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From Environmental Rhetoric to Ecocomposition and Ecopoetics: Finding a Place for Professional Communication

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This essay sketches a theoretical rationale for a revived pedagogy and research program in environmental studies within the field of professional communication. The first wave of such studies drew upon themes established by environmental rhetoric and ecocriticism within the Cold War context of political environmentalism. The second wave might well look to ecocomposition and ecopoetics in developing a new kind of ecologically sensitive workplace study and a renewed interest in the language of space and place and the concepts of local and global in teaching and research.

TWO NEW BUMPER STICKERS

Back in the 1980s when writing teachers were striving to replace the Back to Basics trend with Process, Not Product, it occurred to me that any pedagogy one could reduce to a bumper sticker was somehow worrisome. It was the act of severe reduction that caused my mind to resist, much as it did when, during the same period, some technical writers with whom I was consulting at a national lab told me that whenever they took a proposal to one ranking official in the Department of Energy, on his demand, they had to reduce their presentation to six bullets. Every discourse came down to a six-shooter, wild-west communication among strong, silent types.

Hearing this scenario, I kept remembering George Orwell’s 1984—the way the fictional government in the novel uses the impoverished language of “Newspeak” to reduce the options of thought, thus undermining the possibility for critique among citizens. A few years after the real 1984 had passed, Jackie Palmer and I
honored Orwell’s memory by coining the term *Ecospeak* to name a form of rhetoric that involved reducing public debate about the natural environment into two opposing options—environmentalist versus developer, for example, or clean air versus new jobs.

So it is with no little self-irony that I find myself offering two slogans to guide a revived ecological pedagogy and research program for professional communication:

1. Writing Takes Place
2. Localization Begins at Home

In suggesting these fit-for-bumper-sticker slogans, I take consolation only in my belief that they point not toward a reduction but toward an expansion of thinking about what constitutes technical communication. They stand as an invitation to think of ecology not merely as a set of problems taken up by experts and interest groups—clean air, land use, risk management, toxic waste disposal, global warming, environmental racism, and the like—but as a broader set of concerns that potentially transform the field.

**WRITING TAKES PLACE** in the sense that it always comes from somewhere and bears the marks of its place of origin even in a mobile, globalized, networked community of discourse users. The virtual and the global, despite promotional claims to the contrary, never entirely slip free of the real and the local. Localization, a term used these days to signify the differences a text must undergo to be effectively exported to a new site, begins with an understanding of the ecology within the context of production, that is, **LOCALIZATION BEGINS AT HOME**. We need to understand where we are coming from before we can understand where we are going.

I expand the bumper stickers further in their own sections later in the article and then deal with their implications for research and pedagogy, but first I offer a brief review of the history of environmental studies within rhetoric, criticism, and technical communication. Readers already initiated in these studies can profitably skip the following background section and move directly to the exposition of **WRITING TAKES PLACE**.

**The Background: Environmental Rhetoric, Ecocriticism, and Technical Communication, or NUKE THE WHALES!**

I was once told by an organizer of national meetings that the reason for a limited interest in environmental communication among technical writers was that so few of them actually worked in the environmental field, meaning, I suppose, that they did not write about environmental issues such as oil spills and air pollution or work for the U.S. Forest Service or the environmental divisions of the oil companies. Most technical writers in those days worked for big defense contractors and computer companies.
This tendency to classify environmental concerns topically and vocationally was reinforced by the first generation of studies in environmental technical communication. Whatever else one may say about this work, the output was impressive. A list of the books alone would have to include Cantrill and Oravec’s *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of the Environment*, Herndl and Brown’s *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, Coppola and Karis’s *Technical Communication, Deliberative Rhetoric, and Environmental Discourse*, Killingsworth and Palmer’s *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics*, Peterson’s *Sharing the Earth: The Rhetoric of Sustainable Development*, Sauer’s *The Rhetoric of Risk: Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments*, and Waddell’s “And No Birds Sing”: *The Rhetoric of Rachel Carson*.

