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The University of Southern Mississippi

Facilitating Environmental Literacy in a Socio-Digital Landscape

by

Anna Hotard

A Thesis
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The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of
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Abstract

My work engages digital communications, traditional writing, and campus/community engagement in order to curate emergent knowledge of environmental citizenship and sustainable development. In the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, there has been a growing interest in environmental literacy both on the University of Southern Mississippi campus and within the city community. Environmental literacy takes many forms from informational sessions, fundraisers and events, to outright activism. This work informs my evolving identity as an editor as I choreograph traditional transcripts into a digital sphere in order to provide a collective space for related interests.

Keywords: bioregions, editorial, community, engagement, digital

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Introduction

Intent of Project

This study will examine digital literary editing through practice, reflection, and theory. As a researcher, I compiled and curated material intended for a page of the *Digital Piney Woods (DPW)*, a website that connects campus and community. Its founders call the site “a socio-digital landscape.” That the creators of this online resource do not even call the *DPW* a “digital journal” suggests new roles for those who edit pages included there. This thesis will explore my evolving identity as an editor as I work with contributors to develop multimodal expressions of environmental literacy for this ‘digital landscape’. Since the *DPW* mediates campus and community, I sought out material in both places. I curated undergraduate essays recounting experiences at a regional environmental center. I also explored environmentalist activities and events off campus to better understand the emergence of environmental literacy in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. These experiences contextualized my editorial work with the region and informed the ways I curated the work of other writers who were themselves becoming acquainted with their own local habitat. These students’ environmental literacy activities, grounded in the natural world, provided a necessary balance to the virtual space of the *DPW*. My thesis describes how this balance affected my curation and design of the page I edited.

Certainly digitalization has revolutionized the ways editors worked, but a look back at the broader history of editing shows that the editorial identity has always been dynamic. The book format has evolved with technology. With Kindles, eBooks, and iPads in existence, books can be read via electronic media. Articles, journals, and other research sources have also gone viral and can be found loose on the internet or collected

and organized in a digital library. In a digital age, the production of books and other traditional formats of literature and research have had to evolve to fit the new mold. Editing has adapted to this new era and way to achieve information in order to remain relevant.

For the *Digital Piney Woods*, I gathered environmental literacy narratives written by students in response to an experiential learning exercise. Similarly, my own reflections on environmental literacy have been holistic and experiential, based upon my observation of the increasing interest in environmental matters on campus and in the surrounding community. I understand my roles as that of a literary editor rather than an empirical researcher. The purpose of compiling and framing this material is to encourage those who access the *DPW* to connect the literary practice of first-person narrative with bonding to regional habitat. As grounded as the project is in local habitat, it is a digital project, too.

The history of literary editing leading to the digital age suggests that traditional editing and digital editing have much in common. Marshall Lee's book, *Bookmaking: Editing, Design, Production*, points out that editing has been around since humans began telling stories. In oral tradition, editing was the initial "selection and discrimination" of oral literature (Lee 30). Each storyteller would relay the story differently, perhaps by omitting the duller parts, rephrasing others, or even embellishing the story overall. Once the writing of oral tradition began, writers decided what was deemed acceptable to be recorded. All "published" works were the result not only of the original storytellers but also the person whose judgment affected the work and its publications. Though they were not yet called "editors," they performed some basic editorial functions.

Antecedents to the modern editor can be represented by those who produced the ancient Greek plays and Roman literature. They were followed by the scribes who created the medieval manuscripts. These scribes performed not only the selection and discrimination aspects of editing but also the copyediting and proofreading facets. “Without accepted rules of grammar and spelling, the ‘editors’ were left to make their own choices- but choose they did and languages developed through the process” (Lee 31). The works that demonstrated clarity, consistency, and logic were imitated and adopted by the lexicographers to come. With Johann Gutenberg’s creation of the printing press, the editing of books became institutionalized with a professional routine. Printer-publishers did their own editing with employees or the occasional family member to act as proofreaders.

By the 18th century, publishing houses had established full-time editorial employees as they became their own separate entity with their split from the printing houses. However, even at this time, editors were still mainly proofreaders while the head of the house made the main editorial judgments. It was not until well into the 19th century when editors began to handle more of the content. When the publishing houses grew bigger and began to departmentalize, editors began to have a say in what could and could not be published. Before 1950, the image of the editor invoked an individual who worked with both authors and manuscripts from concept to printed book. Since World War I, the profession has been divided into specialties and can have as many as four editors assigned to a single book.

Whether performed by an individual or multiple people, the editorial function remains the same. Editors must find and present book projects to a publishing house,

negotiate contracts between the author and publisher, develop manuscripts to the satisfaction of both the author and publisher, correct and style the manuscript for composition, and lastly organize editorial work. These functions may be divided among several specialized types of editors. In every respect, the editor is the middleman between the author and the publisher. He or she acts as the publisher's representative and tries to make the best terms for the company during negotiations.

In *The Book Publishing Industry*, Albert N. Greco and his co-authors distinguish the differences between each type of editor. The acquiring or sponsoring editor has the power to reject books but not always the ability to accept one. Acceptance of a book is up to the publisher and is based on the book's potential to sell and its intrinsic quality. However, the editor may speak on behalf of the book and its author in order to clear it to acceptance. Once a book has been accepted by the publisher and the sales department, the art director submits jacket and cover designs. The editor makes sure that the cover properly represents the book and the story it has to tell. Editors also play a small role in the sale of subsidiary rights to book clubs, translations, film, television, radio, serial rights, condensations, e-books, and more as these can add to the success of not only the book but also the editorial department. In some houses, the editorial department has a say in the advertising and promotion budget as well.

In the eyes of a layperson, the world of publishing goes something like this: an editor reads a manuscript sent in by hopeful writers. He or she selects a promising one and calls in the author to form a contract. The editor then asks the author to make some changes as needed and then sends the manuscripts off to be printed. As straightforward as this is painted, this is only a small representation of what an editor actually does today.

