which students were progressing toward more critical habits of thinking and reflecting. As a result, the adult development literature that I will review here informs and guides the methods of data analysis which I will explicate in Chapter Three.

Adult Development Theories

In “William Perry and Liberal Education,” Patricia Bizzell summarizes the work of psychologist William Perry in an effort to describe how his theories of adult development and learning are useful in the composition classroom. According to Bizzell, Perry’s model of adult development involves the movement of young adult learners through three world views: “Dualism,” “Relativism,” and “Commitment in Relativism” (447). In the Dualist world view, students engage in dichotomous thinking and see problems as having either right or wrong answers. In the Relativist world view, students occupy a position from which they can observe through experience the idea that Truth is unknowable and instead opt to see the world in relation to the self. Beyond these world views, Perry describes a third position—Commitment in Relativism—in which students might still see the world in relation to themselves, but can also begin to understand how their world views have been shaped by the various communities in which they live (447-8). The movement through world views that Perry articulates is, as Bizzell argues, less a description of the cognitive processes of all young adults and more a description of “what happens to young people when they receive an education” (449). According to Perry and Bizzell, a liberal arts education enables students to develop reflective standpoints from which they can consciously observe and critique their own values, ideas, and assumptions (450).

Bizzell affirms Perry’s assertion that asking Dualist students to consider and negotiate different perspectives on a particular problem will facilitate their movement toward Relativism and Commitment in Relativism (450). Furthermore, Perry’s model can help teachers understand the variety of differences that they see in student compositions, and the model might also “provide [teachers] with a sort of philosophical map of the changes liberal

education seeks to induce in our students” (453). However, Bizzell is careful to note that there are limitations on the applicability of Perry’s model in the composition classroom. For example, Bizzell urges teachers to recognize the extent to which Perry’s model is not value-neutral as well as the dangers inherent in assuming that a liberal education might be able to move students more quickly through the world views that Perry describes. Bizzell also suggests that Perry’s model is not an appropriate “blueprint” (451) for a composition course. To this point, Bizzell explains that “[s]ome research has suggested that Dualists make more progress if teachers initially take a nurturing, rather than a challenging, stance with them” (452).

However, I argue that teachers can be both confrontational and nurturing so long as we are willing to meet students where they are in their developmental journey and value the progress that they can reasonably make in one or two semesters of a foundation communication course. In “Meaning-Making in the Learning and Teaching Process,” Michael Ignelzi outlines an approach that can help teachers ascertain the developmental needs of their students and build a bridge between what students already know and what they will need to learn in order to participate critically in community life. Using the adult development theories of Robert Kegan, Ignelzi explains how the demands of a liberal education conflict with the stage of meaning-making in which most adults are situated. For example, Ignelzi summarizes Kegan’s assertion that most adults occupy a stage of meaning-making in which they understand the self in relation to the assertions and values of influential agents. According to Ignelzi, a learner in this stage of meaning-making “can create a shared reality with others but is limited in the ability to reflect on that shared reality and how it is influencing or determining the person’s own views” (8). However, Ignelzi argues that liberal

education values Keegan's stage of meaning-making in which "the self can internalize multiple points of view, reflect on them, and construct them into one's own theory about oneself and one's experience" (8). Here, the demands of liberal education require students to make a developmental leap—one that mirrors the progress that students make between Dualism, Relativism, and Commitment in Relativism—that teachers might more effectively facilitate by building a bridge across developmental divides.

In order to help teachers construct developmental bridges, Ignelzi suggests four guidelines designed to encourage the emotional and educational development of students. First, Ignelzi argues that teachers will provide more effective learning opportunities to their students if they are able to understand and appreciate the position from which students enter the educational conversation. Second, teachers should scaffold assignments and lessons so that students are able to practice increasingly difficult, higher-order thinking; however, Ignelzi argues that teachers should also provide guidance and support during this process. Collaboration informs Ignelzi's third guideline; specifically, he suggests that students working in diverse, collaborative groups are more likely to learn from those students in the group whose meaning-making abilities are more developed. Finally, Ignelzi argues that students need opportunities to reflect on their progress; critical reflection on the developmental distance travelled in the space of an assignment or a semester will help students see how they have actively participated in the construction of new knowledge, thus engaging them in the higher-order meaning-making valued in a liberal education (13-4).

Ignelzi's guidelines help teachers build developmental bridges designed to facilitate student movement through more complex orders of meaning-making within composition courses, and Jack Mezirow, in "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of

Transformation Theory,” complicates this notion of a developmental bridge by articulating what he refers to as Transformation Theory. According to Mezirow, Transformation Theory offers a way for teachers to better understand the process by which adult learners come to recognize the extent to which knowledge is rhetorical; this recognition occurs through transformative learning or

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (7-8)

Here, Mezirow describes how students—through critical reflection—can create new ways of living and thinking that allow for inclusive, democratic actions. Furthermore, transformative learning asks students and teachers to recognize the extent to which we perpetuate hegemonic and oppressive discourses whenever we fail to see our assumptions, values, and beliefs from a critical and rhetorical standpoint (8). This failure too often results in tragedy for those who find themselves the objects of oppressive systems that attempt to distribute power along inequitable lines. However, Mezirow’s concept of transformative learning is designed to lead students toward action, and—in light of ecocomposition’s commitment to sustainable environments and communities—a place-based pedagogy informed by critical literacy scholarship is well-positioned to help students develop more complex ways of understanding their communities so that they might actively reshape them along more equitable, just, and democratic lines. In the following chapter, I describe the ecocomposition-informed syllabus and assignments that I designed as a response to my own

desire to participate in the development of progressive pedagogies that inspire and move students toward critical thinking and well-reasoned action in the communities that they value.

Chapter Two.

Methodology and Data Collection

Purpose and Research Questions

As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, the purpose of my research study is to explore the ways in which the interaction between ecocomposition theories, (eco)feminist pedagogy, and adult development theories can create new, generative spaces for critical literacies and reflexive thinking in the multimodal composition classroom. I designed this study with three major research questions in mind:

- What communication challenges might students face in a composition curriculum focused on place and environment?
- To what extent did these challenges result from the presence of an ecocomposition approach, and how did students attempt to navigate these challenges through multimodal communication?
- What types of responses and reflections emerge that can help us understand the variety of challenges faced by students?

The research questions outlined above emerged during a semester of graduate study in which I explored different approaches to critical pedagogy in composition studies. In fact, the review of ecocomposition, critical literacy, and adult development literature that I provide in Chapter One is the direct result of an evolution in my own ability to think critically about the potential for transformative learning in the composition classroom. As I began to more fully recognize the important role that literacy and civic engagement has played in my own academic life, I developed a greater interest in the extent to which my conceptions of place,

space, and environment were affecting my approach to pedagogy in the composition courses that I teach. For example, I pulled up my deep Texas roots in the fall of 2006 and began teaching a first-year writing course at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. In an effort to get to know my students in a way that would help me develop a better understanding of the knowledge that they brought with them to our classroom, I initiated several informal discussions about the value of home and place throughout the semester.

In hindsight, I understand that my willingness to share my own place stories and my willingness to actively appreciate the place stories that my students shared helped create a space for reflection, community, and multiple perspectives in my classroom. When I learned more about ecocomposition and its emphasis on the extent to which discourse, community, and environment are ecologically connected, I saw an opportunity to add to a growing body of research that seeks to complicate critical composition pedagogies by foregrounding place in discussions of race, class, and gender. To this end, my initial research question—What communication challenges might students face in a composition curriculum focused on place and environment?—evolved to encompass a greater emphasis on the extent to which ecocomposition can help students engage in the type of transformative learning that Mezirow recommends. In other words, in what ways can ecocomposition help students make their assumptions about community, place, and communication “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” (7-8)?

In order to study this research question further, I used my status as a graduate student and teaching assistant in the English department at Iowa State University to bring ecocomposition to both of my fall 2007 English 250 sections. I invited all of my students to participate in the study (52 total), and I emphasized the fact that participation was voluntary

and would not affect my evaluation of their coursework. Of 52 possible participants, 32 students volunteered to participate in this study. However, I only analyzed the work of students who were able to participate in all the data collection episodes that informed this study (questionnaires, assignments, and reflection); here, my concern was that much of my analysis involves a focused look at how students progressed across the spectrum of data collection episodes. If a student was unable to participate in one or two data collection episodes, I was unable to consider his or her work in a holistic way. This concern reduced the number of students included in my study to 26.

The students included in my study identified themselves as belonging to a variety of majors including Pre-Veterinary, Pre-Medical, Business, Engineering, and Philosophy. Of the students included in this study, 12 identified themselves as belong to a major that is particularly concerned with issues of place, space, and environment: 9 in Biology, 1 in Landscape Architecture, and 2 in Pre-Architecture. Furthermore, of the 26 students whose work informs this research study—16 women and 10 men—there were only two students who identified as a race other than white. The racial and sexual demographics of the 26 students I include in this study reflect the overall racial and sexual demographics of all the students who enrolled in both sections of my English 250 ecocomposition course. Additionally, the English 250 courses that I teach are situated within a land grant university in the Midwest with an enrollment of approximately 21,000 undergraduates, 75.9% of whom are Iowa residents (Office of Institutional Research 41-4).

Research Design and Methods

My approach to this research study is informed by the explanation of qualitative grounded theory research projects that John W. Creswell provides in Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. According to Creswell, a grounded theory study asks the researcher to “focus on understanding how individuals experience the process and identifying the process” (66). The participants in my study have all experienced the same process (the ecocomposition syllabus I designed), and I have used grounded theory coding methods to identify categories that illustrate pivotal moments that the participants experienced during the process. Furthermore, Creswell explains that “the intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory” (62-3). While my research study relies on previous work in ecocomposition theory to situate and inform my research purpose, the data generated by my study will help me expand on existing ecocomposition theory and suggest avenues of further inquiry.

The design of my qualitative research study was also influenced by the view of participatory action research that Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart provide in “Participatory Action Research: Communicative Action and the Public Sphere.” Kemmis and McTaggart argue that participatory action research is a social, collaborative, and reflective process in which the line between researcher and participant is transformed into a “spiral of self-reflective cycles” (276) that engages coparticipants in repeated cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (276-7). The “spiral” metaphor that Kemmis and McTaggart use to describe the ebb and flow of participatory action research is the best way that I have found to describe the process by which my research design emerged. Beginning with theory—ecocomposition, critical literacy, and adult development—I developed research

questions to guide my study and engaged students in an open dialogue about the purpose and focus of the study. What were their concerns about a course focused on place and environment? What issues of local importance did they find salient and worth exploring further? The process of incorporating student concerns into the focus of my research study led me to revisit and revise my research questions as the semester progressed and helped me develop a better understanding of the potential actions that students might be willing to take on behalf of their own interests in place and environment.