The topical focus in these works and in the many shorter articles and chapters remained relatively tight, limited to subjects and genres of communication that could be classified as specifically environmental. Those of us who identified our work as somehow environmental focused on such topics as environmental impact statements (Killingsworth and Steffens), landscape photography (Frost; Wickliff), government reports (Rude), and other forms of “gray literature” (Schlenz). We wrote about campaigns to save the red wolf (Rauch) or the great lakes (Waddell, “Saving”), about national parks, wilderness areas, and public lands, and the rangers, scientists, and activists who joined forces to maintain, study, and protect those places (Chiavello; Ingham; Karis).

We responded to the charges of vocational irrelevancy head on. Both James Souther and Craig Waddell argued for an intensification of scholarship in environmental communication on the basis of job opportunities. “Spurred by environmental legislation and, more generally, by the heightened environmental concern that inspired such legislation,” Waddell wrote, “environmental communication has become one of the fastest-growing [professional] areas within scientific and technical communication” (“Defining” 3).

But technical communication is more than a job description, is it not? The professionalization of the environment leaves us thinking that only certain groups are touched by ecological concerns and the interest in place: nature writers, environmental activists, ecological scientists, environmental engineers, and government agents—a large number of people, most certainly, but nothing close to an overwhelming percentage of those who work in the field known as technical communication, or more broadly, professional communication.

I would suggest that although this hyperspecialization, which might have made the natural environment seem irrelevant to the largest percentage of teachers and researchers in technical communication, follows trends associated with modernism in general, the particular context of the Cold War and the persistent threat of nuclear destruction intensified specialization in the technical fields. In this argument, as in so many others, it was Kenneth Burke, who led the way. In the quintessential work of postwar rhetorical scholarship, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke
clearly had the Manhattan Project in mind when he suggested that it is all too convenient for scientists to seal off their specializations and radically separate technical from ethical issues. In so doing, they can live in a constant state of denial about their responsibility for their research and their inventions. Robert Oppenheimer can proclaim the technical sweetness of the atom bomb even while acknowledging its moral terror (see Rhodes).

The contextually augmented tendency to define—and confine—technical problems as the business of special interests, technical experts, and academic specialists spread into other fields of work and study as well. And the purveyors of humanistic environmental studies contributed to the trend by looking for ways to make their work special and different, to create the characteristics of discipline and expertise. In the usual manner of literary studies, ecocriticism accomplished this specialization by creating a canon of privileged texts. The first generation of ecocritics focused all but exclusively on clearly definable nature writing, canonizing British Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley and American essayists in the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau with their clear sense of nature as having political as well as philosophical and poetic appeals (Bate, Romantic; Buell, Environmental; Kroeber; see the introduction to Killingsworth, Walt, for a review of this trend). Environmental rhetoric, in tying activist work and political discourse into science and technology, fed directly into the more specialized fields of scientific rhetoric and technical communication, so that my book Ecospeak, framed as a general study of environmental rhetoric in America, could be categorized as a work on technical and scientific communication in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) awards competition of 1992.

Early studies in environmental technical communication were not only marked by the trend toward specialization but also reflected on the key themes of Cold War politics. Consider, for example, a central figure in both environmental rhetoric and ecocriticism—Rachel Carson. She is the author of the 1962 classic Silent Spring and by profession a science writer employed by the U.S. government and someone all professional communicators should be happy to claim as one of their own. Carson’s language resonates with the global sensibility and the general edginess of the atomic age. She describes pesticides as biocides, a broad-based threat to life with as wide a range and a capacity to kill equally devastating, if not as dramatic, as nuclear weaponry. Dramatizing the threat is Carson’s business. In her famous prologue, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” for example, she sketches an apocalyptic future of a human race fully capable of destroying itself and all life on earth—echoing with uncanny power the civil defense films and Cold War propaganda that every schoolchild encountered in the age of fallout shelters and the Red scare (see Brain; Glotfelty; Killingsworth and Palmer, “Discourse,” Ecospeak, and “Millennial”; Waddell, “And No Birds”).