For the most part, the only projects that publishing houses consider are offered by agents or some agent-less but established authors, ones considered by in-house editors, manuscripts offered by someone known by a member of the firm, or those offered by packagers who develop book projects as completed or partially produced. Another possibility is books that originate with foreign publishers. This focus on profitable and publishable books has been criticized with the claim that works of value by the yet-to-be-published with no agents are being excluded. Editing exists not to impose a set of values, perspective, or hierarchy, but to facilitate personal and heterogeneous expression. That is what I intend to do with my role as a literary editor of a digital page. By providing different accounts of bioregionalism, individual opinions can be formed while personal experiences are created and compared.

As one can tell, editing has evolved since its conception. However, in recent years, editing has extended further into the digital age. The mastermind behind the digitization of literature and other printed sources has been up for debate since its conception. The concept of an e-book originated in 1930 with the invention of “The Readies” by Robert Carlton Brown. In his manifesto, he writes “The written word hasn’t kept up with the age. The movies have outmaneuvered it. We have the talkies, but as yet no Readies” (Schuessler). He demands for a “simple reading machine which I can carry or move around, attach to any old electric light plug and read hundred-thousand-word novels in 10 minutes if I want to, and I want to” (Schuessler). In 1971, Project Gutenberg began digitizing texts. In the 1980s, reference books moved to electronic editions during the CD-ROM revolution. The 80’s also saw a launch of adventure computer games based around stories such as Tolkein’s *The Hobbit* and Stephen King’s *The Mist*. In 1993, Peter

James was accredited with creating the “worlds first electronic novel” when he published his novel, *Host*, on two floppy disks (Flood).

To collect all these new digitized texts in a single location, the digital library was born. Digital libraries act as a collection of online articles, essays, books, and other sources of literature. They provide an easier way to access these sources. Digital libraries have made research simpler with easy accessibility and search ability to find what one is looking for. In their essay, “Editing Environments: The Architecture of Electronic Texts,” Neil Fraistat and Steven A. Jones discuss how an electronic edition of a traditional source is already a virtual world even if the editor does not perceive it as so. The editor not only acts as librarian or encoder but also as a “textual ecologist/dramaturge/gamemaster, maximizing the resources of whatever editorial environment he or she chooses to work within” (Fraistat and Jones 10). Digital editing is no longer just editing texts. It now involves photographs, film, and other multimedia that requires editing as well. Digital editors focus also on the design of where their digitized editions will be located. They must curate and choreograph their editions into an easily navigable story that continues to intrigue the reader and lead to further investigation and interest.

Choreography typically tries to create a bond between the subject and the viewer. The choreography of my digital page, originally for the *DPW*, includes the narratives of my fellow students at a regional environmental center, my personal experiences with the various environmental activities throughout Hattiesburg, as well as the accounts of community members who are rallying for more awareness of related issues. This will share the story of Hattiesburg’s growth as an environmentally-aware city with simply

plain text, photography, and careful coordination. Hopefully, the readers, too, will want to be more bioregionally aware by the end.

Just as editors have a say in the content of their work, I decide what the content of my focus will be. As previously mentioned, my page for the *Digital Piney Woods* is focused on bioregions which looks at the cultural connections to the ecosystems that surround humans. The bioregionalism movement began in the 1970s with the collaboration of natural scientists, social and environmental activists, artists and writers, and community leaders. Its first practitioners intended that it go further than conservation. A bioregion is both a cultural and a natural field, both personal and objective: Peter Berg defines it as “geographic terrain and a terrain of consciousness” that can be applied to anthropological studies, historical accounts, social developments, customs, traditions, and even the arts (“Bioregionalism”). Bioregionalists believe that effective citizenship springs from finding well-being in the context of a local habitat. In “Bioregions: The Context for Reinhabitating the World”, Thomas Berry states that the disruption of our bioregions—the break between a person and their local habitat-- leads to “a poisoning of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil and the seas that provide our food” (2). To live bioregionally means to be aware of the local ecology that is rich in both natural and indigenous history of the place. By living this lifestyle, one is committed to making choices that help balance the human impacts and the environment. The goals of the bioregional movement are to restore and maintain the local natural systems, implement and practice sustainable ways that satisfy the basic human needs, and lastly to support the work of re-inhabitation. With the bioregional movement as the theme, the *Digital Piney*

Woods became the opportune place to experiment with the differences between editing in the traditional sense and editing digitally.

Because it emerges from individual consciousness, bioregionalism is a personal foundation for developing environmental citizenship. Bioregionalism's idea of citizenship grounds one's public duty in one's personal experience of habitat. This balance of the personal and the public makes writing about developing bioregional consciousness particularly appropriate for my editorial work. And, another kind of balance also inspires that work- that between writing grounded in the bioregion but published in the virtual world of the internet. Both dyads inform the kind of community-building I intend to participate in as an editor.

Definition of a Socio-Digital Landscape

The *Digital Piney Woods* is termed a socio-digital landscape by its creators, Dr. Jeffrey Kaufmann and Dr. Randy Gonzales. Dr. Kaufmann is a professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern Mississippi and Dr. Gonzales is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. It was originally created to negate the stereotypes of the Piney Woods region, an ecoregion covering 54,400 square miles of the Southern United States, by providing unseen and unknown knowledge of the region and its residents. In order to do this, the *DPW* became a project to connect academics, students, and community members in an environment where they would be equally valued. Thus, a socio-digital landscape was born to bridge the town and gown split by allowing collaboration and interaction between these three groups. By

building relationships between people and cultures, humanistic inquiry can be met and a shared space will be created.

The Piney Woods region contributes to agriculture through lumbering, livestock raising, and crop farming. Ranging from North Carolina to Texas, the region is aptly named after the longleaf pine that can be found throughout. Typically scoring low on the GNP metric that measures per capita material wealth and economic resources as quality of life indicators, the region is often associated with a lack of intelligence, culture, and knowledge. As residents of this region, Dr. Kaufmann and Dr. Gonzales seek to break through the stereotypes to bring the reality of this vast area to light.