As a result of my interest in participatory action research, the line between instructor and researcher was permeable throughout the course of my study. In other words, my primary purpose as an instructor (provide for the educational needs of my students to the best of my ability) significantly influenced and was influenced by my primary purpose as a researcher (investigate ways to better serve my students specifically and composition students in general). The interplay between my purpose as a researcher and my purpose as a teacher helped me develop more personal relationships with my students through interpersonal communication and classroom proximity; however, I argue that the amount of time I spent conversing and interacting with students actually increased the reliability of my findings, because it afforded me many opportunities to verify my analysis of their work by sharing my thoughts with them and inviting them to suggest alternative interpretations of their work in our course. Furthermore, my role as a researcher compelled me to manage ethical standards by obtaining Internal Review Board approval for this research study and all data collection instruments. Finally, I have kept student work confidential, and all references to student names in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Research Design and Trustworthiness

My primary method for developing and sustaining audience trust in my data interpretation will rest on: (1) the amount of time invested in the study (a semester of interaction with and observation of students); (2) the extent to which I invited each student to interpret her/his own work through reflective writing exercises as well as my presentation of those reflections in my work (including passages from student writing); (3) the analysis of “negative cases” or cases that appear to disconfirm some of the outcomes I report. This last approach—the disconfirming narrative—will be significant. Although I am excited to present the great strides that many of my students made during our ecocomposition semester, those cases in which students appeared less engaged or unmoved (in terms of adult development) may shed light on areas of improvement (for my own pedagogy and for composition studies in general).

Data Collection Techniques

I collected data for this study by asking students to participate in the following communication activities:

- An Initial Questionnaire regarding student definitions of place, space, environment, and communication (see Appendix A)
- Assignment 1: Critical Personal Place Narrative (see Appendix D)
- Assignment 2: Photo Documentary Midrash (see Appendix E)
- An informal Reflection Essay regarding student work on Assignments 1 and 2 (see Appendix C)

- An End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire regarding student definitions of place, space, environment, and communication (see Appendix B)

The questionnaires that I developed were designed to work together in that they allowed me to look closely at changes that developed over the course of the semester; as a result, I did not begin analyzing responses to these instruments until the semester was over. However, I was able to begin analyzing responses to the remaining instruments (assignments and reflection essays) when students started submitting drafts. In fact, the comments that I provided to student rough drafts helped me develop my analytical categories. Consequently, I have “clean” copies (free from highlighting or categorizing notes) of all student rough drafts that include my comments. I also maintain an organized file of original data instruments for each student participating in this study (highly manageable and retrievable).

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will provide a description and pedagogical rationale for each of the data collection instruments (i.e., communication activities and assignments) that I used to inform this research study. Following my description of the research instruments I used, I will provide a brief sketch of the ecocomposition-informed syllabus in which the primary data collection instruments were situated.

Data Collection: Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires

According to Dobrin and Weisser, one of ecocomposition’s goals is “to provide a holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment” (572). For the purposes of this research study, I based my research questions on Dobrin and Weisser’s articulation of ecocomposition in terms of discourse and environment. In order to observe the extent to which students were able to develop more

complex understandings of the ways in which human communication interacts with environments, I designed two questionnaires¹ that gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own conceptions of place, space, environment, and communication. I asked students to respond to the first questionnaire during the second week of class, and I prefaced my explanation of the questionnaire with an introduction to the course theme (place, space, environment, and multimodal communication) and my reasons for inviting students to investigate ecocomposition with me. I introduced the second questionnaire to my students during the last week of the semester, and I explained that the questions were similar to those featured on the first questionnaire so that we could reflect on the extent to which our ideas about place, space, environment, and communication had changed—if at all. Throughout the semester, I refrained from offering students specific definitions of the terms we were working with (place, space, environment) and instead opted to facilitate an ongoing discussion about the extent to which the definitions of these terms are subjective and worthy of investigation.

Data Collection: Assignment 1, Critical Personal Place Narrative

The first assignment in my ecocomposition-informed English 250 syllabus asked students to develop a critical perspective on their interaction with a particular place. The Critical Personal Place Narrative² required students to choose a place that has had a meaningful impact on their lives and compose a personal essay in which they interrogated both the purpose and construction of that place. The guiding idea in this assignment is that students will engage the ecological (broadly conceived to incorporate a variety of ecological

¹ See Appendix A and Appendix B for the full text of each questionnaire.

² See Appendix D for the full text of the Critical Personal Place Narrative assignment sheet.

places) theme of the course by critically analyzing and complicating what they already know about the world around them.

Beginning an ecocomposition course with a critical personal narrative is important for a few reasons. First, personal essayistic writing can encourage what Donna Qualley, in Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry, calls “earned insights.” Qualley defines “earned insights” as a “kind of understanding whose essential truth is only realized or more fully grasped as it is made manifest through the individual's experience and contemplation of that experience” (35). In the context of an ecocomposition course, “earned insights” begin with a critical personal inquiry into the “essential truth” of a student's interaction with a particular place. In other words, students cannot ascertain the extent to which truth is negotiated and constructed in their own world views unless they have unearthed and examined a personal experience that has contributed to their world view. The Critical Personal Place Narrative that I designed allows students to make their personal interaction with a place “visible, explicit, and thus open to examination” (41). However, a critical consideration of the interaction between discourse and a student's personal experience with a meaningful place is not in and of itself critical through the composition of a personal narrative. In “Radical Pedagogy and Student Resistance: Can We Fight the Power?” Alan W. France and Karen Fitts propose the following view of personal writing:

. . . we do not believe that writing can be separated from politics, that there are ideologically neutral topics that students can write about. [The] insistence that students write about 'their own ideas' merely confirms the ideology of privatization that shepherds students away from questions of social equity unpalatable to beneficiaries of the status quo. (52)

It is important, then, to clarify that the Critical Personal Place Narrative assignment is personal to the extent that the content of a student's essay springs from personal experience and continues toward an analytical consideration of the interaction between place and discourse—discourse that is necessarily constructed by ideology, race, class, and gender. To accomplish and encourage this sort of analytical perspective, I included activities and readings in the syllabus that helped students interrogate their personal experience of a place. For example, students explored how two writers interpreted the Mississippi River in different ways by reading Ben Metcalf's "American Heartworm" and an excerpt from Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi. In the first piece, Metcalf anthropomorphizes the river in order to comment on the ways in which industrialization in the Midwest created stark and complicated contrasts along class and racial lines. In the second reading, Twain paints two very different portraits of the Mississippi: one in which the river is a source of inspiration and another in which the river is merely an object. In both texts, however, I encouraged students to investigate the word choices, metaphors, and underlying themes that helped us develop a more complete picture of how the authors conceived of place and environment through narrative.

Asking students to critically examine the role that ideology plays in the interaction between discourse and environment through a personal narrative can also encourage students to develop a critical awareness of their own agency. In "Encouraging Emergent Moments: The Personal, Critical, and Rhetorical in the Writing Classroom," Rochelle Harris argues that "a critical writing pedagogy with a primary goal of having students claim their own agency and become active participants in critiquing and transforming unjust social institutions happens at the intersection of the personal-critical-rhetorical" (402). Harris further suggests

that the intersection of the “personal-critical-rhetorical” can lead to what she refers to as “emergent moments”:

The term emergent moments names the point at which the personal, the critical, and the rhetorical intersect in a text, a point at which the student can hold multiple perspectives simultaneously and reflexively. Such moments can be facilitated but not imposed, and they are often connected with narrative, especially when narrative moves beyond its familiar boundaries. (403)

The activities and readings that accompanied the Critical Personal Place Narrative assignment certainly encouraged students to consider many perspectives on the purpose and meaning of place in our world. However, asking students to workshop their personal essays in a peer response environment also encouraged students to consider how multiple perspectives both inform and are informed by one's interaction with a place. For this reason, students submitted two drafts of their essay—one in week 3 and one in week 4—for peer response sessions. In both peer response sessions, students shared drafts and commented on the quality and development of descriptive language as well as rhetorical concerns (organization, style, and delivery). Furthermore, during each peer response session, I encouraged students to move their personal narrative beyond familiar boundaries toward a more critical standpoint by emphasizing the advice and response of fellow students and offering my own written response to student work. Here, the variety of critiques that students received in response to their work was a critical component in their ability to engage and consider multiple perspectives in their personal narratives.

Data Collection: Assignment 2, Photo Documentary Midrash

The second assignment in my ecocomposition-informed English 250 syllabus asked students to continue their place inquiry through a Photo Documentary Midrash³ assignment. In this assignment, students used a midrash style to compose a photo “place” essay for publication on a personal blog site that all students set up at the beginning of the semester. Here, “midrash style” refers to my interpretation of a method of exegesis used in Jewish faith traditions. For my purposes, I have conceived of midrash as a four-step process in which student’s begin to interpret a text by: 1) articulating the surface meaning of the text's content, 2) reflecting on the current state of their relationship with the surface meaning, 3) composing an alternative or opposite interpretation of their relationship with the text, and 4) finally synthesizing the uncovered perspectives into a cohesive vision or re-vision of the text. Of course, the text at the center of this interpretation is an actual place.

The Photo Documentary Midrash asked students in small groups to use digital cameras to document and *uncover* the varied or disputed purposes of a particular place. The first step in this process required each group of students to collaboratively decide on a place to document which meant that they had to collaboratively negotiate their differing ideas of what constitutes a place. Once students, in their groups, selected a place and collected a variety of photos, they then used the images to individually compose a blog-based visual midrash that documented their interpretative exploration of the place. Along with their photographs, students individually composed brief analytical narratives to accompany and illuminate each interpretive “position” in their visual midrash. Here, it is important to note that the Photo Documentary Midrash and the Critical Personal Place Narrative occurred

³See Appendix E for the full text of the Photo Documentary Midrash assignment sheet.

simultaneously in the syllabus to constitute a coherent unit focused on personal narrative and place. Because the midrash style necessarily requires students to consider multiple perspectives as they interpret and interrogate their interaction with a place, I believe that both assignments helped students approach their personal place reflection from a critical standpoint. Furthermore, both the Photo Documentary Midrash and the Critical Personal Place Narrative helped me accommodate Ignelzi's suggestion that teachers provide more effective learning opportunities to their students by valuing the knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom (13-4). In other words, I wanted to begin the semester by meeting my students where they were and valuing the developmental places to which they desired to travel.