Building upon Carson’s success, the ecologist Paul Ehrlich sounded the alarm again in 1968 with The Population Bomb. His concept of a population explosion
captured the attention of a public wary of worldwide disaster. After Carson and Ehrlich, apocalyptic narratives predominated in literary as well as activist writing, including thousands of science fiction stories about the end of the world and in postapocalyptic satires such as Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* and Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The news media got into the act as well, developing a taste for what the global climate specialist Stephen Schneider called “the four Ds”—drama, disaster, debate, and dichotomy (206).

But it was the science writers like Carson, Ehrlich, and Schneider himself who got things started. And in studies of environmental discourse, nature continues to appear not so much as the source and setting of life but as a problem or potential problem, a disaster waiting to happen, attended by a series of ongoing debates, from John Muir’s fight over the Hetch-Hetchy Valley in the 1890s to senate hearings on global warming in the 1980s. The three related fields of environmental rhetoric, ecocriticism, and environmental communication would produce such titles as *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Buell), “Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to Global Warming” (Killingsworth and Palmer), and *The Rhetoric of Risk: Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments* (Sauer)—doom and disaster on all sides. Perhaps the spirit of the age, as well as the connection between nuclear fear and environmentalism, was best captured in the seriocomic T-shirt slogan NUKE THE WHALES!

In the current atmosphere of economic globalization and global terrorism, a new agenda beacons. The doom-and-disaster studies will continue to absorb specialists with the stomach for that sort of thing—and well they should, because the problems of environmental protection did not end with the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequent easing of the global nuclear threat. Now the threats are far more insidious, and in many ways the global aspect of the threats has been redistributed and requires a kind of perverse localization to be understandable. I suspect a new language will emerge for discussing the ways that human beings live within the natural environment that reflects the new historical context, particularly the fear of terrorist attack. We should be on the lookout for the new discourse trends.

Meanwhile, some of us have perceived a lifting of the barriers of specialization and have noticed a new set of themes in humanistic environmental studies, the range of which is suggested by recent works traveling under the banners of ecocomposition and ecopoetics. For the remainder of this essay, I will call attention to these new directions and suggest their relevance for students and teachers of technical communication.

**ECOCOMPOSITION: WRITING TAKES PLACE**

A variation on the bumper sticker *WRITING TAKES PLACE* could be *ECOLOGY IS FOR EVERYBODY*. Composition specialists beginning with Marilyn Cooper’s influ-
ential College English essay of 1986, “An Ecology of Writing,” have explored the idea that all writing connects to an environment in ways that are little understood and require further study. Cooper suggests that ecology is not so much a metaphor for context as a replacement concept. Context suggests background, something that merely surrounds without deeply informing. Ecology suggests the living ground of a composition, what it springs from, what it requires for its meaning and its appeal to strike home.

The idea receives its fullest treatment in the 1999 neocognitivist work of Margaret A. Syverson, The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition. Syverson views writing as sharing the qualities of all complex systems and emerging within an ecological matrix involving four primary characteristics:

1. Writing is distributed, “both divided and shared among agents and structures in the environment,” as well as “distributed across space and time in an ensemble of interrelated activities” (7).
2. Writing emerges during the process of composition; that is, conditions and formations such as meaning, genre, and style arise in process, and although they behave in an ordered fashion, that order cannot necessarily be predicted or controlled formulaically.
3. Writing is embodied. Despite the “massive suppression of awareness of this physical relationship” in academic life, all human cognitive and communicative activities are rooted in physical life—“clasping a book, moving the eyes across a line of text, using the muscles of the hand, arm, and fingers to handle a pen or keyboard” (13)—and the conditions of such embodiment have deep impacts on writing.
4. Writing is enacted when knowledge results from “an ongoing interpretation that emerges through activities and experiences situated in specific environments” (13); “every act of knowing brings forth a world” and “all knowing is doing” (13–14).