In appearance, the *DPW* is a collection of web pages and web applications that will allow for social discovery, collaboration between the university community and the non-academic, and the easy to access, widespread availability of work in a digital format. It is termed a “landscape” because the perception of it varies from each viewer, or participant (Gonzales & Kaufmann, “Introduction”). Like when looking at the traditional meaning of the word, each individual will notice a different aspect of it to focus on. A socio-digital landscape will allow for all the different perspectives to be shared to make the overall picture.

The *DPW* is a value-driven project focused on exchange, dialogic composition, and community knowledge (Gonzales & Kaufmann, “Introduction”). The act of exchanging concrete objects, ideas, or other abstractions, allows participants to share contrasting perspectives, cultural differences, and more. This can help participants become engaged and informed citizens, in and outside of academia. Recognition of community knowledge, which is often overlooked, allows for more than the academia

perspective of everyday life. The *DPW* was initially conceptualized as a student journal before taking the holistic approach to include the communities beyond campus.

Lastly, dialogic composition leads to the constant recreation of a space that continues to welcome diversity and variety in its participants and ideas. Of the three values, dialogic compositions is the one that truly strives to merge the town and gown split that has originated since the Middle Ages. Academia oftentimes groups the public sphere as an “other” with a sense of discontinuity between the two. As members of the university community, the creators and other participants risk bringing a condescending academia mindset to their interactions with the community. In some occurrences, interactions with the non-academic community is seen as service of bringing education and knowledge to those who are not as “privileged” (Gonzales & Kaufmann, “Introduction”). With the help of dialogic composition, the *Digital Piney Woods* will assist in creating and maintaining relationships between the two spheres, create a shared space between individuals, and eventually fuse the two communities together.

In order to achieve the answer to the questions that appear along the way, expand further than the academic audience, and put a face on public scholarship, Dr. Kaufmann and Dr. Gonzales implement three methods: visual media, collaborative methods, and exchanges with “knowledge-bearers” outside the realm of academia (“Introduction”). Visual media includes the use of a camera to capture still or moving images deemed social, cultural, or personally significant. Visual media helps enable multimodal research as it is oftentimes combined with composition and data collection. In a technologically-consumed society, providing multimodal options such as photographs and video appeals to the participant’s social and sensory experience. Researching, documentation, and

composition can be made with the most common tool of all: the smartphone. Equipped with cameras and recorders, the opportunity for social and environmental engagement is literally at one's fingertips.

Still in its nascent stages, the *Digital Piney Woods* is one of a kind. More than just bridging the two opposing spheres, academia and the community will be merged into one to create a better understanding of the varying aspects of a region that covers a large portion of the country. It brings together a journal, pedagogy resources, and archives all interested and focused on a culture and people of a specific region. It will be a source for academic research, information for the curious, and a place to disprove the stereotypes

Socio-Digital Landscape Roots

The *Digital Piney Woods* brings together pedagogy resources, a digital journal, and archives. It takes these three different aspects and focuses them around an interest in the culture and people of the Piney Woods region. There are many sites that have these aspects but most of the models are not as holistic as Dr. Jeffrey Kaufmann and Dr. Randy Gonzales desired. One can glean important differences by comparing the *DPW* to the following examples that were referenced in order to create the socio-digital landscape by bringing together these three components. This context, sketched out by Kaufmann and Gonzales, influences how I understand my own role as editor.

Southern Spaces, an interdisciplinary digital journal about regions, places, and cultures of the US South and their global connections, stands as a model for the journal aspect of the *DPW*. This site is an ideal example of this component of the socio-digital landscape since it is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, open access journal and works in

conjunction with the Robert W. Woodruff Library of Emory University. With its focus being on real and imagined spaces of the US South as well as their global connections, *Southern Spaces* publishes articles, photo essays and images, reviews, presentations, and short videos. The *DPW* seeks to do the same with its even narrower focus of the culture and people of the Piney Woods region of the US South and Southwest. *Southern Spaces* is easy to navigate and is organized in various ways to make its research and scholarship simpler to find by breaking down the search criteria into topic, year, author, genre, or special series. Submissions are mainly made by members of academia or independent and institutionally-affiliated scholars, photographers, artists, filmmakers, and journalists. In contrast, the *DPW* seeks to publish more than the voices of academia as it hopes to bring members of the community into the contribution process.

Densho, the Japanese American Legacy Project, acts as a model for the archive section of the *DPW*. Started in 1996, *Densho* was originally created to document oral histories from Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in World War II but has grown into a mission to educate, preserve, collaborate, and inspire action for equity. The archive section contains over 825 interviews and visual histories of Japanese Americans and others who were affected by the World War II incarcerations. This is over 1,600 hours of recorded footage that have each been transcribed into segments for ease of viewing. There are also over 12,000 historical photos and newspaper clippings documenting the history of Japanese Americans. Each source is indexed by topic, location, and chronology. These histories also document experiences from immigration in the early 1900s through redress in the 1980s but the World War II mass incarcerations are its main emphasis and focal points. To access the archive, one must create an account or

temporarily use the guest account. The archive itself is easily navigable as long as one knows what to look for. In contrast, the *DPW* curates and digitizes primary sources from community members through student and community projects and stores them in a physical archive. Researchers can also be guided to other online Piney Woods related archives through an archive blog.

MediaNola is a portal for histories of culture and cultural productions of the city of New Orleans. For the *DPW*, this project stands as an example of combining digital publication with student work as it works in collaboration with Tulane University students. Started in 2009, this site aims to preserve collective memory by uniting archival resources with members of the public in order to produce and reflect on the people, places, and things associated with the local culture of New Orleans. It acts as both a destination site and tool for writing and mapping history from 1880 to present. Acting as a destination site, multilayered histories are provided across various media and information platforms in order to provide a more holistic sense of the local culture. As a pedagogic tool, *MediaNola* offers classes at Tulane to train students as amateur historians and offers examples of assignments from these classes. Similarly, the *DPW* seeks to take submissions from both students, community members, and academia to provide a multilayered account of the people and culture of the Piney Woods district.

