The Architecture of Textuality: A Semiotic View of Composing In and Out of School

Peter Smagorinsky

This chapter was originally presented at the Economic and Social Research Council Seminar Series *Reconceptualising Writing 5-16: cross-phase and cross-disciplinary perspectives* at Crossmead Conference Centre, University of Exeter, Devon, England, 7 May, 2004

In the last few years I've had the opportunity to take several trips from the U.S. to Europe, primarily to attend academic conferences but also, of course, to absorb as much culture as possible during my visits. As a way of introducing some ideas I'd like to develop in this chapter, I will review my experiences with two magnificent churches I visited during recent trips and my readings of them as texts; or, in some cases, my limited ability to read them, or my evolving understanding of them as I learned more about their histories. I hope that this brief account of my travels helps to set the stage for my ultimate goal with this chapter: to make a case for a broadened notion of textuality. While 'New Literacies' studies have gotten much attention of late because of their emphasis on technology and its implications for textuality

in emerging economies (e.g., The New London Group, 1996; Street, 2003), I will argue that multimodal literacies are not so new at all, and that they have always been implicated in the emerging economy. Indeed, they have been around since the first drawings on cave walls and have served educational purposes for millennia.

First stop, Paris. Like any good tourist, I spent time in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, among Christendom's greatest architectural achievements. As part of the reading I did in preparation for this trip, I learned that in the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great proposed that the scriptures be depicted on the walls of churches for the benefit of the largely unlettered Christian flock. In the city of Arras in northern France in 1025, religious leaders revived this idea, believing that it might enable 'illiterate people to learn what books cannot teach them' (Gies and Gies, 1994: 130). During the Middle Ages sculpture was the most esteemed artistic medium, one of the few that could be admired and understood by both aristocrats and uneducated peasants. Many European churches

began to provide comprehensive theological lessons carved in stone, the Cathedral of Notre-Dame among them. Because it depicted the Biblical narrative in sculpture and other art forms so that it could be 'read' by the masses, the church was variously known as the Sermon in Stone and the Bible of the Poor.

My experience of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame was probably less informed, and certainly less inspired, than those of the illiterate worshippers for whom the chapel had been so constructed, given my own disaffiliation from formal religion and their deep faith in the church and its teachings. My interest in the church as a historical site and architectural wonder is admittedly more secular, a point I make not to demean its religious significance but to account for different readings of the church. While I can recognize depictions of the most famous Biblical narratives, many of the icons in Notre-Dame had little significance for me, either as familiar stories or as articles of faith, even as I resonated with them as deeply spiritual works of art. Like almost anyone who visits this cathedral, I found myself awed at its magnificence. Unlike many, I was incapable of engaging with it as a profoundly moving religious experience, in part because of my lack of faith and in part because of my narrow knowledge of the Biblical narrative.

I now shift to a different site on a different trip, this time to the great island city of Venice. I again confess my ignorance by saying that before visiting Italy, I did not realize that Venice was an island off the coast of the Italian mainland, or that this position enabled the city to become one of the greatest naval powers in European history—a source of power and conquest that ultimately informed my reading of the church as a text. I was also quite ignorant about its crown jewel, the Basílica de San Marco. This church provides the sanctuary for what are believed to be the bones of Christ's Apostle Mark, the possession of which gave Venice the prestige that helped it to become, over time, one of Europe's most important cities. Like the

Cathedral at Notre-Dame, the Basílica de San Marco is replete with Christian iconography, a sermon not only in stone but also in spectacular jewels, precious stones, and valuable metals. Even for someone like me with limited knowledge of the stories being told, the Basílica provides an extraordinary experience, one filled with wonder at the scope and beauty of the church's design and amazement at the riches of the church's ornamentation.

But my lack of knowledge of Biblical stories was offset by a very different knowledge, that of Venetian history, learned primarily through my reading in preparation for this much-anticipated trip. I learned that the interior decoration for the Basílica was largely the result of the fourth Crusade, perhaps the most shameful exploit in the history of Christianity (Norwich, 1989). At the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, the Venetians launched an assault on Constantinople under the Christian cross, ostensibly as part of their continuing campaign against the Muslims but more specifically aimed at seizing the great wealth held by their rival city. With its location at the intersection of the land route from Europe to Asia and the seaway from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and with its ideally contoured harbour within the Golden Horn—an asset for both trade and naval manoeuvring—Constantinople, and Byzantium before it, was a city of incomparable fortune.

Advancing the Christian faith, the motive for many Crusaders, was largely a pretense for the Venetian's venture, which was designed to enrich their church, the city-state of Venice, and individual Crusaders. The booty from this invasion is now abundantly on display in the Basílica de San Marco, contributing greatly to its glorious embellishment. I should also add that St. Mark's bones themselves were stolen by Venetians in 828 from Egypt, though for ostensibly more lofty purposes. Legend has it that when Mark went to the lagoon that ultimately became the site of the city of Venice, an angel came and said, 'Peace to you, Mark my Evangelist'.