Building upon this theoretical foundation and adding a deep awareness of the history and practices of environmental rhetoric and ecocriticism, such scholars as Sid Dobrin, Christian Weisser, and Derek Owens have called for a new approach to teaching writing that they call ecocomposition. For them, ecology becomes something more than a set of themes that occupy the attention of a special group of authors and texts. Instead it appears as a component in every text—the writer’s realization of spatial limits and contexts, a concern with the place that any text occupies in the world. It also becomes a model for how authors and readers join in a web of discourse clearly anchored in the roots and soil of earthly life. The ecocompositionists want to know where as well as how and why writing works.

It was Dobrin, in fact, who gave me my first bumper sticker, WRITING TAKES PLACE. In an essay with that title, he tries to anticipate, and squelch, the assump-
tion that “ecocomposition, because of its emphasis upon ecology, is […] identified as an environmentalist approach to composition studies, just as ‘ecology’ is often used synonymously with ‘environmentalism’ by the popular press” or that “ecocomposition deals solely with nature writing and with environmental rhetoric and that it addresses environmentalism as a subject” (13). It is much more than that, he claims:

While […] informed by environmental and ecological theory and [concerned with] the ways in which nature gets written and mapped, part of ecocomposition must also be the study of the sites and places of writing […] not just natural environments but other environments: classroom environments, electronic environments, writing environments, and textual environments since […] these are some of the many locations in which the relationships between discourse and place are highly political and in which actual learning takes place. (13)

Ecocomposition, especially in problematizing the relationship among sites and places, raises some unsettling questions for technical communication. Above all, the concept of an ecologically rooted textual and rhetorical situation places in question the nearly exclusive concern of professional communicators with workplaces, global discourse communities, and virtual realities. The ubiquitous experience of computer mediation in current discourse tends to obscure the importance of place in writing. Even in some composition studies that claim to be ecological, the writing environment becomes identified not with particular regions, cities, schools, and neighborhoods but with the global computer network.

This view gains strength when reinforced by the prevailing model of the mind as a central processing unit—a concept borrowed from cognitive psychology in the 1970s and 1980s (rendered obsolete by the complex cognitive science and systems theory that scholars like Syverson are using these days). Such metaphors as those that call the mind a computer work because they resonate with our bodily experiences of material reality. If our fingers are in hourly contact with computer keyboards and our eyes scan display monitors practically every minute of the day, it is no wonder that we use the computer as a model as well as a tool for thinking and writing. Bathed in the light of the digital display and tucked away in climate-controlled offices and studies, we are bound to find appeal in Jean-François Lyotard’s famous claim that the computer is the new nature. Add the fact that the high-tech industry has dominated the job market in professional communication, and the appeal becomes close to irresistible. Resist, and you are labeled a Luddite. But as the high-tech market for professional communicators begins to weaken, perhaps the time is right for an alternative to emerge.

Ecocomposition urges us to start with the question of place: Is it really the same experience to use a computer in New York and in Beijing? Recent work in international communication suggests that it is not. In an effort to accommodate informa-
tion products for global markets, the consultant Nancy Hoft follows industry practice in proposing a system to develop unfinished core documents in corporate headquarters that can be localized once they are delivered to sites of use. This approach has attracted a number of adherents. A representative from a high-tech firm that hires a number of students from my state university suggested that our technical communication curriculum include courses in localization, how to take centrally developed information and make it useful in diverse contexts. The need for localization hints that the problem of local and global goes beyond the question of how far a network stretches. Once again, writing takes place.

**ECOPOETICS: LOCALIZATION BEGINS AT HOME**

The trouble with localization—and more generally, with determining and representing the place of professional communication—is that we are talking about an activity developed within a modernized culture, and like all activities and artifacts associated with modernism, writing tends to pull free of place. At best, it is footloose, mobile, and portable (as in exportable and importable); at worst, it is alienated, abstracted, and homeless. The home toward which modernist writing yearns is utopia, which literally means no place.

Consider what we mean by the word *site*, and maybe you’ll see what I’m getting at. Ostensibly the word *site* is synonymous with place, but typically we restrict the meaning in very special ways. Sites of study for naturalistic research in our field, what we usually call workplace research, tend for the most part to have the same recurring elements: the conference rooms, the cubicles with computer workstations, the white plasterboard and beige plastic, the telephones and copy machines, the receptionists, the security guards, and the supervisors in their glass-enclosed offices—the kind of place satirized in a film my daughter introduced me to, *Office Space*, which I recommend to anyone who has been reading a lot of workplace studies. (In my favorite scene, the protagonist comes to the office straight from a fishing outing at the lake, cleans a fish on his computer desk, and tosses the guts on a stack of unfinished reports.)