Asking students to critically interrogate their relationship with a meaningful place, however, need not end with a limited view of place. The ecocomposition syllabus that I designed asks students to consider place and environment in a more abstract way. For example, throughout the semester I moved the class discussion toward considerations of electronic and technological places that both inform and are informed by race, class, gender, and ideology through discourse. For a discussion of critical technological literacy in the composition classroom, I turn to Barb Blakely Duffelmeyer's "Critical Computer Literacy: Computers in First-Year Composition as Topic and Environment":

Today, the presence of computers in our culture and in the educational system that functions to reproduce that culture creates multiple literacy requirements. However, if students don't concomitantly acquire critical computer literacy, they will not be able to affect the conditions of their lives, for it is critical

computer literacy that allows us to comprehend our relationship with computer technology and its uses, possibilities, and meanings. (290)

The Photo Documentary Midrash assignment asked students to critically consider the “uses, possibilities, and meanings” of computer technology as they composed within this technological place. The midrash exercise further enhanced the critically analytical nature of the composing process because students were not only composing a critical, visual text but also composing an online identity from a personal-critical-rhetorical standpoint. It is this process of developing a critical awareness of self in the context of meaningful place that can encourage students to develop complicated visions of their own environmental agency.

Data Collection: Reflection Essay on Assignments 1 and 2

At the end of each unit in my ecocomposition-informed syllabus, I asked students to reflect on the quality of the work they composed for the unit, the problems they faced, and the successes they experienced. Reflective writing is an important aspect of the ISUComm Foundation Course curriculum, because it helps students develop the habits of mind that critical pedagogy attempts to facilitate. To this point, Amy Lee, in Composing Critical Pedagogies: Teaching Writing as Revision, argues that critical pedagogy should “help students critique and more consciously participate in their constructions of self, other, and world” (46). Here, reflective writing on the lessons learned, problems faced, and decisions made during the course of an assignment can help students become more conscious of the extent to which their writing takes place and informs the ways in which they think about the “self, other, and world” (Lee 46). Furthermore, Ignelzi argues that students need opportunities to reflect on the progress that they have made if they are to develop more

mature critical thinking skills. Critical reflection on the developmental distance travelled in the space of an assignment or a semester will help students see how they have actively participated in the construction of new knowledge, thus engaging them in the higher-order meaning-making that liberal educations emphasize (13-4). For the purposes of this study, the informal essays that students wrote in response to a reflection prompt⁴ that I provided allowed students the opportunity to reflect on the communication decisions that they made during the course of the assignment and helped me gain a better understanding of the ways in which students experienced my teaching of the assignment. In other words, the reflective writing that students produced after Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 provided a useful check on the ways in which I interpreted student data.

A Sketch of Our Ecomposition Semester

Blog Journals

Encouraging students to consider technological communication—especially via the Internet—as ecologically situated in an electronic “place” can help students question the social and political effects of their communications in both “cyber” and “real” worlds. To facilitate the interrogation of technological communication in my classroom, I asked students to write in a field journal that they maintained on a personal blog site. Throughout the semester, students responded on their blogs to a variety of ecologically-themed prompts that required them to conduct exploratory Internet research, compose thoughtful analyses, and comment on the blog-work of their fellow classmates.

⁴See Appendix C for the full text of the informal reflection essay prompt.

Because the link and comment features of a blog can mirror the ecological web in which life and communication exists, students were able to visually and physically (through “clicking”) see the class discourse as it was created, mapped, and morphed in our system of blogs. With each journaling prompt, I asked students to critique the subject of their journal entry as well as the technological framework that was facilitating the communication. For example, in unit three of the syllabus, students selected a corporate blog from a diverse list of blogs that I assembled and used their rhetorical analysis skills to critique the blog’s rhetorical situation and use of rhetorical appeals. In this entry and others (there were a total of 8 required entries), students actively engaged the difference between summary, analysis, and opinion while also enhancing their blog entries with links to other sources; I explained that the links could be definitional (contextualize a complex word), exploratory (investigate a peripheral topic), or argumentative (create a claim about the text). Additionally, I advised students to consider how the technology itself was functioning in the online environment: How does our interaction with blogging software and our interaction with an online place affect the way we communicate as well as the content of our communications?

Unit Two: Rhetorical Analysis, Advertising, and Place

In Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel, Jean Kilbourne claims that consumers witness approximately 3,000 acts of advertising each day (58). When we consider how ideologically suspect some of this advertising can be, the need for critical media literacy becomes increasingly apparent. I began the second unit of my ecocomposition-informed English 250 syllabus by asking students to critically analyze advertising through a written rhetorical analysis of an advertisement and its environment. I engaged the critical potential of this rhetorical analysis by asking students to consider the

extent to which *advertising is our environment*. The process of interrogating the ways in which advertising is constantly present in our culture can help students contemplate the ecological impact of market-driven advertising. A critical rhetorical analysis of advertisements, through ecocomposition, can also encourage students to consider the social and political implications of advertising that is problematically gendered and increasingly focused on the commodification of women's sexuality and violence against women. By engaging advertising analysis through ecocomposition with a focus on gender representation, students can begin to consider the possibility that advertising can have a hostile or dangerous impact on women. Furthermore, an ecofeminist perspective allows us to consider how this hostility and danger impacts other “powerless” groups—to include plants, animals, and the earth itself.

To help students examine the extent to which gender, advertising, and environment can interact in a local community, I created an ecocomposition-informed rhetorical analysis assignment in which I asked students to write a substantial essay that responded to advertising in action. This writing assignment was similar to most rhetorical analyses in that students analyzed the advertisement in terms of its rhetorical appeals and rhetorical situation. However, I also asked students to analyze the advertisement's location apart from the advertisement's historical and social context. In other words, students examined the exigence that gave rise to the advertisement as well as the location in which they found the advertisement.

The second assignment in unit two asked students to continue their advertising analysis by collaboratively (in small groups) analyzing an advertisement that featured an ecological or “place” theme and modifying the advertisement to unearth and openly

communicate the advertisement's underlying ethical and ecological implications. The process for this assignment involved four key steps: in groups, students 1) analyzed the rhetorical situation of an advertisement of their choosing, 2) invented a new rhetorical situation that heightened or complicated the advertisement's original purpose, 3) created a new “jammed” advertisement that openly engaged the original advertisement's implied or overt cultural assumptions, and 4) designed an oral and visual presentation in which they discussed the rhetorical decisions they made throughout the composition and culture jamming process. This activity evolved from Naomi Klein's No Logo, a book in which Klein discusses culture jamming and the problematic nature of advertising/branding in public spaces. To support students during the culture jamming assignment, I asked students to read an excerpt from No Logo before they began their own culture jamming exercise.

The theoretical rationale for the culture jamming assignment is informed by Bruce McComiskey's “Social-Process Rhetorical Inquiry: Cultural Studies Methodologies for Critical Writing about Advertisements.” In this article, McComiskey argues that students can most effectively understand and engage in meaningful advertising analysis if they are encouraged to consider the advertisement itself as well as “the cycle of production, distribution (and exchange), and consumption” through which a culture experiences advertising (382-3). However, McComiskey is careful to point out that asking students to become critical consumers does not necessarily encourage students to develop a sense of agency in response to questionable advertising practices; here, McComiskey suggests that students must actively engage in “processes of rhetorical intervention” (384-5) as a way to improve critical writing and develop a sense of civic agency. The culture jamming assignment allows students to not only critique the rhetorical situation of the original

advertisement, but also allows them to collaboratively intervene in the marketing cycle by considering their own rhetorical choices.

Unit Three: Argument, Advocacy, and Ecology

In the final unit of the semester, students participated in two major assignments that asked them to explore an ecological or “place” issue and construct their own well-reasoned arguments about the issue. The major assignments in unit three were designed to build on the work that students completed during unit one and engage the rhetorical and analytical skills that students developed throughout the semester. Furthermore, the remaining two assignments worked together to create a cohesive argumentative project that engaged students in a multimodal composition experience.

In the first major assignment of unit three, students researched an ecological or “place” issue and composed an argumentative research essay using a Rogerian approach to argumentation. This approach asked students to: 1) seek out and articulate the perspectives of many sides of the issue, 2) develop the character of those sides with respect and honesty, 3) explore and describe the situations in which each side might make sense, and 4) seek out and establish a common ground that pertains to all sides of the argument (Wood qtd. in “Two Models of Argument”). I asked students to engage in Rogerian argumentation rather than traditional debate-style argumentation, because I believe that the process of seeking out and contemplating multiple sides of an issue encourages students to re-evaluate their original positions in light of new information. Furthermore, a Rogerian approach to argumentation complicates a modernist approach to argument—an approach that looks for and perpetuates ideological dichotomies that do not accurately depict problems as they occur in human life and allow for the oppression of human and nonhuman nature. In the context of an

ecocomposition-informed English 250 course, encouraging students to question dichotomous thinking is especially important; with a more complicated world view, students were better prepared to openly question the dichotomies that we interrogated throughout the semester: man/woman, masculine/feminine, sex/violence, urban/rural, nature/human, us/them. Using this Rogerian approach to argument, students developed an argumentative position on an ecological issue; I asked them to go a step further, however, and develop their argumentative position as an act of advocacy. Students critically explored the many sides of a particular ecological issue and advocated for specific changes, thoughts and actions that would provide new ecological benefits or encourage public awareness of a pressing ecological issue.

The second major assignment in unit three asked students to revisit the listening activities that they encountered in unit one. During the *This American Place* assignment, students worked in small groups to select a place to investigate, collected sound recordings of place-stories from passers-by, and massaged these collected stories into an argumentative (again, using a Rogerian approach) radio show in the spirit of Chicago Public Radio's *This American Life*. As students revisited *This American Life* and developed their own radio program, they needed to think critically and rhetorically about the purpose and audience of their chosen place in order to elicit stories from passers-by that would fit into a coherent radio composition. Additionally, students continued to develop a sense of agency through advocacy and rhetorical intervention as they considered how their radio program might intervene as a form of unique media advocacy.

Final Exam: Electronic Portfolio with Reflections

Students ended the semester by composing a portfolio of their work and presenting it electronically on their personal blogs. Because the ecocomposition-informed course that I

designed engages multimodality in all major and short assignments, the student-produced blogs were necessarily a collection of written, oral, visual, and electronic compositions that illustrated each student's journey toward the acquisition of an ecologically-informed sense of critical literacy. In lieu of a traditional final exam, students composed a semester reflection essay for publication on their personal blog; in this reflection, students revisited the Critical Personal Place Narrative that they composed during unit one and reflected on the ways in which their perception and definition of “environment” and “place” had changed. The semester reflection assignment also encouraged students to witness the body of work that they produced during the semester from a critical perspective. By surveying their blog publications and composing a final reflection, students were able to dialogically engage the ecological themes of the course in the context of their own ability to effect meaningful ecological changes in the local and global environments that surround them.