This greeting was taken as a divine prophesy that Venice would be his final earthly resting place and justified his remains' return, however nefariously acquired.

My knowledge of the cynical design behind the fourth Crusade deeply affected my experience of the Basilica. Its incomparable beauty and splendour were, for me, compromised by the manner in which the precious materials had come at great human cost and at the price of the church's integrity. This reading of the church might not be available to those who understand Christian iconography and have spiritual engagement with the church but no knowledge of Venetian history.

My experiences in these extraordinary houses of worship have contributed to my own understanding of both the production and reading of writing. I link the composition and reading of texts together, because I think they are inseparable; a text without a reader provides only the potential for an eventual reading transaction, and a reader without a text can't do much reading. However, much writing done in school, and especially most writing done for assessment, seems to assume that texts are autonomous—that is, that they have inherent qualities without respect to particular readers, communities of readers, or textual genres that set up expectations for how texts are most fruitfully produced and understood. I am persuaded by Nystrand (1986) that textual quality is a function of readers' expectations; a good text is one that is *in tune* with whatever conventions, rhetorical qualities, vocabulary, and other qualities its community of readers anticipates. This does not necessarily mean that readers always like what authors say or how they say it; rather, an effectively written text is in dialogue with readers' expectations, even if the writer deliberately thwarts those expectations, as in a parody or text designed to be provocative. To extend Nystrand's musical metaphor, my colleagues and I have argued that texts and readers must not only be in tune with one another but also with the larger

harmonic structure of which they are all a part, with different genres (in music, for instance, freeform jazz, the minuet, the Senegalese griot form, etc.) providing different expectations for structure, presentation, grammar, and other aspects of the textual whole (Smagorinsky, 2001).

The field of education, however, does not often embrace this notion of reading and composing as what Nystrand (1986) calls *reciprocal* processes. That is, texts do not follow what Nystrand refers to as the *doctrine of autonomous texts* (p. 81), i.e., the belief by Olson (1977) and others that texts must be sufficiently explicit to produce a meaning independent of what readers read into them. Many educators, for instance, might assume that the Basílica de San Marco has a fixed meaning grounded in a literal understanding of the Biblical narrative. Any constructive work on my part, they might argue, is irrelevant if it is not concerned with my comprehension of the text as it is inscribed, or how they think it is inscribed, or how the inscriber might have thought it was inscribed. The meaning of the Basílica, they might argue, is in the text, not in my transaction with it and the images that my reading evokes for me as a consequence of my experiences and knowledge of textual codes.

The same assumptions are often at work in the formal educational arena with respect to both the reading and writing of written texts. My daughter, for instance, once took a standardized assessment of writing in which, along with countless other teenagers in countless large rooms across the U.S., she responded to a writing prompt that called for a particular type of writing. The assessment of her writing appeared to have been done by a machine, though I cannot say for sure. Among the evaluative comments was that *she appeared to have little sense of audience*. Now, how they determined that I have no idea. I do recall laughing out loud over their conclusion that kids who sit in silent rooms in uncomfortable desks while being watched like thieves writing on topics of someone

else's choosing that appear to be scored by machines have little sense of audience.

This same teenager writes abundantly on her own time, often in remarkable ways: ensconced at the computer, with several Instant Messaging windows open being filled with conversations with online friends from around the world, coauthoring book manuscripts based on the Animorphs book series (see http://www.scholastic.com/animorphs/index.htm), writing sophisticated html code for her art web sites, coauthoring and discussing anime art with online friends spanning the globe, dashing off her homework for different teachers, and much more (see Black and Steinkuehler, 2008, for a review of research in this area). This writing, I assume, is responsive to each other person's communicative needs, and thus shows some awareness of audience; at least, they seem to write back, which suggests to me that she knows how to get across to them. Some of her writing is in languages that are highly specialized, not just html but such dialects as *l33t* (pronounced "leet"—see http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A787917), the sort of playful, original, intelligent, and fun use of language that is typically pursued with joy and passion by teenagers among themselves (Alvermann and Xu, 2003; Black, 2008; Kirkland et al., 2001), yet is viewed with opprobrium and suppressed in school, and certainly on writing assessments. Her use of these conventions—like most of the purposeful, particularly the meaningful, and enjoyable things that people do with texts—is largely discounted in schools.

One reason that my daughter and so many kids around the world find their nonacademic textual reading and writing to be meaningful and absorbing is that, unlike most of what they produce for school and assessment, it does indeed communicate with and invite response from people whom they consider to be important: their peer group, either immediate or virtual. This communicative, often affective dimension of textual exchange is not available in writing for school that has narrow evaluative criteria and is responded to primarily in terms of adherence to those

criteria; what they get back is not the informed and engaged response from a reader but critical attention to their errors in form. This error, for many kids, likely includes their limited understanding of audience, which in my view is built into requirements of the writing tasks often elicited in classrooms and on writing assessments.