*Site* can also mean a text or document, usually in historical or critical studies that involve close reading, with the implication that we go to reading as if it were a place, as prototypical modernist individuals conditioned by the culture of literacy described in the work of Ong and McLuhan. A slightly extended version would see a global discourse community as a site, a network of literate agents known primarily by their texts—the journals, listservs, letters, and e-mails of an academic discipline or special-interest group—a view that Joseph Harris critiqued years ago as a suspect application of the “community” concept, which, he suggests, ought to have clear links to specific geographical places (see also Killingsworth, “Discourse Communities”).

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One more meaning of *site*, perhaps the most telling, is the Internet site, which strives for the constellation of effects that we call virtual reality or cyberspace. Virtual reality involves software that gives the illusion of space surrounding and absorbing the user, simulating experiences of all kinds: online sites teach, train, and sell products, allow us to do work, play games, and watch the news via interfaces that make us feel as if we were really there—but then again not. These artifacts claim to be better than the reality they replace because they can be delivered at a distance or at a lower cost than the real thing. A person can enjoy the sensation, the emotion, and in the case of pornography even the physical stimulation while reducing or eliminating the real risks of what the characters in William Gibson’s cyberpunk novels call the meat world. Virtuality appeals to the modernist sensibility because it claims to have realized the utopian ideal, a place that is no place. It makes excellent science fiction because it has the dystopic potential of all utopian visions. In dystopian fiction—from the early twentieth-century short story masterpiece “The Machine Stops” by E. M. Forster to William Gibson’s cyberpunk visions—virtual reality fails when the roof leaks, the machine breaks, the network goes down, and real life intrudes. The mind wakes up and finds itself attached to a body, and the body is made of the earth’s own clay.

To pursue the question of what we mean by *site*, the emerging field of study known as ecopoetics may prove useful (see especially Bate, *Song*; Buell, *Writing*; Killingsworth, *Walt*). Poetics is a division of theory traditionally associated with the study of poetry but more generally concerned with the art or craft of writing, particularly the making of beauty and meaning in verbal forms. As environmental rhetoric yields to a broadening concern with place in ecocomposition, so the reflective and reactive practices of ecocriticism in literary studies finds a complement in ecopoetics and its treatment of verbal possibility and productivity. Ecopoetics tries to say what happens to the things and places of the earth—the mockingbird and the bluebonnet, the forest and the meadow—when we represent them in language, when we use words like *nature* and *environment* to talk about the earth, when we personify, objectify, idealize, metaphorize, and textualize—and in turn what happens to human thinking and behavior in the process.

Ecopoetics would have us consider what kinds of tropes we use when we talk about sites. In one sense we are speaking metaphorically or rather creating a metaphorical series that with each extension takes us farther away from any connection with the earth. A metaphor is an identification of one thing with a seemingly different thing, or a substitution of one thing for another. To start at the end of the chain I have just suggested in my survey of sites, we are speaking metaphorically when we call a node on the Internet a “site.” (Personally, I have no idea what the “thing” really is, some intersection or intermingling of electrons, I suppose.) This substitution links back to previous metaphors: the text of a document is said to be a site, and the association of likeminded people who use a common language is said to be a discourse community (a global village, to give a slight twist to McLuhan’s famous formulation).
The website appears as a place that enfolds the other two conceptual entities: the library or archive of documents and the community of writers. To go back another step, the workplaces—home or office—where these writers create the associations, the texts and the websites are places in a more literal sense but are still subject to a figurative way of thinking. In workplace studies, the site functions as a synecdoche, the trope in which a part stands for the whole. The office is never the whole picture of the workplace but only the focal point of study. The car drive or train ride to work, the home support system, the neighborhood, the bioregion, not to mention the body or physical condition of the individual, would all seem to make a huge difference in the quality of the person’s work. But the chain of figurative associations we typically construct tends to eliminate or de-emphasize those connections.