Chapter Three.

Data Analysis and Findings

Overview of Approach to Data Analysis

My overarching method of data analysis involved coding student work according to distinct categories that helped me respond to my primary research questions. Specifically, in order to determine the communication challenges that students faced in this ecocomposition course, I identified categories that were meaningful to participants within the context of this study and which resonate with the literature featured in my conceptual framework. These categories helped me respond to the following two inquiries:

- How did student conceptions of place, space, and environment change over the course?
- How did students engage concepts of place, space, and environment through narrative structures and themes?

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will use samples from student work to describe the categories and themes that inform my approach to data analysis, and I will organize the results of my study in terms of two main data collection episodes: Assignment 1 and Assignment 2. In my discussion of Assignment 1 and Assignment 2, I will offer an overview of my analysis and observations. Finally, in Chapter Four I will contextualize my observations of Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 in terms of the changes that I found in the Questionnaires—specifically, the changes I observed in student conceptions of place, space, and environment.

Analyzing Assignment 1, Critical Personal Place Narrative

In the first assignment of my ecocomposition-informed English 250 syllabus, I asked students to compose a narrative essay in which they attempted to develop a critical perspective on their interaction with a meaningful or significant place. The critical nature of the Critical Personal Place Narrative allowed students to engage the themes and goals of our ecocomposition-informed course with respect to Dobrin and Weisser's view that ecocomposition should "provide a holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment" (572). In my analysis, I focus on the differences and similarities that students brought to the terms *place*, *space*, and *environment* because these terms seem to represent different ways of interpreting the relationships that exist between human and nonhuman nature. For example, during many of our class discussions throughout the semester, students contemplated how the use of these terms was rhetorical; whether we were reading argumentative essays, student compositions, or literary texts, I asked students to think about the various ways in which the authors were thinking about place, space, and environment. However, I did not offer students specific definitions of these terms as one of my goals for the course was to provide students with an opportunity to arrive at their own definitions of contested terms.

In order to ascertain how students were thinking about place, space, and environment at the beginning of our semester together, I identified three major themes—I will refer to these as "place concepts"—that students used to articulate their ideas about place, space, and environment in Assignment 1. Next, I identified four unique narrative structures in Assignment 1 that allowed me to describe how student ideas about place, space, and environment were working in their essays. When I looked closely at the essays students

produced for Assignment 1, I noticed that some combinations of place concepts and narrative structures tended to yield work in which students were beginning to problematize dichotomous thinking about nature and culture. Here, I saw connections between the work some students composed for Assignment 1 and the goals of Mezirow's transformative learning model: "[transforming] our taken-for-granted frames of reference . . . to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (7-8). Furthermore, I noticed that some combinations of place concepts and narrative structures illustrated student movement toward Perry's third world view or Commitment in Relativism—a world view in which students might still see the world in relation to themselves, but can also begin to understand how their world views have been shaped by the various communities in which they live. In an effort to describe the developmental moves that students made in their Critical Personal Place Narratives, I will first describe the place concepts and narrative structures that I identified.

Place Concepts in Assignment 1

In my analysis of Assignment 1, I identified three place concepts or ways in which students were conceiving of place, space, or environment. In the first Place Concept I noticed—Place as Community—students focused on their interactions with a group of people who were working toward a common goal in a particular place. Although other place concepts may have included the presence of specific groups of people, students working with Place as Community focused on the extent to which a community of people constituted the place at the center of their inquiry. For example, Carrie decided to write her Critical Personal Place Narrative about a church that her family attended in her hometown of Chicago, Illinois.

The introduction to her essay illustrates her original plan to focus on the architecture and design of the church that she loved:

I remember first stepping into a round, empty worship area, with rows of pews surrounding the central altar. A single silhouette of Jesus on the cross hovered above the main focal point. A curved wall made of white marble separated the altar from the choir area . . .

After receiving some feedback from fellow students during our first round of peer response, Carrie decided to shift the focus of her essay toward her idea that people constituted the church more than the actual building did: “Leaving my church was extremely hard for me, but I know that I will carry the friendships, and the life lessons I learned, with me forever.”

In the second place concept I identified—Place as Abstract Memory—students focused on how their perceptions of a particular place have changed over an extended period of time or the extent to which an emotion or psychological state might constitute a place more than the physical or real world places in which the memory occurred. In this place concept, students saw parallels between changes in themselves and changes in their attitudes toward the idea of a significant place. For example, Tanya used her Critical Personal Place Narrative to explore the grieving process she went through after her mother passed away. Although the place at the center of her essay was a specific cemetery, Tanya decided to retell the story of this place as she experienced it at different points in her life. Moving from childhood toward adolescence and adulthood, Tanya described how her own life situation affected her ideas about the cemetery as a place:

A month later, I found myself walking the all-familiar route to the Oak Hill Cemetery. My earlier misgivings about cemeteries had vanished: I was no

longer reminded of uncomfortable visits or of childish horror movies. Instead, a blanket of peace wrapped around me when I visited my mother's grave.

In another illustrative example of Place as Abstract Memory, Wendy wrote about a trip she took across North America. Although she devotes several moments in her essay to descriptions of specific places in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S., Wendy carefully explains her purpose in the essay's final paragraph: "Now I must explain: this may not seem like one particular place or feel like I have any connection to these places, but this place is not physical. It is a realization I learned years after returning home . . ."

In the last place concept I identified—Place as Nature—students focused on natural (or nonhuman) places that they described in pristine, peaceful, or magical terms. For example, Craig's essay about a wakeboarding trip he takes every summer features descriptive passages in which he characterizes his place—a lake—as quiet and peaceful:

The untouched water at 8 am following a storm, soundless except for a few loons in the distance. A couple of branches have fallen into the dark green grass and some leaves are on the ground but if anything the storm was peaceful.

In Craig's essay, he spends much of his time describing the activities he participated in at the lake, but the overarching concept in his essay rests on the extent to which he conceives of place as natural and nonhuman.

Narrative Structures in Assignment 1

In my analysis of Assignment 1, I identified four narrative structures that students used to organize the events in their essays. In the first narrative structure I identified—the Inventory Tour—students selected a place and described the physical attributes of the place

without or with few references to other people, a larger community, or themselves.

Furthermore, students who utilized the Inventory Tour narrative structure tended to organize their essays in the same way that one might organize a guided tour of a home: brief introductions to specific rooms with little transition between rooms and casual references to important or meaningful items. For example, Shelly wanted to focus on her love of biology in her Critical Personal Place Narrative by writing about the classroom in which she took science classes during her freshman year of high school. From the room's décor ("It has two sinks, cabinets for graduated cylinders, beakers, etc.") to the many events that took place in the room ("On the counter she had two hissing cockroaches in a glass cage."), the focus of Shelly's essay does not venture beyond a catalog of events and items.

In the Grand Journey—the second narrative structure I identified—students selected a place in which they participated in an arduous or adventurous task. A unique characteristic of the Grand Journey narrative is the presence of a transformational moment that takes place at the end of the essay; here, the student learns something grand and exciting, and the story is always moving toward this transformational moment. For example, Miranda's essay begins with the premise that her large, overwhelming high school posed problems for her because of her somewhat shy nature. However, she offers the reader detailed reflections on a series of events and activities that helped her develop more confidence:

Two more years passed and I was walking across the stage at graduation.

Looking back, the past four years had been a blur; I had gone from being a scared freshman entering late on the first day of class to a confident senior. I had overcome many obstacles during those past few years . . .

The next narrative structure I identified—the Great Escape—focuses on the stressful and hectic daily lives of students who seek out special places that are safe havens for them. In the Great Escape narrative, students used a compare and contrast method of organization to describe the extent to which certain places can provide a much needed escape from the trappings of routine daily occurrences. For example, Jake’s essay about the Iowa State University teaching farms is organized around the contrast that he sees between the “bustling city” and the “peaceful” teaching farms that remind him of his hometown: “It is not until my tires hit the gravel that I realize at last I have escaped! I have escaped into a world of my own. It is so peaceful you can hear the soft breeze whispering through the corn before you feel its gentle touch upon your arm.”

In the last narrative structure I identified—the Pivotal Moment—students focused on a particular place; midway through the essay, however, this focus shifts toward the student and how he or she reacted to the significant change. For example, Shannon begins her essay by describing joyful memories that she identifies with her childhood home: “I learned to ride my bike on those sidewalks, parked my first car on that street, and received my first kiss on that doorstep.” However, the essay’s focus shifts when she begins to discuss her parents’ divorce, an event that led her to live with her grandparents on their farm. Shannon transitions from one place to another by including the following illustrative passage:

Rooms that were once full of furnishings were suddenly nearly empty.
Family pictures were taken down, and the atmosphere of the house grew uncomfortable. It’s funny how quickly a home can turn into a strange building. Suddenly I didn’t recognize the place I’d known all my life.

In the second half of her essay, Shannon describes how the Pivotal Moment (her parents' divorce) led her to a new place (her grandparents' farm) in which she learned more about herself and the person she wants to be in the future.

Analyzing Place Concepts and Narrative Structures in Assignment 1

One of the goals of my ecocomposition-informed syllabus was to help students develop the critical thinking skills that would allow them to develop the “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” (Mezirow 7-8) habits of mind that characterize movement toward Perry’s concept of the Commitment in Relativism world view. As I mentioned earlier, I noticed that some combinations of place concepts and narrative structures led students to either critically consider perspectives other than their own or to reflect on the extent to which their world views had been influenced by significant places. With respect to Mezirow and Perry, the most successful Critical Personal Place Narratives used either a Great Escape or Pivotal Moment narrative structure, and the students who wrote these essays tended to conceive of Place as Community.

