



Our Discipline: An Ecological Creative Writing Manifesto

Jeremy Schraffenberger

University of Northern Iowa

jeremy.schraffenberger@uni.edu

Courses that teach poetry, fiction, and drama writing can offer students valuable insights and experience on today's college campuses, but only if creative writing classes are brought into deeper and wider relation with other courses in the curriculum; only if such programs maintain a pedagogy not geared toward packaging for the marketplace but instead emphasize reading skills, critical thinking, language awareness, and historical consciousness, qualities and abilities that will prove useful in many walks of life; and only if such programs can be made to foster more understanding of public concerns and social responsibility. (112)

—David Radavich

This science of relationships is called ecology, but what we call it matters nothing. The question is, does the educated citizen know he is only a cog in an ecological mechanism? That if he will work with that mechanism his mental wealth and his material wealth can expand indefinitely? But that if he refuses to work with it, it will ultimately grind him to dust? If education does not teach us these things, then what is education for? (210)

—Aldo Leopold

Our discipline contains multitudes. Our discipline is diverse. Our discipline is shaped by individuals as they enter our classrooms, write in our journals, present at our conferences. Our discipline has no canon. Our discipline can never find its true subject. Our discipline cannot be reduced. Our discipline plays well with other disciplines. Our discipline is interdisciplinary. Our discipline likes it this way.

Our discipline wants you to know every single one of its aspirations, its hopes, its dreams to transform its students, its teachers, its texts, itself. Our discipline wants to lay each of its ideas on the table in front of you. Our discipline invites you to pick one or two of them up. Our discipline thinks you'll find something here for you.

Our discipline believes we should take seriously both the metaphor and the reality of ecology. Our discipline believes ecological thinking will change everything we do.

Our discipline is not interested in genius. Our discipline tries hard to avoid nostalgia. Our discipline looks askance at idealized renderings of the world it observes. Our discipline wonders and marvels at the world it observes, but our discipline is skeptical of the cult of romantic inspiration. Our discipline worships not. Our discipline does not preach. (Our discipline admits that, yes, sometimes it could be said to preach.)

Our discipline is mountainous, oceanic, cavernous. Our discipline is tidal and riverine. Our discipline is atmospheric. Our discipline is glacial. Our discipline is grassland, desert, and forest. Our discipline is sidewalks and streets, alleys and highways. Our discipline is junkyard, backyard, cornfield, parking lot. Our discipline moves through the spaces and places we find ourselves moving through. Our discipline is post-pastoral.

Our discipline is animal. Our discipline stalks its prey through delicate shadows. Our discipline salivates. Our discipline bleeds.

Our discipline is bodily. Our discipline is a body. Our discipline embodies. Our discipline is bodies of knowledge and bodies of work. Our discipline heeds the body's imperatives. Our discipline is a corpus, a corpse, carcass, cadaver, compost.

Our discipline is grounded in place. Our discipline slams its fist on the table and proclaims that we know *who* we are by knowing *where* we are.

Our discipline is domestic. Our discipline is where we live our lives. Our discipline is our home. Our discipline does the dishes and weeds the garden. Our discipline sweeps the floor and cooks dinner. Our discipline is not sentimental about housework.

Our discipline prescribes no specific style, no specific form, no specific voice. Our discipline is not elitist. Our discipline is hoi polloi. Our discipline is bored by prestige and could do without literary snobbery. Our discipline enjoys clear narrative and elliptical experiment equally. Our discipline knows the words to many songs. Our discipline es multilingüe.

Our discipline does its research. Our discipline hikes the trails of library stacks raking its fingers along the spines of books. Our discipline trawls databases A to Z. Our discipline collates and explicates and annotates. Our discipline has a snack. Our discipline naps on the fourth-floor couch. Our discipline is disciplined.

Our discipline reads and writes for *College English*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *PMLA*. Our discipline subscribes to literary magazines. Our discipline edits and writes for literary magazines, too. (Our discipline has grown thoroughly accustomed to rejection.) Our discipline is a member of AWP, MLA, NCTE, ASLE, CWSO. Our discipline is in good standing. Our discipline pays its dues.

Our discipline is comfortable with computers and uses them just about every day. Our discipline is on the Internet. Our discipline clicks and drags and drops. Our discipline uploads and downloads. Our discipline sends copious emails. Our discipline has Twitter and Facebook accounts. Our discipline takes pictures with its smart phone and posts them online. Our discipline is at home in the digital world, but our discipline is not too crazy about the increasingly unavoidable hypertechnologized mediation of human experience. Our discipline thinks we all need to cut back on our screen time. Our discipline says it's serious about this, people.

Our discipline is systems, networks, relationships, connections and interconnections, interdependence, embeddedness, the dynamic interplay between and among the things of the world, including ourselves and our discipline.

Our discipline looks to the ancient past. Our discipline thinks about its hominoid ancestors. Our

discipline imagines their faces, the pre-linguistic sounds they made. Our discipline listens to the music of the first difficult words uttered, perhaps to explain or instruct, perhaps to protest or debate, perhaps to sing about the sheer joy of being alive or the strange and awesome beauty of the world around them, perhaps to sound out their grief over the death of a beloved other. Our discipline knows that we are connected to these people. Our discipline wants to touch their bones and teeth. Our discipline is evolutionary. Our discipline is always digging in the dirt.