Compositions, archives, and pedagogy are the three main aspects of the *Digital Piney Woods*. Though there are many sites that act as examples for the site's creations, these three sites provide the best representation since they are focused on similar aims. However, there is not one single site that combines all of these aspects into one location so the socio-digital landscape aims to be the first to combine all of these features and

more. With the emphasis of the cultural influence, environmental importance, and the people that make up the Piney Woods region, bioregions and environmental literacy seemed to be the ideal choice of a focus area of my own page.

Definition of Focus Area

The interest to pursue bioregions and environmental literacy was subliminally planted in my mind during the summer of 2013 after my freshman year of college when I participated in Project Serve Canada. On this service abroad trip, we spent a week in Guelph, Ontario, Canada with the University of Guelph as our base. In this one jam-packed week, we weeded, planted trees, and moved firewood at two different organic farms. We met the owners of the Guelph Outdoor School, whose goal is to mentor a nature based education. We were introduced to an off-the-grid homestead (which I found intriguing). We made our own sustainable cleaning products and met the governing body of Guelph to learn how they were making their small city sustainable. Though we participated in mainly environmentally focused service activities, there were several other undertakings that we assisted with. The small town of Guelph, Ontario as well as the rest of the country provides a perfect introduction to the importance of bioregions and environmental literacy. Besides having several organic farms, Canada also uses wind and solar power as its main source for electricity. Wind mills line the fields on the way to Guelph and solar panels are found in even the smallest of places.

Though Project Serve Canada was the initial nudge to this topic area in my academic life, it was not the only event that inspired my focus on the natural world and our relation to it. I have always been enthralled with nature since I was very little and

have spent many family holidays in the Smokey Mountains or on a lake. This editorial work integrates my academic life and my personal life in a way that allows me to support public discourse about the environment.

Besides my own discourse about the environment, two English 101 Honors classes also became more environmentally aware through their focus on the course's theme of bioregionalism. Many of their assignments for the semester involved becoming more aware of the environmental effect on the world around them. In order to take these connections off the page and into reality, these students took an excursion to La Terre Bioregional Center to experience similar occurrences as the ones in the novels they read.

This trip was inspired by Dr. James Inabinet, who was the guest speaker for one of the Honors College's weekly forums in Spring 2014. Here, he discussed the importance of niche in an environment and how it is developed. This was discussed from the perspective of a human, a squirrel, and a tree to further instill the importance and reliance on all three. From this presentation stemmed the field trip and research into other organisations that are working to be more environmentally conscious.

For one of their short assignments, the English 101 Honors classes had the opportunity to write about their personal experiences on the field trip to La Terre. These papers will become part of my project that I will curate to fit the digital sphere I create. This allows there to be a more well-rounded explanation of this center from different perspectives rather than just have my personal account and the history of the center.

Chapter One: La Terre

Introduction to Dr. Inabinet

As an active community member and advocate for environmental literacy in this project, Dr. James Inabinet is not a stranger to academia. He received his Bachelor of Science in Geology from Louisiana State University. Twenty-seven years later, he would receive his Master of Arts in Earth Literacy from St. Mary of the Woods College in Indiana. After receiving his Doctorate of Philosophy in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies, he would go on to be an Adjunct Professor at the Institute for the 2013-2014 academic year.

In-between earning his bachelor's and master's degrees, Dr. Inabinet founded the La Terre Foundation and Bioregional Center in Kiln, Mississippi in 1989 that is still active today. Spurred by the desire to discover what it means to be fully human and to create a human niche by becoming intimate with the La Terre space, this center aims to develop and implement programs and create viable, sustainable models in natural, human, and cultural ecology. He achieves this in several manners. Dr. Inabinet designs Outdoor Learning Laboratories at Mississippi schools which consists of outdoor math and science labs as well as nature trails. He also created curriculum and field guides that combine facts about various outdoor locations while fulfilling the Mississippi State Curriculum Frameworks. He hosts workshops for teaching his curriculum in very hands on and experimental methods. These classes are typically offered at the high school and below levels. For college-level students, Dr. Inabinet created a wilderness program that fosters an earth connection through experiential activities and heuristic techniques. He

has also created a series of lectures focused on human ecology. These lectures focus specifically on global and local ecological problems and how they can be alleviated.

Outside of academia, the La Terre Bioregional Center also offers “Quests” based off of primal rites of passage while keeping with the Lakota Indian tradition. Quests last for five days out in the wilderness. Dr. Inabinet was also able to receive grant funding for the *Earth Circle Exhibit*. This traveling exhibit includes work by twelve commissioned artists who utilized art as a pedagogical medium. This exhibit made an appearance in the Cook Library Art Gallery during the fall 2014 semester.

This year, the La Terre Bioregional Center has changed its name to La Terre Integral Center whose primary focus has moved to education of adults. Its mission has been extended to discover and utilize methods for discerning and enhancing the nature of all human relationships in order to facilitate the thriving of all and begin to attain a viable, sustainable, and peaceful human way of life on Earth.

Dr. Inabinet has been selected as a community voice of this project despite his history and occasional interaction with academia. He truly tries to connect with the public sphere with the La Terre Integral Center to help them achieve or at least understand what it means to be fully human by interacting with the natural space around them. He desires to share his findings with everyone, not just students and the academic world. Since in the end, we are all still learning.

A Trip to La Terre

In order to grasp what Dr. Inabinet’s passion is all about outside of another lecture, two freshman honors composition classes focused on environmental literacy

travelled to La Terre and experience it for themselves. I was lucky enough to accompany them and experience first-hand the variance of bioregions in a small area.

At 8 AM on a Saturday, about 20 English 101H students met at the liberal arts building with the intention to spend the day in the woods. This is not the ideal weekend plans for most college students after a long week of classes. We piled into two white transport vans and embarked on our field trip. Forty-five minutes and one wrong turn later, we drove down a dirt road and pulled up to a fork in the road. A hand-made sign made of multiple wooden planks stood in the middle of the fork quoting, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately and not, when I came to die, to discover that I had not lived.” Little did we know that this quote would hold true to the day that awaited us at La Terre Bioregional Center. We followed the path to the left to meet Dr. Inabinet and let nature be our professor for the day.