Samantha’s essay about her childhood backyard is a good example of a successful essay that discusses Place as Community within a Great Escape narrative structure. Samantha begins her essay by describing the place to which she most often escapes: “A tall, wooden fence stands erect on three sides of my safe-haven.” Later in the essay, she heightens the Great Escape narrative by describing her backyard as “my home, my playground, my sanctuary.” She continues to draw a stark distinction between the stresses of the outside world and the “sanctuary” of her backyard by offering several descriptions of significant family activities that often took place in the backyard. For example, she describes an annual family barbeque to which the entire neighborhood was always invited, and she

reminisces about how much fun she had raking leaves with her parents and siblings. At the end of her essay, Samantha explains that she and her family eventually moved away from her childhood home: “I can remember driving off, the big cottonwoods standing tall behind the yellow and blue split-level home. Although I was away from those tall, strong trees, I still felt safe moving into this strange new environment.” According to Samantha, the reason she “still felt safe” involved her realization that “it was my parents, tall and strong, all along who made me feel safe, supported, and best of all, loved.” Here, Samantha’s description of her parents—“tall and strong”—echoes the manner in which she described another important pair of protectors: “In the center of this patch of heaven were two enormous cottonwood trees that stood as sentries making me feel safe, supported.” The complexity and success of Samantha’s essay, I believe, stems from her ability to consider the perspectives of a community that she values—her family—as well as her ability to conceive of nonhuman nature—the cottonwood trees—as part of that community.

Mary’s essay about her high school acting career is another example of a successful student essay in which the author conceived of Place as Community; however, Mary’s essay employs the Pivotal Moment narrative structure. She begins her essay by describing several experiences she had on the stage of her high school’s theater, focusing on the important connection that she perceives between audience and actress: “I think—I think I am content with this brief separation between myself and the audience . . . My identity was simple but full in that shadowy awareness, the poised readiness.” Mary continues to explore her “identity” by discussing how she feels about the importance of both audience and the students with whom she worked to produce her high school’s plays and musicals. Her Pivotal Moment comes when she is forced to move to another school, one where she no

longer has the support of her theater-mates and directors. It is after this Pivotal Moment that Mary begins to critically reflect on the various ways in which the theater and the theater community have shaped her world view. Mary is careful to note the good things she learned (“timeliness and preparation”), but she heightens the critical nature of her essay by considering things from another perspective: “I lived at odds with self-esteem: craving praises and cringing at criticism. Most of all, I realized my theatrical *potential*, but never quite *met* the directors’ standards.” Here, Mary is beginning to develop the more “inclusive” and “reflective” (7-8) habits of mind that Mezirow describes in his theory of transformative learning.

At the other end of the spectrum, the least successful Critical Personal Place Narratives used the Inventory Tour narrative structure and tended to focus more on tangible items featured within the place, making it difficult to discern how the authors were conceiving of place. For example, Shane’s essay about his grandparents’ home begins with a description of the road that leads to the house (“We slow down and turn onto the gravel road. We travel up a short, steep hill with trees on both sides. At the top of the hill, the road levels off. . .”) and continues with an itemized tour of the house (“There is a six foot, brown grandfather clock to our right that has been in its place since I was small. There are stairs directly in front of us that lead down. . .”). The dense detail with which Shane describes the layout of his grandparents’ house prevents him from fully exploring the purpose of his essay—a purpose he does not reveal until the very end: “This is my home away from home and I will never forget this place. I hope everyone has a place that stands out in their memories that makes them feel as I do when I come to my grandparents’ house.”

The attention to detail that prevented Shane from reflecting on why his place was so memorable also prevented Martha from reflecting on the extent to which she was conceiving of her identity as something tied to a specific place. For Martha, the Inventory Tour narrative structure appeared in her essay as she cataloged the items in her dorm room and the stories she associated with those items. For example, she notices a soccer poster that hangs on her wall and describes how it relates to her identity: “I’ve played soccer since I was a kid. I started and lettered all four years of high school.” Here, Martha refrains from reflecting on the nature of her attachment to soccer, and she does not offer any explanation as to why this sport is central to her identity. However, Martha does begin to reflect on the larger meaning of some of her dorm room decorations; for instance, she describes several family photos that hang on her walls:

I like this picture so much, because it is a good picture of my parents and me. My dad doesn’t usually get to go to things like that with us, he is a farmer and that is very time consuming and he can’t leave very often . . . It is neat to talk to my mom about when she was a kid, we don’t really get to just talk that much . . .

In this excerpt, a closer look at the items in her dorm room allows Martha to mention some interesting comments about the nature of work, communication, and family dynamics, but she refrains from taking a more critical stance on these observations. The work that Martha and Shane composed for the Critical Personal Place Narrative is representative of other less successful essays that employed the Inventory Tour narrative structure in that all of them presented a concept of place in which inventories of items and details seemed to prevent students from moving beyond surface descriptions toward critical reflection on the extent to

which place and identity can interact. The focus on family that Martha and Shane hint at in their essays leads me to believe that they were beginning to conceive of Place as Community; however, in their final drafts, both Martha and Shane did not fully articulate the extent to which community seemed to constitute the meaningful places that they explored in their essays.

Analyzing Assignment 2, Photo Documentary Midrash

In Assignment 2, students worked collaboratively in small groups to select a place and document the life of that place with digital photography. Using the photographs they collected with their groups, students composed individual photo essays in which they narrated the life of their place. Specifically, the assignment sheet invited students to “see a ‘place’ from many sides” and “take a range of photographs that will make an audience (re)consider the place.” Therefore, the explicit purpose of this assignment was to help students embody a more “inclusive” and “reflective” (Mezirow 7-8) habit of mind by encouraging them to use their physical location as a method of invention; in other words, as students moved their physical bodies in an attempt to see many sides of a place, they—to some extent—moved their habits of mind to critically consider perspectives other than their own. Helping students think critically about the extent to which nature and discourse interact constitutes one of the goals of an ecomposition-informed course, and the Photo Documentary Midrash attempted to help students critically reflect on the variety of ways in which different people might conceive of a particular place. Therefore, the analysis that I present in this section will focus on the extent to which students are considering multiple

perspectives of place and will seek to describe the situations (places explored and themes used) that were most conducive to critical reflection and thought.

In order to describe how or to what extent the Photo Documentary Midrash encouraged students to develop a more complicated understanding of the ways in which humans interact with the places in which we live, work, and play, I first surveyed the types of places that students selected and developed five broad categories that encompassed the variety of places that students studied. The categories I identified were useful to me in that they allowed me to more easily manage the 26 student compositions that I considered for this study. Furthermore, I should note that I did not ask students to categorize their own compositions, and I did not ask them to focus on places in or around the Iowa State University Campus. In fact, I invited students to venture out into the Ames community, but time and schedule conflicts seemed to prevent students from accepting my invitation. Finally, the total count of unique places that students considered for the Photo Documentary Midrash was twelve. In light of these considerations, I provide brief descriptions of the categories I identified:

Natural Settings – Students focused on the presence of nonhuman nature on campus by photographing areas surrounding Lake LaVerne, the flora of the Lagomarcino Courtyard, and the open spaces of Central Campus.

Student Dwellings – Students used photography to document student perspectives on life in two dormitories: Helser Hall and Maple Hall.

Abstract Places – Rather than focus on an area that many would readily identify as a place, students focused on abstract ideas of place by photographing perspectives of a campus bridge and a series of specific

architectural features represented around campus (one group looked at steps and another looked at archways).

Popular Landmarks – Students photographed structures that are visually prominent on the Iowa State University campus: Beardshear Hall (a building used for administrative purposes) and the Campanile (a centrally-located bell tower).

Consumer-Driven Places – Students focused on the various ways in which residents of Ames use public places for shopping, entertainment, and dining. Specifically, students took a closer look at the Stomping Grounds Café and the Campustown business district.

Students collaboratively selected the place that informed their photo essays, but students composed the actual photo essays individually. In an effort to describe the various ways in which each individual student conceived of place, space, and environment, I developed four broad categories that account for the various themes that students used to discuss their particular places. I provide brief descriptions of these themes below.

In the Place as Paradise theme, students conceived of their particular place in terms of its connection to nonhuman nature, and students described the place with words like “peaceful,” “perfect,” “beautiful,” “hidden,” and “green.” I use the word “paradise” to describe this category because students seemed compelled to describe the flora and fauna of a place in terms of its secretive or hidden status. An excerpt from Shannon’s Photo Documentary Midrash illustrates the Place as Paradise theme:

Glancing at this photo, I hope you are curious as to what is beyond the large brick arch shown up front. There are no people in this picture, and I believe

that is a good thing. It makes the area seem almost like a secret; it is beautiful yet not discovered. It is quiet and waiting.

Here, Shannon works with a theme in which the place—the Lagomarcino Courtyard—is a hidden paradise that many are either not aware of or do not often visit.

In the next theme I identified—Place as Authority—students focused on the extent to which social hierarchies and attitudes were evident in the edifice or design of a structure. In their descriptions of Place as Authority, students tended to use words like “strong,” “grand,” “marvel,” “intimidating,” and “magnificent.” Here, the word “authority” is meant to describe the extent to which students associated certain architectural or spatial features with the perceived social purpose of the structure. Tammi’s composition about Beardshear Hall—a building that houses the offices of the university Provost and President—reflects the extent to which some students perceived authoritative imagery in their places: “This picture of the main entrance was chosen to display the impressive size and design of Beardshear Hall. The enormous pillars that frame the doorway give a sense of importance, as well as a feel of the building’s theme.” Tammi continues to explore “the building’s theme” by focusing on the grandeur of the architecture and the types of work that take place within the building.

In the Place as History theme, students described their places as something that both affects and is affected by students, usually with an eye toward tradition. Students invoking the Place as History theme tended to describe their places with words like “landmark,” “tradition,” “symbol,” “classic,” and “pride.” John’s Photo Documentary Midrash about the different types of steps featured on the Iowa State University campus illustrates the sense of history that some students saw embedded in campus structures:

Some steps are very worn and even corroded. These steps are the ones that have a great deal of history behind them as they have held the weight of many others who have come and left. Even though they are beat-up and weathered, they are still steps nonetheless and they still facilitate in the progression of our college journey.

Here, John uses the step as a metaphor that allows him to contemplate the extent to which places can constitute history in that they link people to both the past and the future.

Finally, the last theme I identified—Place as Community—encompassed student ideas about place that were tied to social activities that students, by and large, perceived in a positive light. In the Place as Community theme, students describe their places with words like “spirit,” “safe,” “neighborhood,” “friendly,” and “relaxing.” An excerpt from Travis’s Photo Midrash Essay about the Stomping Grounds Café illustrates the sense of community that some students perceived in their places:

As you look around you see many people off in the distance. Many are college students. All came to the stomping grounds for different reasons. Some study for classes, while others are just looking to relax after a long day. This diversity of use and the relaxing atmosphere of Stomping Grounds made it a good candidate for this essay.

Here, Travis opts to focus on the diversity of purposes and people that seem to coalesce in the communal atmosphere that Stomping Grounds provides.