Thus the workplace synecdoche truncates what the phenomenologists call the lifeworld. The text of the document and the discourse community at a distance substitute for face-to-face interaction. And finally, the website substitutes for the office. Now the person writing is as completely enclosed in a mechanically supported mental world as is anybody in the history of human life. This reduced or recontextualized version of the person is the primary subject of our studies in professional communication.

LOCALIZATION AS A PEDAGOGICAL AND SCHOLARLY IDEAL: A FANTASY

As a corrective to this limited vision, and as a memorial to the recently departed Fred Rogers, who, after all, created a virtual neighborhood for millions of young TV viewers, I invite you to join me in a thought experiment. Imagine that before he died, Mr. Rogers made two more of those grainy little films he sometimes showed about where food comes from or how rubber is made. The first would involve a split screen that would show how two professional communicators on different sides of the world make their way home from work. Mr. Li in Beijing and Ms. Lee in New York would each shut down the computer for the day and leave the office. I suspect that we would see the differences begin almost immediately, from the moment the workers gather their things together to head home. The second film would show what happens when a person plugs a computer or cell-phone recharger into the wall, how the path of energy leads inexorably back to some coal-fired, oil-fueled, hydroelectric, or nuclear power plant. It would finish by showing how smoke molecules from one of the big coal-fired plants in New Mexico probably reached the nostrils of people walking around on a fine spring day in New York City so that somebody in southern California could recharge a cell phone.
Films like these, or research narratives that provide the same kinds of information, could serve as the foundation for an ecopoetically informed course of study in localization. The course would begin at home, not the home office of the corporation but the home on the range, or on the plains, on the coast, by the park, or in the neighborhood. The course would restore what gets metaphorically or synecdochally replaced in our understanding of sites. It would bring back places the way that criticism sensitive to the concerns of gender, race, class, and sexuality brings back the body, and it would reconnect the restored body to the remembered earth.

Of course the monumental scope of such projects limits the practicality of my plan, which may be impractical for other reasons as well. First, with all the restrictions on information going in and out of the workplace these days—obsessive secrecy being the one fact of corporate life that does not seem to vary much from place to place—workplace studies may be doomed anyway (see Palmer and Killingsworth). And second, there is no guarantee that the results of ecopoetically sensitive projects in localization would be useful. Ecopoetics has more to do with meaning and beauty than with utility, and utility is enshrined alongside utopia in the pantheon of values in technical communication.

But as long as we have a narrow and specialized view of place, we may as well have a correspondingly narrow view of utility. My work with the ecopoetics of American nature poetry suggests that aesthetic appeal along with political sensitivity tend to diminish as authors stray from familiar ground. Much as businesses and armies often go to pieces when they stretch their resources too far, poetry generally suffers from overextension. Walt Whitman’s work, for example, rings true and clear when he writes from his firsthand experience of the New York islands in his most widely admired poems, such as “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” and “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” but as his vision creeps westward in such poems as “Song of the Redwood-Tree” and goes global in works like “Passage to India,” the ideologies of manifest destiny and other forms of imperialistic ego, not to mention an overplay of abstractions and generalities, mar his performance (see Killingsworth, *Walt*).

Note that the aesthetic has deep connections to the political. The tendency of poets writing in the global mode is to treat nature as an abstraction—Nature with a capital *N*, the idea of Nature rather than the things, patterns, and processes of the material earth, Nature emptied of its earthy contents and filled with human politics and history. What usually happens is that in striving for the universal and in rejecting the regional as somehow paltry and inconsequential, modern poetry tends to invert the old environmentalist bumper sticker, THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY. Any attempt to act globally probably entails an imposition of overextended local thinking. Thus it is essential that we understand the local elements of our own products and visions before we assume their universal applicability. Writing takes place, and localization begins at home.
So What *Can We Do?*

Until somebody smarter than I finds a way to integrate the principles of ecological awareness and serious localization into practical workplace ethnography, what are we left to do? I would say teach. A place-conscious, ecopoetically informed pedagogy offers a way into the closed doors of business through the minds and hearts of future workers and managers. We are always hearing about the need to bring workplace concerns into the classroom. Should we not insist that the road runs both ways?