The day started as we all gathered in a circle around a small campfire. We waited quietly sitting crisscross while Dr. Inabinet poked the fire. At different points around our circle, there were wooden dowels with yarn wrapped around them with a small pouch attached. Each was staked into the ground. Once a small fire was started, Dr. Inabinet took his place in the circle and asked us to think about the purpose of certain organisms like the mouse and the bluebird. After giving us some time to consider the question and the day that laid ahead of us, a “talking stick” was passed from each person to each person to share their thoughts. Before passing the stick off to the next person, the individual had to utter “To All My Relations.” This phrase acted as a respectful acknowledgement of everything we are related to and were about to be further in touch with. It is about more than just our human relations but all of our earthly relationships- to

the wildlife, flora, and overall natural setting that we found ourselves in. At the same time that the “talking stick” made its way to each person, a slightly hollowed out wooden cylinder with sage burning in it was passed around. After this small ceremony was completed, we were led back towards the entrance near the sign to draw compasses in our activity guides so we could read the map accurately and navigate our way through the expanse and varying terrains of La Terre.

After the compasses were drawn, the students were separated into four different groups that would explore five different terrains and complete the activities in the guide. They would later present these terrains and lead a tour through them to the other groups at the end of the day. The instructions seemed simple enough: notice the ecosystem around you, identify the plant and animal life, compare the soil types, and look at the runoff. I chose to follow Dr. Inabinet around as he met with each group to gain an equal understanding of each landscape.

Within the large over-encompassing ecosystem of La Terre, there existed several different and smaller ecosystems. In one area, there was a canopy of pine trees with magnolias, oaks and tulip poplars seeking shade underneath them. Another area was an open field of grass and wildflowers that had been untouched by human landscaping. This area provided shelter for rabbits and other small animals as a feeding ground. The last area followed a creek and was filled with pines, moss, various smaller trees, and tons of insects that flocked towards the steady flow of fresh water. There were numerous species of trees in this one ecosystem. Live Oaks, Water Oaks, Pine Trees, Sweet Bay Magnolias, the American Holly, Black Gums, and Red Maples were just some of the many species of trees that could found in La Terre other than the common Pine Tree that is characteristic

of living in the Pine Belt. Bushes such as Wax Myrtle, Cinnamon Ferns, Royal Ferns, Yaupons, Gallberry, and Titi bushes were also identified. Other than identification, Dr. Inabinet provided interesting facts about each tree and bush species. For example, Yaupon leaves induce vomiting. For this reason, Native Americans would drink a tea made from these leaves in order to cleanse their bodies of all evil.

Though La Terre stands as a space uninterrupted by human activity, there were signs of interaction seen throughout the space. The manmade trails were the first obvious signs of human intervention but if one looked closer, you would notice that the towering Pine trees are planted in a row, something that does not occur naturally. In the middle of one of the highly wooded areas near the creek was the center point of the vision quests that occur periodically at La Terre. At this location, there was a totem pole and a tipi. The vision quests are a much more in-depth exploration of man's relationship with nature than the students and I experienced in this single day. It was on his very own vision quest that Dr. Inabinet learned that he was not a spider but a bear as depicted by a tattoo on his forearm. He provided no other explanation for this realization. Other signs of human intervention were the signs made by Dr. Inabinet labeling some of the plants and the smaller ecosystems. Dr. Inabinet's house with its gazebo and carport are situated near the entrance of La Terre. At this location, he kept a garden where he grew various fresh vegetables. However, these were dead at the time due to the incoming winter weather.

As Dr. Inabinet and I made our rounds from group to group to check their progress, it became closer to the time of presentations. Meeting around 5PM back at the car port, we travelled to each location following the various paths to see swamps, creeks, an oil field, and more. The students relayed their newfound knowledge of plants and trees

and pointed out the small things that nature hides in its pockets like slugs, ripple designs, and curious insect cocoons. As the sun set, the mosquitos came out but still we marched on till almost every trek of land was covered and no tree went unlabeled.

Around 6PM, mosquito-bitten and tired, we made our way back to the carport where a homemade meal of salad, gumbo, and bread was waiting for us from Mrs. Inabinet. We scarfed our food down, relishing the break, and trying not to fall asleep like some had around lunch time. Though we had only wandered around in the woods and in a creek, it was an exhausting day of work that many of us had ever had to undergo.

Before it was time to depart, we pulled our chairs into a circle to breakdown the day in a similar fashion that it began with. This time we discussed what we learned and what we were taking away from this experience when we return to a society that has very little natural environments. One by one, we mentioned how we learned to appreciate the natural world around us more and were thankful for the experience that La Terre provided. Closing each revelation with “To All My Relations” took a new invigorated meaning as we came to understand what it meant after that day. We re-boarded the vans and returned to the world we left behind without much conversation of what we just participated in. Once we finally arrived back at campus, we scattered ways with barely a farewell and returned to our daily business as if nothing had happened.

It’s hard to say if a day in the woods and learning the names of every tree, bush, flower and other natural occurrence would stay with each student once we returned to the technology-influenced and brick and mortar civilization we had left behind for roughly 10 hours. But for me, it revitalized my love of the natural world that I grew up with. I was the kid that played in the woods and stayed outdoors till the street lamps came on

warning of curfew. I was the kid who had a bug collection and wanted to have her own garden. I would purposely get lost on hikes during family vacations and climb into the gorges of waterfalls to embrace the sense of serenity that nature creates. And for those 10 hours, it was like nothing had changed.