In my analysis of student work for Assignment 2, I noticed that the most successful student compositions—the ones in which students seemed willing to engage in perspectives other than their own—were the ones in which students employed all four of the themes that I

outlined above. Furthermore, I saw no connection between the types of places students considered (i.e., Natural Settings, Student Dwellings, Abstract Places, Popular Landmarks, and Consumer-Driven Places) and the ability of students to critically engage with the nature of their places. However, in this study, each place category represents an average of 2-3 unique locations; it is possible that a more extensive research study that incorporated the work of more students (and, therefore, more unique locations) would reveal some connections between place concepts and the development of critical literacies. For the purposes of this study, however, I focused my analysis on the extent to which the presence of multiple place themes in a given student composition revealed the development of critical habits of thought—habits that often unearthed problematic perspectives that demanded further inquiry and reflection.

Analysis of the data I collected for the Photo Documentary Midrash revealed that the least successful student compositions were most often the ones in which students employed few (one to two) place themes. Nancy's exploration of an Abstract Place—the many stairs that can be found around Iowa State University—reveals the use of only two place themes: Place as History and Place as Authority. For example, two entries in Nancy's Photo Documentary Midrash stand out as illustrations of the History and Authority themes with which she was working. In the first entry, "Historical Stairs," Nancy comments on the sense of tradition that she sees embedded in some of the older sets of stairs that one might find on campus: "Throughout campus you will find many stairs. Many of these stairs have been there through hundreds of graduating classes. These stairs have been stepped on by other succeeding alumni, passing on the tradition of succession." Here, Nancy is making a very clear connection between history, tradition, and the academic experience. However, Nancy

makes an interesting connection between History and Authority themes in her analysis of a photo entitled “Tradition Stands Strong”:

When you think of Iowa State a person thinks of power, tradition, and success. Beardshear Hall is a perfect example of this. The stairs represent the strength and power the Iowa State holds. As a student this power is passed on to us because we walk these stairs everyday and we determine not only our future but the future of the world. We're the next generation! The stairs show so much tradition and power that anyone can undoubtedly see that this building is very important. The pillars and strong very straight and simple design shows the hard but basic steps that people need to succeed here. The stairs aren't fancy like at an architecture building, or curvy like the stairs in the library, they're straight and to the point. These stairs exemplify how we as students should go about college.

Here, I quote Nancy at length to illustrate the extent to which themes of History and Authority are intricately interconnected in her composition. Of course, there are hegemonic narratives at work in Nancy’s composition that require further inquiry: Who are the students who receive the “power” that “is passed on,” and from where does the authority that gives rise to this tradition originate? For that matter, what is the nature of this “power,” and to what extent can we complicate the idea that students at Iowa State University, according to Nancy, “determine not only our future but the future of the world”? In the case of Nancy’s Photo Documentary Midrash, the inclusion of other perspectives and place themes (e.g., Place as Community and Place as Paradise) would help Nancy complicate her world view and move closer to a Commitment in Relativism world view.

I can see Nona moving closer to a Commitment in Relativism world view in her Photo Documentary Midrash about a Consumer-Driven Place—The Stomping Grounds Café. In Nona’s work, the inclusion of multiple (at least three) place themes is a good indication that she is attempting to think critically about the extent to which environment and discourse can sometimes be problematically related. For example, Nona uses a Place as Community theme to illustrate the potential for diversity that Stomping Grounds holds: “Sitting at the tables are people with laptops, books and even friends. The occasional sweethearts relax on the sofa with their drinks in hand as a display of their excuse for being together. The atmosphere for Stomping Grounds changes throughout a day. . .” Nona follows this description with a contrasting episode in which she reveals another perspective of the café, one that eschews a Community theme:

If one wanted to know what Stomping Grounds is literally, this photo would tell it all. To some it is just a place to get a good blended drink or coffee; taking a seat would just be a waste of time. So for those who will only swing by for a good cup of joe, this is the place to stop.

Following her emphasis on Place as Community, Nona begins to develop a Place as Paradise theme in the following passage:

As it grows dark the café begins to light up. The seating outside is not abandoned in the evening. In fact, the waitresses begin to come outside to serve. Looking carefully at the photo, attention is drawn to the person outside savoring their comfortable summer night while a waitress bustles around to attend a table to the left.

The extent to which Nona characterizes the evening environment as “comfortable” can be seen in terms of a Paradise theme if we take a closer look at the manner in which she initially describes the café: a “cozy development surrounded in comfortable seclusion.” However, in the previous passage, Nona contrasts the “comfortable” environment of the customers with the hustle-and-bustle environment in which the waitress works. Here, Nona begins to identify a Place as Authority theme by noticing the extent to which order and hierarchy are present in this calm place; however, Nona could develop a more critical perspective on the situation by openly interrogating the extent to which a Place as Paradise narrative might mask problematic themes of Authority.

In another student example—Madi’s exploration of the Iowa State University Campanile—I see a student who is beginning to develop a more “inclusive” and “reflective” (Mezirow 7-8) habit of mind by including multiple place themes in her work. In fact, I identified all four themes at work in Madi’s composition. For example, the first photo she analyzes—“Intimidating Beauty”—finds her weaving the Community, History, and Authority place themes together:

The Campanile has been a landmark of Iowa State University since its bells first rang in 1897. Not only is it a historical monument, it also represents a sentimental and romantic tradition called “Campaniling.” According to the tradition, a student is not a true Iowa Staten until he or she has been kissed under the Campanile at midnight by his or her significant other. This first photograph opens our documentary essay with a morning view of the tower. The sunlight is reflected off of one side of the building and creates a

magnificent glow . . . The view gives a perception of the height, and the morning hues give a somewhat majestic and welcoming air.

Here, Madi seems to recognize a connection between the Campanile as a focal point of the campus and the extent to which Community and History are intertwined in the tradition of “Campaniling.” Madi extends her analysis, however, by commenting on the “height” and “majestic” nature of the Campanile—words that seem to connote a sense of Authority.

Toward the end of her Photo Documentary Midrash, Madi further complicates the critical nature of her composition by integrating Place as Community and Place as Paradise themes:

Many students pass through or by it on their way to classes or events . . . Here, we see one of four entrances that also act as exits. Each doorway is sculpted in an arch framed with artistic architecture. In this photo, a tree blocks an entrance to the tower, giving the impression of a secret passage way. The intertwining of nature and a man made structure gives a representation of how humans have learned to appreciate the environment.

Although scholars like Owens would disagree with Madi on the extent to which “humans have learned to appreciate the environment,” I consider Madi’s recognition that architecture and nonhuman nature can interact as a positive step toward a Commitment in Relativism world view. Furthermore, Madi’s identification of a connection between nature and culture would help students begin to think about the possible ways in which this connection might be problematic.

The final Photo Documentary Midrash I want to share—Miranda’s exploration of Lake LaVerne—illustrates how a student’s ability to include multiple perspectives and place themes can lead to critical turns of thought while also unearthing problematic assumptions

that would benefit from further analysis. For example, Miranda incorporates all four place themes in her work, and she is attentive to the idea that the purpose of this project is to engage diverse perspectives about place; she illustrates this awareness in the following passage about a photograph she took as she looked up at a very tall tree:

This picture is not meant to make you feel small or insignificant. This picture was chosen because it gave the sense of looking to the future. It is important to remember the past, but even more important is to prepare for the future. Campus projects to help it stay clean and environmental projects to keep the earth green are some of the few things Iowa State is helping with. This picture was chosen because we often only pay attention to what we can generally see, the present or the near future, caught up in our daily lives that we forget it is important to take time to see a perspective different from our usual one.

Here, Miranda uses the language of Authority (“small or insignificant”) to illustrate how one might view the situation differently from a standpoint of hope based on a History theme (“looking to the future”). Furthermore, Miranda uses examples of social projects and endeavors to add to the Community theme that she continues to build in the rest of her composition. All of her theme-weaving centers on her conception of Place as Paradise—a vulnerable and valuable place in need of protection. However, Miranda’s attention to the value of multiple perspectives does not seem to include some of the Lake’s residents:

A striking contrast against a green background, the swans of Lake LaVerne give way to a rich history of tradition. Iowa State University is now celebrating its 150th year since opening up its doors to students and now even

today students still keep the traditions alive. The two swans Sir Lancelot and Elaine are just one of the many attractions that the students of yesterday and today enjoy.

Here, Miranda identifies the importance of tradition that so many of her classmates identified, and this perspective is certainly worthy of further student analysis. However, I might also continue to complicate Miranda's composition by asking her to reflect on her characterization of nonhuman nature—"the two swans"—as "one of the many attractions that students of yesterday and today enjoy." Encouraging students to complicate the extent to which environment and discourse are related needs to include a focused look at how some conceptions of place, space, and environment relegate nonhuman nature to an "othered" or oppressed status.

In the next and final chapter, I contextualize my observations of student work for Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 by exploring how student conceptions of place, space, and environment changed over the course of the semester. I rely on student responses to the Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires I designed to articulate the manner and degree of change that some students experienced. Finally, I use student responses to a reflective writing prompt to contextualize the lessons learned and implications that are the result of this research study.

Chapter Four.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Conclusions

In the previous chapter, I used samples from student work to describe the categories and themes that informed my overarching approach to data analysis, and I organized the results of my study in terms of two main data collection episodes: Assignment 1 and Assignment 2. In my analysis of Assignment 1 (Critical Personal Place Narrative), I found that students combined different place concepts (Place as Community, Place as Abstract Memory, and Place as Nature) with different narrative structures (the Inventory Tour, the Grand Journey, the Great Escape, and the Pivotal Moment). Moreover, I found that some combinations of place concepts and narrative structures were more conducive to the sort of critical thinking that would facilitate Mezirow's concept of transformative learning.

In my analysis of Assignment 2 (Photo Documentary Midrash), I found that students tended to incorporate one or more of the following place themes: Place as Community, Place as History, Place as Paradise, and Place as Authority. Here, I found that the nature of the themes that students opted to use was less important than their ability to conceive of the ways in which it might be possible to use *all four themes* in their work. In other words, a successful Photo Documentary Midrash in which students actively attempt to develop the “inclusive” and “reflective” (7-8) habits of mind that Mezirow describes tended to incorporate multiple perspectives and multiple ways of interpreting human connections with place, space, and environment.

In order to observe the extent to which students were able to develop more complex ideas about place, space, and environment over the course of our semester together, I designed two questionnaires⁵ that gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own conceptions of place, space, environment, and communication. In the following subsection, I explore the results of the Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires, and I consider the extent to which these results can help us better understand the work that students produced for Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 by referring to student reflections.