Compared to some of my more radical comrades like Dobrin, Weisser, and Owens, I am a bit more circumspect about practicing environmental politics in the classroom (or feminist, race, class, and labor politics, all of which are close to my own heart, admittedly liberal and bleeding). But again, ecology can be defined poetically and pedagogically even if you do not subscribe totally to the environmentalist agenda or to the many updated and related agendas, such as animal rights, bioregionalism, and antiglobalization.

So, I close with a few suggestions for a revised pedagogy, most of which I have adapted for the study of professional communication from Owens’ 2001 ecocompositionist manifesto *Composition and Sustainability,* which, despite its apocalyptic subtitle—*Teaching for a Threatened Generation*—suggests a number of ways to avoid associating ecological concern with the Cold War mood of doom and gloom.

Here are some simple adjustments to raise awareness and shift practice toward place-centeredness in your daily teaching:

- In all examples of writing you analyze, add questions involving the metaphors of place and space, such as why are so many websites modeled on the shopping mall? “Visit our website” has almost become synonymous with “We have something to sell you.”
- In guiding topic selection, making assignments for papers, and choosing examples to analyze and discuss with your students, consider using environmental themes, stressing the multidisciplinary nature of ecological matters. One advantage in ecologically oriented research is the availability of relevant government documents and websites, not only from the Environmental Protection Agency but also from most other agencies, all of which are governed by environmental regulations and must take considerations of place and space into account. Working in the public domain has been, for me at least, a welcome relief from the hothouse atmosphere of the secretive corporate world.
- In service-learning projects and internships, do not lose the wonderful opportunity to teach localization. Be sure that a concern with tying the experience to global issues does not overwhelm the local nature of the project. For exam-
ple, in working with local government projects, students in one program at my university are encouraged to research similar projects in comparable towns and make recommendations based on failures and successes elsewhere. Here is a great chance for localization, for showing how comparison must also include contrast, how local conditions differ from those where similar projects have been undertaken.

- In teaching communication ethics, a topic covered in all the textbooks these days, include questions about sustainability, environmental protection, and place appropriateness. For example, what is the “environmental footprint,” as Owens puts it (215), of the practices we recommend and undertake? I am personally haunted by a question that a researcher in toxicology told me that he asks every time he hears a proposal for using chemicals in agriculture: Who lives downstream? Another good one comes from studies of ecological justice and environmental racism: Who pays the highest environmental costs for this project? (See Bullard, for example.) Environmental ethics makes clear the connection of human practices to local ecologies and the connection of various regions to one another through the media of air, water, and land. Should we not add these natural media to the media studies that focus all but exclusively on oral, print, and electronic media?

- Above all, contextualize computer usage. Do not merely replicate the cubicles and isolation portrayed in workplace studies in your own computer classrooms. One possible exercise I can think of arises from a memory I have of meeting my former colleague and esteemed mentor Don Cunningham leading his students into the parking lot near the English building to remove and reinstall the radiator hoses in their cars and then write about the experience. Why not have students do some such thing in ordinary settings and then in virtual reality? Or simply have them write and read papers together using pencils and then using computers—or compare face-to-face conversation with computer chatting. Have them analyze the experience by asking what is lost and what is gained by changing from one medium to the other, remembering with Emerson the divine law of compensation: “Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good” (287) and “Every advantage has its tax” (299).

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M. Jimmie Killingsworth, professor of English and director of writing programs at Texas A&M University, has been writing essays and books about environmental rhetoric and literature for over twenty years. His publications include *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* (1992, with Jacqueline S. Palmer) and *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (2004). His work in technical communication includes *Signs, Genres, and Communities in Technical Communication* (1992, with Michael Gilbertson) and *Information in Action: A Guide to Technical Communication* (2nd ed. 1999, with Jacqueline S. Palmer).