The Connection to Editing

When I first embarked on this thesis project, I knew it would be hands-on but I did not expect the degree to which that would be. There are two things that an editor looks for when reviewing a manuscript or other source that requires a second look: grammar and content. The grammar part can be easier than the content part of the source as it is looking at punctuation, repetition, word usage, and other basic grammatical choices. It is the content area that can be harder to correct. Due to this, an editor wears many hats. They are a researcher, choreographer, and occasionally a cinematographer when utilizing the digital sphere.

In order to fully be able to grasp the concept that is being explained, there must be an understanding of it, at least in the most basic of all forms. The first role an editor must fulfill is that of a researcher. Focusing on bioregions and environmental literacy is one of those topics that requires more than just the dictionary definition and an encyclopedia entry. Luckily, the city of Hattiesburg seemed to know exactly what I was looking for and presented various opportunities to explore and gain first hand interaction with my topic of choice. In order to fulfill the researcher aspect of an editor, I attended the Piney Woods Picnic, a two-day music festival that raised funds for the recently created Piney Woods Land Trust. At this function, I was able to introduce myself to members of the

Land Trust and have had the privilege to sit in a few of their meetings to see what they have planned for the surrounding area. I have also submerged myself into bioregions at the Lake Thoreau Environmental Center and La Terre Bioregional Center.

After the researcher hat is worn out, the choreographer hat is ready to wear. In this role, the editor combines the content with the grammar in order to tell the story that needs to be told. Like a choreographer designs movements of the body by utilizing form and motion, so does an editor with words. The editor takes the writer's untamed words and helps mold them into a comprehensible story. Editors will make adjustments to the form of the text by looking at syntax and transitions. To utilize motion, the editor makes sure the text is also moving forward in its narrative or instruction in a manner that is easily interpreted and logical. Narratives are like a dance in that they tell a story in a unique way, the first through physical movements and the other through depictive words.

If working in the digital sphere, cinematography becomes another addition to the editor's role. In order to create a digital space that is appealing, film or photographs may be utilized. These cinematographic aspects will improve the story telling as they add to the visual appeal for readers. It is the manner in which the texts are presented. It may be through flashy and in your face depictions with emotional interpretations through photography and film or it may subtle and minute but still an appealing break from the lines of text. It requires noticing if this line fits here or if this photograph acts as a transition between paragraphs.

All in all, an editor does more than check for misspellings and word confusion. They help shape a work of art and play a crucial role in releasing it to the world. They take something that already exists and make it better. They are the masterminds of

turning before's into after's. In its own little way, editing is its own art form that takes practice and requires development over years to reach the full potential. It is ever-changing as it shifts from text to text, each requiring a different aspect.

In order to capture a more holistic view of the environmental literacy campaigns and facilities in Hattiesburg, I have curated a site that organizes them in one location. There is a section aimed at providing first-hand reviews of the trip to La Terre with both my personal experience as shared above and those of a few English 101 Honors students. These are paired with photographs from the trip. Each of these essays have been edited by me and then produced on the site in a manner that is easy to access and to read. The hope is to provide more insight into La Terre with these multiple accounts. The site will also include information and links or re-postings of articles written about other events that have occurred in Hattiesburg with the intent of advocating environmental literacy.

Chapter Two: The Community as Community Activists

Theory

Environmental literacy begins simply with awareness of the relationship between the environment and human life. This relationship can be easily overlooked as one becomes more entranced within the brick and mortar that has surrounded society. It is only in the few glances of a flower growing through the cracks, the shade of a tree on a hot day, or the call of a blue jay to its mate that one reminisces in the beauty that is nature. To keep it from being buried in cement and car exhaust, one must be aware of the changes that are happening and understand the importance of the environment. This leads to the second stage of a knowledge and understanding of both human and natural systems and processes. The more one knows, the more one understands, and the better the need for change will be. This will lead to attitudes of appreciation and concern for the environment, which is the third stage. As one appreciates the relationship more, the more active one will become in it. This leads to stage four: developing critical thinking skills and problem solving. Noticing the problems at hand leads to thinking of ways to address them. The final stage of achieving environmental literacy is gaining a capacity for personal and collective action and civil participation (“What is Environmental Literacy”). This is where the activism begins. It starts with one individual raising awareness and it steadily grows. Together, the community itself become activists for itself since the surrounding environment is a communal component. In ecology, a community is defined as “a group of interdependent organisms of different species growing or living together in a specified habitat” which is exactly what people, fauna and flora create (Purves, Orians, & Heller, 1204).

The city of Hattiesburg has recently been climbing the environmental literacy ladder with events and organisations that are in the name of the advocacy and awareness. Those involved range from community members, academia, and students. Below are some of the events and organisations that the city has hosted or is home to that function in the name of environmental literacy.

The Piney Woods Picnic

The Piney Woods Picnic was established to create awareness of the Bouie and Leaf Rivers and the American music that is rooted in it since Mississippi is deemed the “birthplace of rock and roll” (*Piney Woods Picnic*). In order to provide the general public with information on how organizations enhance the environmental and economic revitalization, this organization utilized social media, seminars, and other various events. With the help of local organizations like the Land Trust of the Mississippi Coastal Plains and local bands, a three day festival occurred at Pep’s Point in September of 2014.

The Pascagoula River System is the largest unimpeded waterway of the contiguous states with its Bouie and Leaf tributaries being a favorite spot for canoeing and kayaking. These rivers were once traveled by the Choctaw and utilized by the settlers during the pine boom of the 19th century and have undergone very little change. The goal of this three day festival was to help assist the newly established Piney Woods Land Trust in raising funds to maintain lands that were either donated or purchased for preservation or ecotourism as well as support local music and continue its development through workshops and networking (*Piney Woods Picnic*).