Analyzing Questionnaires

I began answering my first line of inquiry—changing definitions of place, space, and environment over time—by categorizing patterns in responses collected from the Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires. Below, I describe the four categories of change that I identified, and I provide the number of students who fell into each category where $n=26$:

- *No apparent change* (5 students identified) – Student answers either remained the same at the end of the semester or begin to reveal changes that the student does not know how to articulate.
- *Ambiguous change* (6 students identified) – Student answers seem to indicate change but are communicated in an ambiguous or cryptic manner.
- *Modest change* (6 students identified) – Answers reveal modest changes in the student’s ability to critically distinguish between place, space, and environment; however, students make significant changes in their awareness of place as a rhetorical consideration.

⁵ See Appendix A and Appendix B for the full text of each questionnaire.

- *Substantial change* (9 students identified) – Student answers are initially ambiguous or uncertain and evolve to incorporate knowledge of the extent to which ideas about place, space, and environment are socially constructed.

I will begin my review of these categories of change by commenting on the responses of students who seemed to make little to no progress in terms of complicating ideas about place, space, and environment.

In the *no apparent change* category, I found that Ben's responses to the Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires were practically identical and featured definitions of place, space, and environment that focused on size as the method of distinction: "All of these are intertwined but are vastly different. Ex: Housecat vs. Lion. . . Both belong to feline family but are very different." Another example of *no apparent change* can be found in Travis's End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire where he does not attempt to define place, space, and environment (making it difficult to judge any change), but he does offer the following comment:

My definitions of the words place, environment and space have greatly changed over this last semester. Place has been given a much deeper and more complex meaning to me . . . Environment used to have a very broad meaning to me and I rarely thought of things as environments. This class helped me think more about its meaning and what environments I interact in/with everyday.

Although it is difficult to see the change to which Travis is referring, I do recognize the positive backslash that unites the words "in" and "with" in reference to Travis's ability to reflect on his interactions with nature. In fact, Travis's conflation of the words "in" and

“with” reminds me of Freire’s thoughts on problem-posing education: “[it] affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (84).

Though Tammi’s responses to both Questionnaires do not indicate specific, measurable changes, they do seem to echo Freire’s positive reflection on the extent to which people in the process of learning are also “in the process of *becoming*” (84). For example, Tammi begins her Initial Questionnaire with very specific definitions of place, space, and environment: “Place – Somewhere that can be described and you can go there. Space – A smaller section, such as in a room, or a closet. Environment – Capable of supporting life.” On her End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire, Tammi decides against an itemized list and offers the following qualitative answer:

This semester, I have felt my workstyle change. I have never really had to write/think about a place or environment so much, and I feel that I had to change some things about myself. Place, environment, and space are all similar and different in different ways. You may have to think differently to write about each one.

Tammi’s response to the informal reflection essay⁶ for Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 also provides some useful context for her changing relationship with place, space, and environment:

What I liked most about my work for Unit 1 was how it helped me discover something new about myself. I have never really taken a class quite like this before, so I feel like I am learning some really new (and cool) things. I have

⁶ See Appendix C for the full text of the informal reflection essay prompt.

never had to take pictures for a class and actually know how they would make someone feel. In my high school, we always had to write very formal essays about the things they told us to. I feel that I am breaking away from my 'high school mode' of thinking.

Here, Tammi's ability to consciously reflect on her learning process as it was happening is, I argue, a positive step toward Freire's concept of conscientization or self-actualization through liberatory education.

In the *ambiguous change* category, students provided responses on both the Initial and End-of-the-Semester Questionnaires that were cryptic and difficult to interpret. For example, Nona's first response found her attempting to provide specific definitions of place, space, and environment: "A place is a limited area which is quite isolated. An environment is used when referring to more than a physical place . . . Space can be physical room or just a calm area." The *ambiguous change* to which I refer involves Nona's End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire where she opts to define these terms in relation to herself:

I found a place to be a city for me in my first paper about London. A place just happens to be a physical area where I can go. An environment, however, is the area which surrounds me. This includes my dorm room which represented the environment for my [Assignment 3, Advertising and Environment] paper.

Here, Nona seems to be entering or existing comfortably within Perry's Relativist world view that Bizzell describes as a position in which "knowing the world means devising an individual strategy for survival. For the student Relativist, education is a process of devising persuasive answers, since right answers no longer exist" (448). In Nona's case, the addition

of individualized responses involving the self seemed persuasive in terms of the semester's goals—complicating perceptions of place, space, and environment.

Sean made *ambiguous changes* that were similar to Nona's in that his responses seemed to situate him squarely in Perry's Relativist world view. To illustrate, Sean began the semester by defining place, space, and environment as terms that were related: "I think a place would best be described as any particular spot in the universe. An environment would be what surrounds a place, everything a place is made up of. Lastly, space is a certain area within boundaries of any place." In Sean's response to the End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire, he qualifies his original perspective by including "person" in his definition:

Place, environment, and space are all closely related. They are all based on the person. A place is a significant spot to a person. Environment is places around a person. Lastly, space is everything and anything relating to a person's place.

Here, I argue that Sean's decision to revise his previous definitions of place, space, and environment to include people rather than abstract ideas or things is a positive step toward complicating the relationships that exist between nature and discourse.

In the *modest changes* category, students developed definitions of place, space, and environment that were slightly more complex than their initial definitions. However, the most compelling change I noticed in this category concerns the students' ability to recognize place as a rhetorical consideration. For example, Melissa's initial response to my question about the possible connections between communication and "ecological concerns" was as follows: "Communication is some form of interaction between at least two people that makes them understand each other. People must be able to communicate their concerns in order to

improve or fix their concerns or reach an agreement.” At the end of the semester, Melissa had this to say about the connections she saw between communication and place, space, and environment:

Communication is creating an understanding between at least two people or living things. When you are in a specific place, environment, or space, sometimes there are other people or animals around you. In order to be able to coexist in the same place, space, or environment, certain amounts of communication are needed.

Melissa goes on to explain how people might make different communication decisions according to the demands of different places, but it is interesting to note how her concept of communication expands to include nonhuman nature as a participant and coexistence as a purpose of communication.

According to her responses, Martha made similar strides throughout the semester. For example, Martha begins the semester by identifying no connections between ecological concerns and communication (she leaves this question blank) and ends the semester by composing the following response:

Communication refers to the contact and relay of thoughts from one person to another. Place, environment, and space are connected because of the way you communicate in different places/environments/spaces. It is different communicating in a classroom than in a dorm room, or in emails where you need to be more specific to make up for lack of body language.

Martha’s willingness to consider place broadly—to include electronic or technological places—is a positive step toward understanding the extent to which the relationship between

discourse and environment permeates our lives. The change that Martha illustrates in the previous passage, however, is more meaningful in light of her response to the informal reflection essay that I asked students to write after we completed Assignment 1 and Assignment 2. Martha writes:

My Critical Personal Place Narrative did describe me but I think it could have been better. I should have thought to include my morals and thoughts. Not just the superficial part of my personality. Yes, I like soccer, and I love my family, but I also like to read and feel like I really need to figure out what I am going to do after college. I didn't say anything about how I feel about things and who I am as a person.

Here, Martha's ability to consciously reflect on the extent to which revision would allow her to develop a more critical and accurate portrait of herself and her relationship to a personal place is promising in light of the growth that she articulated in response to the End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire.

In my final category of change—*substantial changes*—students often began the semester with specific definitions of place, space, and environment that became increasingly flexible as the semester progressed. Moreover, I saw significant changes in some students' ability to conceive of place, space, and environment as socially constructed terms. For example, Mary, John, and Carl began the semester by offering very specific and direct examples of our terms; Mary's definition illustrates this point:

A place is an area with ground area, small or large, but not extremely small.

An environment is the surrounding physical features and relationship between

these features, and the influence on people . . . A space is either a smallish area with ground, or a volume of air anywhere, often confined by other things.

It is interesting to note, however, that all three students developed more ambiguous definitions of place, space and environment as the semester progressed. For example, Carl's End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire says, "I don't know how to define these words exactly," and John's answer echoes Carl's response: "To be honest, I still do not understand the definitive differences between these terms."

The *substantial change* to which this category refers took place within each student's reflection on the relationship between communication and place, space, and environment. For example, both Carl and John were unable to identify any connections between ecological concerns and communication at the beginning of the semester, and Mary's response was simple and to-the-point: "Need to be aware and share ideas and concerns (by communication) about ecology." At the end of the semester, Mary's response was more rhetorical in nature: "Timing, emotion, context and ethics can affect how an audience accepts a message just as place and a geographical/cultural/social environment can." In the same way, John's response refers to the manner in which communication affects "ideas and feelings pertaining to place/environment/space," and Carl's response indicates a heightened awareness of the socially-constructed nature of place, space, and environment: "I think environment has a lot of affect [*sic*] on communication and how effective it is. Not only obvious problems like noise level, but also the pre-existing ideas people have of an environment affect communication."

Lessons Learned

Early in this thesis, I offered Dobrin and Weisser's working definition of ecocomposition, and I will return to it now in order to highlight some of the lessons I have learned in the process of teaching an ecocomposition-informed course:

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 (primarily composition, but also including literary studies, communication, cultural studies, linguistics, and philosophy) 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)

In light of Dobrin and Weisser's definition and the challenges that students faced during our ecocomposition-informed course, I believe that a truly transformative ecocomposition pedagogy will equip students with a wide array of tools that they can use to articulate their perceptions of contested terms like place, space, and environment. Here, I refer to the manner in which students struggled during their Photo Documentary Midrash assignments; in their attempts to describe the "many sides" of a place, I feel that some students would have benefitted from greater access to terminology used in disciplines such as architecture or design. To this point, Dobrin and Weisser's emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of ecocomposition is well-taken.

Furthermore, a greater emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of ecocomposition would allow me to incorporate perspectives from fields pertaining to ecological studies. In particular, I think a greater ecological emphasis in my course would help students work more effectively toward the critical habits of mind that Mezirow describes. For example, one of the tenets of Mezirow's Transformation Theory pertains to a student's ability to see knowledge as something that is rhetorically and socially constructed. I believe we can help students increase their awareness of the extent to which people's conceptions of place, space, and environment are socially constructed by encouraging students to collaboratively compose their own rubric for identifying place concepts and themes. This idea is closely related to the rubric that William Cronon provides in his introduction to Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature. In this introduction, Cronon suggests seven ways in which nature is portrayed in daily life and media, and his rubric has helped me introduce the concept of rhetorical constructions of nature and place to students. However, I think that providing interdisciplinary readings focused on ecological concerns as well as media and cultural representations of place, space, and environment would equip students to *construct their own rubric* for evaluating place concepts. An activity in which students work collaboratively to compose their own analytical framework would help students more fully participate in the liberatory pedagogy for which Freire advocated. In other words, bringing students closer to the means of producing and deconstructing knowledge would help them "perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (49).