Our discipline looks to the distant future. Our discipline thinks about future generations. Our discipline imagines their faces and wonders what languages they will speak, what food they will eat, what houses they will build, what books they will write and read, what fears and confusions they will suffer, what fires they will gather themselves around to tell their own stories and to retell ours. Our discipline works for these future generations. Our discipline works for sustainability.

Our discipline is about time.

Our discipline is about space. Our discipline is galactic and cosmic. Our discipline marvels at the immensity of the universe. Our discipline marvels at the utter smallness and insignificance of humans. Our discipline gets teary when it thinks about the pale blue dot that is earth engulfed by the infinite vastness of space. Our discipline is humbled constantly. Our discipline cultivates humility.

Our discipline cares deeply about the university. Our discipline cares deeply about the goals of a liberal education. Our discipline cares deeply about curriculum and critical thinking. Our discipline cares deeply about how it functions in the academic world. Our discipline shows up to department meetings to talk about our discipline. Our discipline serves on committees. Our discipline is very collegial. Our discipline cares deeply about higher education as a place where real work might get done. Our discipline cares deeply about students as those who might do some of this work with us.

Our discipline argues that all education is environmental education.

Our discipline thinks it's important to repeat itself: all education is environmental education.

Our discipline scales the walls of the university to explore the vast wilderness of the world beyond. Our discipline likes to play in the mud. Our discipline stays out late and forgets to come home. Our discipline has a talent for wandering. Our discipline wishes to speak a word for absolute freedom and wildness. Our discipline goes a little wild. Our discipline knows that language is wild, that the mind is a wild habitat, that humans are wild creatures.

Our discipline doesn't understand how so many smart and well-meaning people can ignore our current ecological crisis, people it knows and works with every day, people with talent and advanced degrees, people who embrace intellectual rigor, reasonable people, compassionate people, really very nice people. Our discipline is beginning to wonder when we'll all wake up to the impending global environmental disaster. Our discipline is concerned. Our discipline loses sleep about these things. Our discipline, when it comes right down to it, is very sensitive. Our discipline cries sometimes, especially at night when the everyday business of living its disciplined life dissolves into quiet. Our discipline hopes it's not too late. Our discipline fears it's too late. Our discipline does not give in to despair.

Our discipline cultivates environmentalism, environmental imagination, environmental consciousness.

Our discipline is not afraid of critical theory and will even use it sometimes, but often it prefers to be more or less atheoretical. Our discipline is not naïve. Our discipline has read those books, too, sure. Our discipline understands and appreciates what you're saying but would sometimes rather talk about something else. Our discipline will be over here.

Our discipline thinks that academic discourse should loosen up a bit and have some fun. Our discipline believes that subjectivity is important. Our discipline likes to laugh. Our discipline thinks scholarship should embrace metaphor, imagery, narrative, lyricism, and wild experiment as valid ways of knowing. Our discipline thinks it would be weird not to be artful and creative in its scholarship when artfulness and creativity are at the heart of our discipline. Our discipline believes that creativity and critical inquiry can (and should) be mutual ways of making meaning.

Our discipline believes that writing—especially writing taught in college and university classrooms—needs to do more than just dazzle its readers with technical beauty, more than decorate the surface of its pages with pretty things. Our discipline believes that students should get more from their writing experiences than just a folder of publishable poems or stories or essays. Our discipline thinks aesthetics and ethics should get to know each other and talk on a regular basis. Our discipline believes that student writing is a legitimate and meaningful form of discourse. Our discipline wants student writing to matter and matter deeply.

Our discipline wants to touch things. Our discipline is necessarily materialist. Our discipline is necessary.

Our discipline is cartographical. Our discipline writes the land. Our discipline is a landscape. Our discipline considers the crucial difference between land and landscape.

Our discipline is not nature writing. Our discipline is not nature writing. Our discipline is not nature writing. Our discipline enjoys nature writing, sure, but our discipline is not nature writing.

Our discipline approaches the biological, the geological, the cosmological with unending curiosity. Our discipline admires science. Our discipline enjoys walking with science, sidles up next to the messy, beautiful strangeness of science. Our discipline flirts with science, longs for science, dreams of science, whispers questions into the darkness of science's ears, touches the cool skin of science, but our discipline is not science.

Our discipline resists the mechanistic, the atomistic, the merely utilitarian.

Our discipline is perpetually situated at a crossroads. Our discipline loves the crossroads. Our discipline never wants to leave the threshold space of creative energy and tension and artful possibility that is formed at the crossroads. Our discipline believes that the crossroads is an inherently ecological place. Our discipline dances and celebrates at the crossroads. Our discipline is a crossroads.

Our discipline is a contact zone, an ecotone. Our discipline crosses the line. Our discipline decenters the human perspective, challenges human self-interest, combats human chauvinism.

Our discipline calls for change. Our discipline gets political. Our discipline is liberal and democratic. Our discipline is pluralistic. Our discipline believes in the public good. Our discipline is critical of global capitalism. Our discipline is concerned with social justice. Our discipline joins the fight

against racism. Our discipline joins the fight against sexism. Our discipline joins the fight against oppression and injustice wherever they are to be found. Our discipline believes that environment is another significant location where oppression and injustice are to be found. Our discipline *knows* that environment is an absolutely crucial location where oppression and injustice are to be found. Our discipline believes social oppression and injustice spring from the same well as environmental oppression and injustice.

Our discipline is wary of the management.

Our discipline has work to do.

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