Other than supporting local music and bringing awareness to the needs of the environment around us, this festival also entailed several other activities and interests. Located at Pep's Point Water Park, the festival kicked off with performances by Chance Fisher, Mississippi Shakedown, Parallax, and Light Beam Rider. The Saturday festivities began with the "Bouie River Half Marathon: Rails to Trails to Tributaries" along with performances by Moon Taxi, Drivin N Cryin, and Cary Hudson. A "So Long As It Floats" parade with floats made out of old recycled materials like empty barrels, reinforced cardboard, or simply decorated canoes that threw out miscellaneous knickknacks and were judged for their decorations. Raffles, arts and crafts, educational booths, musician workshops, informational videos, local business booths, and food and drinks were available the entire weekend. The festivities closed out on Sunday morning with an "All Faiths Float" led by Doc Patterson, a pirogue builder, song writer and Methodist Minister, for a 6.1 mile kayak, canoe, whatever floats trip down the Okatoma River. Ten percent of all proceeds earned at this event were given to the Piney Woods Land Trust.

The 2015 Piney Woods Picnic planned to be even bigger. With more bands, advertisements and sponsors, the Piney Woods Picnic is sure to only grow from here and hopefully become an attention-grabbing annual event.

Piney Woods Land Trust

Land trusts are non-profit organizations established for the specific purpose of preserving land. The Land Trust for the Mississippi Gulf Coast (LTMCP), who is guiding the Piney Woods Land Trust with their establishment, began in 2000 and covers the six

coastal counties of Mississippi. These counties are Pearl River, Hancock, Stone, Harrison, George and Jackson County. LTMCP's mission is "to conserve, promote and protect the green places of ecological, cultural or scenic significance in the counties of the Mississippi Gulf Coast" (ltmcp.org). There are over 1,100 land trusts in the United States that are protecting over four million acres with the help of landowners. This land has been turned into wildlife habitats, urban gardens and parks, and lastly, river corridors and trails. The money used to implement these new environmental conservation sites comes from grants, membership dues, private donations, corporate donations, and fundraising events. It is used specifically in land acquisitions, restoration and preservation of the properties, development and continuous management of the trails as well as education and outreach. Currently, the LTMCP has protected a total of 6,758.45 acres and replanted over 80,000 trees. Land trusts rely heavily on volunteers to keep these places running and clean. Volunteers can assist in trail building and maintenance, restoration projects, and cleanups.

The Piney Woods Picnic was the first public introduction to the Piney Woods Land Trust, a subsidiary of the Land Trust of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Still in its early stages, the organization is still trying to gain footing by defining their area and goals as well as expanding their membership. Due to this, there is currently little information on this specific organization besides the general interactions and attendance at meetings. They are focusing on conservation around Lake Thoreau, the Longleaf Trace, and the Leaf River. Land trusts stand as ideal organizations that entice the community to become involved in assisting their surrounding environment. Within the short time and limited meetings I have attended, this group has expanded from its original three members to

about fifteen highly active members that represent various other organizations around the Hattiesburg, Petal, and Oak Grove area. These representatives include members from LTMGC, MS Power, WUSM (USM's radio station), Lake Thoreau, local contractors and business owners and more. Though they are in their beginning stages of establishment, they have projects in mind like blue ways and boat launches and are ready to preserve the historic environment that surrounds the Hattiesburg area.

Lake Thoreau

The Lake Thoreau Environmental Center is a tucked away but vital part of the University of Southern Mississippi with its property rich in history, culture and philanthropy. Its mission is broken into two parts. First, to provide an environment that inspires all ages to explore their connections to the natural world. Second, to provide a model for preservation and protection of longleaf pine forests (Lake Thoreau). Acting like a "living museum", Lake Thoreau is an ideal site for environmental activities in south Mississippi. This center lives by the guiding principles of education, research, recreation, and conservation. Besides providing a location to hike, fish, and bike, Lake Thoreau provides a place for research for USM students and faculty members alike. At this location, they have been able to study stream mesocosms, longleaf pine management systems, climate and hydrology monitoring as well as avian behavior. Lake Thoreau is also home to a longleaf pine forest, over 350 plant species, 44 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 105 species of birds.

The Lake Thoreau property is broken into the Eubanks Preserve and the Longleaf Preserve. The 131 acre property that makes up the Eubanks Preserve originated in 1960

when Leon Mason Eubanks, an English professor at USM, built Lake Thoreau there. He turned it into a recreational site and during the 1970s and 1980s, he started the Lake Thoreau Recreation Club. For a small annual fee, members could use the site for fishing, hiking, boating, and other recreational activities. Dr. Eubanks often took his students here for poetry readings as well. In 1999, the estate was donated to USM when Dr. Eubanks passed away with the intent of using it as a nature preserve for scientific, educational, and aesthetic purposes. In 2008, the Lake Thoreau Environmental Center was created by the Biological Science Department at USM in order to have a place to develop environmental education. Over 12 miles of trails were created throughout the property and in 2013, the Natural Sciences Collections building was completed. Inside the facility is the USM Herbarium, the Ichthyology Collection, and a classroom.

Outside of academic use, the center hosts several events and programs for the community. They are available for children of all ages, teachers, girl scouts and boy scouts, and adults. Lake Thoreau can also be used for parties, workshops or meetings. They also have outreach programs where the Department of Biological Sciences can bring a range of topics to groups who are interested.

Conclusion

Within the small city of Hattiesburg are already many community events that encourage environmental awareness. By hosting events that are more than just rallies and lectures, the interest can be spread to more people who will find themselves to be serendipitous participants. Some will come for the music or the escape and leave with a desire to make sure it can happen again. Others will be proactive because they understand

the purpose and are able to combine it with a fun atmosphere. There are plenty of smaller organisations and events that occur within the city that are focused on environmental literacy, whether it is obvious or not. Attending these events is the easiest way to get involved. It takes the community to save the community.

Chapter Three: Pulling It All Together

Original Intention

A typical thesis project for the English department either involves creative writing or an analysis of a text or multiple one from one of the many critical lens. I wanted to do something a little different in order to add breadth to my skillset. This editing project allows collaboration with various groups and incorporate their perspectives into my curation and framing of materials for the *Digital Piney Woods* page that I planned to curate. I also had to learn how to edit a multimedia text to enhance the literary editorial work I managed for the La Terre piece.