Another lesson I will take from my experience with ecocomposition involves the use of student work as text in the classroom. For example, in my analysis of the work that

students produced for Assignment 2, the Photo Documentary Midrash, I noted several ways in which individual students could have usefully heightened their level of criticism by incorporating more or different ways of seeing place, space, and environment. To this point, I noticed that the presence of multiple place themes in a student composition revealed the development of critical habits of thought—habits that often unearthed problematic perspectives that demanded further inquiry and reflection. Evaluating these assignments was worrisome for me. On the one hand, I wanted to value the critical work that students had achieved in the space of their compositions; on the other hand, I was uneasy leaving unearthed hegemonic concepts of place, space, and environment to lie in plain view without subjecting them to further analysis or reflection. Here, I think it would be helpful to have students revisit their Photo Documentary Midrash as well as their Critical Personal Place Narratives at the end of the semester in order to subject student work to further reflection and interrogation. At this point, I am reminded of bell hooks's suggestion that teachers should respect "the aspect of our vocation that is sacred" (13) by valuing the willingness of our students to incur risk during the transformative learning process. I mention hooks's suggestion here, because asking students to revisit their earlier work with a more critical and perceptive eye could invite students to bear witness to their own involvement in oppressive or hegemonic discourses. Though these moments can be liberating and transformational, I believe teachers should honor student risk by willingly subjecting their own concepts of place, space, and environment to similar analytical processes.

I will conclude this study by suggesting two areas that I feel are worthy of further study. First, the purpose of this thesis did not allow me the space to comment on student perceptions of all the ecomposition-informed assignments that accompanied the Critical

Personal Place Narrative and the Photo Documentary Midrash. However, I think it is important for me to note that a significant number of students identified Assignment 3—Analysis of Advertising and Environment—as an influential assignment. I suspect that students found this assignment influential because it asked them to go out into their local worlds and analyze an advertisement with which they had developed a personal, localized relationship. Furthermore, I brought ecofeminist concerns to bear on this particular assignment by facilitating class discussions about the extent to which racist, gendered, and violent images in advertising constitute a hazardous environment for all people. Though some students reacted strongly to these discussions, many felt that the conversations were worthwhile and informative. For this reason, ecofeminist concerns about the intersections of race, class, gender, and environment could inform an interesting study about critical literacy and advertising analysis in composition courses.

Finally, the second area for further study suggested in this thesis involves the last major essay that students completed in our ecocomposition-informed course. Assignment 5—Argument, Advocacy, and Place—asked students to compose an argumentative research essay in which they researched diverse perspectives on a local issue related to place or environment and advocated on behalf of the local community's interests. Student response to this assignment was positive in that many of them enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about issues that were affecting their local communities. In light of the progress that students made during our time together in an ecocomposition-informed course, I think that further study of the relationship between ecocomposition and student involvement in issues of local importance would help compositionists broaden their understanding of student authorship

and agency and would allow students the opportunity to more fully live *with* the world by witnessing the ways in which their compositions can do creative work *in* the world.

Appendix A.

Initial Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out more about your views on broad topics such as ecology and communication. Please remember that you may skip any question at any time, and do not answer any questions that make you uncomfortable in any way.

1. In a few sentences, briefly describe how you personally define the following terms: place, environment, and space.
2. What do you think are the most important differences between a “place,” a “space,” and an “environment”? What are the most important similarities?
3. How do you personally define “communication”? What connections do you see between “communication” and ecological concerns?

Appendix B.

End-of-the-Semester Questionnaire

Please read each prompt and respond to the questions with as much detail as you can. In your response, feel free to incorporate any information that you think is relevant or helpful. Thank you!

1. Take some time to reflect on your work this semester. As you reflect, consider the various ways in which you define terms like place, environment, and space. Please write a paragraph in which you explain your definitions. (It might be helpful to compare and contrast them.)
2. As you look back on the work we've done this semester, which assignment(s) stand out as your favorite(s), and which assignment(s) influenced the way you think about place, environment, and/or space? Take a moment to explain this influence, and feel free to reference any assignments in your response.
3. How do you personally define communication? In your view, how or to what extent are communication and place/environment/space connected? In your response, feel free to use personal examples or examples from our class.

Appendix C.

Reflection Essay

Take out a sheet of paper, and write a Reflection Essay in which you thoughtfully answer at least three of the following questions with regard to the Critical Personal Place Narrative and the Documentary Photo Essay. Please provide examples.

1. How well did your work during Unit One fulfill the purpose of both assignments?
2. What problems did you face while you worked on Unit One, and how did you resolve them?
3. What do you like most about your work for Unit One. Why?
4. What could you have done differently to strengthen your work? What could I have done differently to help you?
5. Describe your composing process for Unit One, and explain how you will change/modify it for future assignments.

Appendix D.

Assignment 1

Unit 1: Assignment #1 Critical Personal Place Narrative

Audience and Purpose

In keeping with our recent discussions regarding how we interact and relate to the space around us, this assignment asks for you to reflect on a personal experience with a place and how you have carried that experience through your life. For this assignment it is important to keep in mind who your audience is, as you will need to recreate an interaction you had with a particular place that has occurred in your life and to transfer that experience critically to writing.

- Your audience will be your instructor, your peers, and yourself to some extent.
- You will be writing a scene/event/experience that has in some way shaped your relationship with a particular space. The point of emphasis in this essay will rest mainly in how you demonstrate the significance of your relationship to a certain space.

Assignment

While the key to writing a personal essay—writing nonfiction—is to recreate the place you choose and your interaction with it as close to the truth as possible, your audience will not expect you to remember conversations and other details exactly as they occurred. At the same time, do not to deceive your audience by fictionalizing pieces of your story or by exaggerating to extremes.

Prewriting

Think of a specific place that has shaped your identity. This place could possibly have shaped who you are, your opinions, and/or your ideals. Put yourself back in that place, but be sure this is a place you are comfortable enough to share with your audience. Where were you? What occurred at this place that has affected you? Was the interaction limited to a few instances, or was it extended over a long time? What did you see/say/do? Critically re-create that place by using specific details—showing us what you saw and letting us hear conversation through dialogue.

Here are some approaches to prewriting in an effort to recreate this place:

- Draw a map or a picture of the place and make it as detailed as possible,
- List any sounds, smells, textures or sights that may help the audience understand your chosen place,
- If applicable, list people who interacted in this place with you and how their interaction with it may have shaped your own view of it.

These are only a few suggestions, as there are many ways to begin writing an essay. If you have any questions during the drafting process, don't wait; let me know as soon as possible.

Revision

With this nonfiction genre, it may be difficult to distance yourself enough from your story to appropriately revise it. It is essential that you have several people critically read your essay

(meaning people outside your peer response group). As you write, construct a list of concerns and questions and ask your reviewers to check the clarity of your story so they can look for particular areas that concern you. We will also workshop your essay in class, so you'll have a chance to share concerns with your classmates as well.

Appendix E.

Assignment 2

Unit 1: Assignment #2

Photo Documentary Midrash: Seeing a “place” from many sides

Audience and Purpose

For some time now, you have been working on a critical personal narrative about a place that has had a significant impact on your life. We will carry this theme—how we interact with and relate to the space around us—into the second assignment for our Unit 1 portfolio. This assignment asks you and a partner to use your documentary photography skills to document a moment in the life of a place. You and your partner will publish your documentary essay on your course blog site, so it is important for you to consider your audience. For this assignment, you should also consider the idea that Internet publishing significantly widens your audience. Therefore, this assignment will also focus on creating and establishing an Internet identity.

- Your audience will be your instructor, your peers, and anyone else who might “surf” to your blog’s Documentary Photo Essay entry.
- You and your partner will pick a location—your dorm room, a commons area, aisle 5 at the Wal-Mart, etc.—and document what takes place in that location with the documentary photography skills you learned in Compose, Design, Advocate (Chapters 9 and 11). Individually, you will publish a web page that displays at least four of your photographs. You will also need to supply a brief analytical caption for each photo on your blog.

Assignment

Begin this assignment by collaboratively selecting a location to document; the location should be specific, such as a local coffee shop or commons area in a fraternity or sorority house. With a camera (digital or other), take a range of photographs that will make an audience (re)consider the place; to do this, you will need to visit the place at different points in the day. You should also take photographs that capture specific details that occur within the place. For example, you could take a panoramic photo of a McDonald’s restaurant and follow it with several images of smaller details: photos of the fryers, a person placing an order, or a child racing down the swirly slide.

Your next step is to design a blog entry in which you will display your photographs so that readers can see the “many sides” of your place. You may work together to select and arrange your photos, and you may collaboratively create the theme, focus, and ideas for your image captions. However, each group member is **individually** responsible for: (1) posting the photo essay to her or his blog site and (2) writing the critical captions. For each image, **individually** compose a brief analytical caption (150-200 words) in which you reflect on the following:

- The content of the photo (What is happening?)
- The larger meaning or implications of that content (What is not in the image and why? What circumstances give rise to this place?)
- The rhetorical decisions you made throughout the composing process (How did you select your photos? How did you design your photos? Here, you should discuss

things like vectors of attention, framing, and cropping. You should also experiment with rhetorical terms like logos, ethos, and pathos.)

Prewriting

It may be helpful for you to take many photographs of your place so that you have a wide variety of “sides” to consider. Because you will be working with a partner, effective communication and collaboration are essential to the success of this project. Begin by brainstorming about the location you have selected: How are your experiences with this place different? How are they the same?

Here are some things you should consider while you are documenting your place:

- How does the space invite or discourage interaction?
- How does the function or purpose of the place change over time?
- Be conscious of what is not present (wildlife, human-made machinery, trash, etc.).

Revision

As with all of our work this semester, (re)visioning and re-seeing your writing is a critical move in the composition process. Therefore, it is important to elicit the input of people both inside and outside of class (and at all stages in the writing process) in order to make both your blog and your photographic essay more aesthetically pleasing.

Note

All students currently enrolled at Iowa State University are eligible to check out various types of technological gadgets—including digital cameras and laptops. Find out more about reserving cameras at: <http://www.it.iastate.edu/checkout/students.html>

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