My overall project started out with a purpose of exploring the differences in editing mediums. The two focus points were traditional manuscript style versus new-age digital editing. In order to do this, a particular subject had to be chosen. With access to the still-in-the-making socio digital landscape, the *Digital Piney Woods*, and my advisor's freshmen classes at my disposal, environmental literacy and bioregions seemed to be the right fit.

The original idea was to take the work of the students and initially edit it traditionally as would any college professor or peer. I would then take the ones that fit the aim of the page that I would create for the *Digital Piney Woods* and edit them to fit the site. This would include use of other media such as photos, recordings, and more that would be accumulated over the semester. Editing for a digital publication varies from a physical one in that it must be organized differently and easy to understand. However, this idea changed not long after I was IRB approved to collect the student's work.

The project then turned to incorporating the various voices utilized throughout my research- those of the student, academia, and the community. It turned into a page devoted to a call-to-arms from each of these representatives. Since I have worked with various groups associated with the environmental literacy movement in one way or another, these voices would be easy to pick out. The student could be myself or a compilation of those in the classes whose work I collected. The voice of academia could be my advisor, Dr. Sciolino, who is focused on environmental literacy or even Dr. Inabinet, with his academic background and history of teaching. The community input could be drawn from members of the Piney Woods Land Trust, the Piney Woods Picnic coordinators, or even a representative of the Center for Community and Civic Engagement at USM since they plan monthly service trips to clean up local rivers and streams.

Each representative's goal would be to break through the taboo of environmental awareness that both the media and politics have repeatedly ignored or belittled. They would discuss why it is important to be environmentally literate and how to balance environmental management while achieving a moderate quality of life. This could vary from individual to individual depending on living situations, accessibility, time, finances, and more. These representatives from various walks of life could discuss how they are trying to achieve environmental literacy and why it is important. These writings would be both personal narratives and rallies for change.

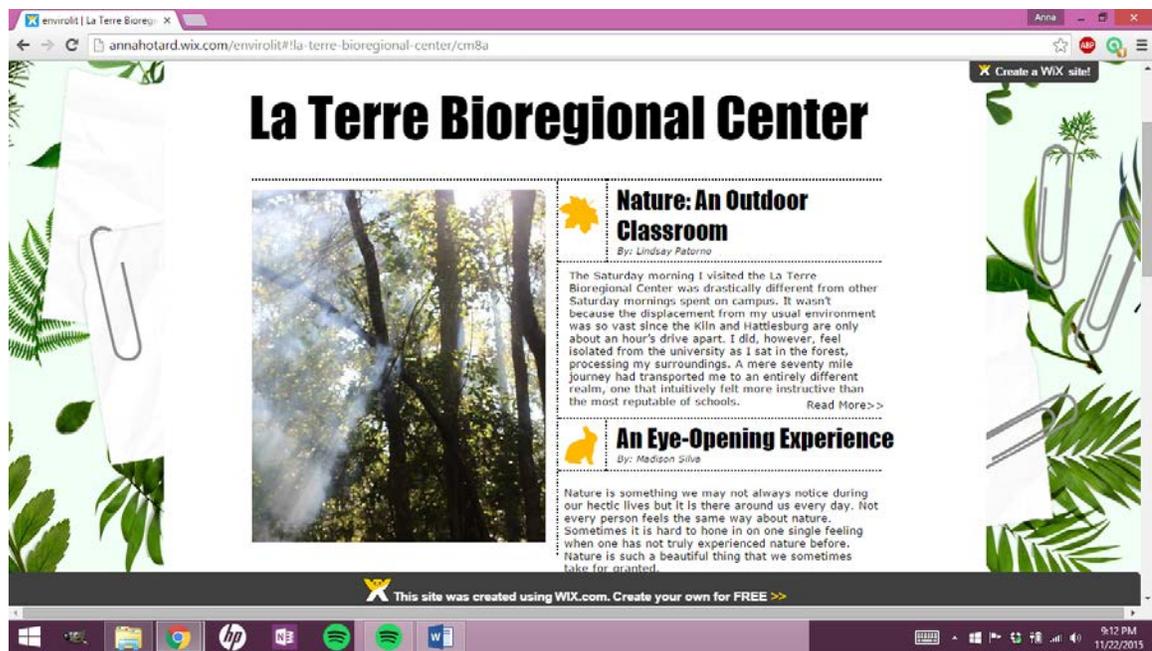
However, like the leaves in autumn, these plans changed as well.

The Final Result

Being environmentally literate does not mean retreating into the woods and scavenging for food. It means being more self-aware of how each action affects the natural world. Becoming environmentally literate starts with small actions such as recycling or reusing water bottles. It is being mindful of water and electricity usage, being conscious of pollutants being released and the amount of waste that is being dumped.

With the possibility of digital publication, there were plenty of opportunities to make this more than just three extended statements of the importance of environmental literacy. This goal proved difficult to achieve when most of the organisation were still in their formation stages. This proved true of the creation of the *Digital Piney Woods* as well since its final completion is delayed past my deadlines. With the plans to curate a page for the *DPW* placed on hold but still wanting to curate a digital production, a new plan of action was created. A very small scale and less technical version of the *DPW* was created to have a single location where all environmental literate organisations could be found. Therefore, I created a free wix site, one of the only website building sites that I am familiar with, that did just this. On this site, all information regarding the growing environmental literacy movement in the city of Hattiesburg can be found. The students' essays, Dr. Inabinet's website, and a link to the La Terre site can be found here. Also, all social media, relevant news articles, and links to the Piney Woods Picnic are conveniently located on the site as well. The Lake Thoreau Environmental Center has its own link so all information regarding the events and research completed there can be located. Lastly, there is brief information about the Piney Woods Land Trust with the

intention of adding more once they have become more established. The site is easy to navigate and complete with photos, articles, and all current links. Making adjustments is a huge part of an editor's role as they set out to meet the needs of the publishing house and the author. Thinking outside of the box is also a necessity to choreograph a successful digital sphere since there is more of a stress on appearances and ease of access. The site can be found at <http://annahotard.wix.com/envirolit>.



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