As my opening illustrations suggest, I also embrace a broad view of textuality and literacy, one that takes a semiotic view that regards any configuration of signs as a potential text (Smagorinsky, 2001). And so, my daughter's anime art drawings stand as texts, as do cathedrals designed to tell a story, and musical compositions, and web pages, and other arrangements of signs that provide a meaning potential for possible readers. This perspective, while seemingly a radical idea for schools and those who assess their students, has been available for some time, having been outlined by Mead (1934), Lotman (1977), Scribner and Cole (1981), Gardner (1983), Harste et al. (1984), Wertsch (1991), Witte (1992), Smagorinsky (1995), The New London Group (1996), and Pope Gregory the Great 1,500 years ago.

I would like to illustrate what is potentially lost in typical school conceptions of composition by referring to some recent studies I've done under the sponsorship of the Spencer Foundation, each focusing on the design of living spaces by high school students. These living spaces include houses (Smagorinsky et al., 2005), the interiors of homes (Smagorinsky et al., 2006), and ranches designed to produce particular breeds of horses (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). In each case the students designed spaces that revealed their understanding of the structures and spaces and how people function in relation to them, followed conventions associated with design fields, drew abundantly on knowledge from across the school curriculum, engaged in a lengthy process of composition, drew on formal and informal knowledge from both school and personal experiences, were apprenticed into approaches to design, and inscribed their designs abundantly with

personal narratives and values in relation to how they wanted to live their lives.

Significantly, they accomplished all this in classes that are outside the academic 'core' of the school, in classes not only not required for graduation but generally regarded, in the words of one teacher of these students, as 'basket weaving', a term used in the U.S. for classes that are easy and mindless. (I should point out that weaving baskets, especially those inscribed with artistry, is actually pretty hard, as one of my Native American students—himself from a community in which the weaving of baskets is an important cultural tradition—instructed me.) Yet, in such classes, I've found students working with high levels of engagement with the curriculum; further, they have exhibited sophisticated cognition and understanding of audience in their academic work. Based on my observations of classes across this school's curriculum, I believe that these levels of engagement and cognition are higher than what the students tend to reach in the core classes that they are required to take.

THE COMPOSITION AND READING OF AN ARCHITECTURAL TEXT

My own informal reading of Parisian and Venetian churches has suggested the ways in which readers may or may not be in dialogue with what its designers probably had in mind. I'll next move to a study of the development of a set of architectural plans (Smagorinsky et al., 2005) in a high school architectural design class. This study was particularly interesting, because it enabled us to examine not just student Rick's composing process, but his teacher Bill's negotiation of meaning with the student throughout the month or so during which he produced his design—a sort of interpersonal exchange not available to those of us who visit venerable churches. As a result, we were able to understand in some detail how the student's inscription of meaning in the house design was and was not aligned with his teacher's expectations,

and how their negotiation of the form of the final design represented both Rick's apprenticeship into the field of architectural design as conceived by Bill and Rick's inscription of a personal life trajectory into the drawing.

We next outline some of the major themes we found guiding Rick's design of a house under the mentorship of Bill, who worked closely with the local construction firm operated by his brothers. This firm built a particular kind of house designed for the tract housing market; i.e., houses that look roughly the same, situated on lots of the same size and shape, all required by code to sit the same distance from the suburban streets on which they were built. Bill's values were thus oriented to producing rectilinear designs that sat on rectilinear properties, typically on level plots in this generally flat part of the country. Within this setting, Eric produced his design, which he also submitted to a state-wide competition, finishing fourth.

Normative assumptions guiding text production

Bill and Rick used the term 'common sense' on a number of occasions to describe Bill's assumptions about architectural design and home construction. In many ways, Rick recognized and appreciated the reasoning behind Bill's common sense and took it up in his own work:

> He took it a step further and explained, you know, okay, like in a bathroom, it's going to be much easier on your plumber if you put everything on one side. Put your sink and your toilet on one side. Then when you put your bathtub, you put it at the end. Put the spout at that one side. Don't put a sink way over here in one corner, and then you're just going to have plumbing going everywhere. You know, just teaching us some common sense things that you really wouldn't think of.

In our reading of the data, we saw these references to common sense—or 'practical' knowledge as they referred to it on occasion—as instances of what D'Andrade (1995;

c.f. Cole, 1996) calls *cultural schemata*; that is, 'patterns of elementary schemas that make up the meaning system characteristic of any cultural group' (Cole, 1996: 126). These schemata often take on a normative value that is generalized as 'common sense' that, one presumes, ought to inform any reasonable analysis of a situation. This common sense, which we interpret to be culturally constructed, provided the common ground of agreement for the principles that guided Rick's design of his house. In terms of the sort of house that Bill envisioned his students describing—those that would sell in a competitive housing market in a period following a serious economic depression—these values were axiomatic.

Our notion that they are culturally-situated springs from the fact that in other parts of the world, housing has different requirements. Prior to their closure, for instance, I taught on military bases in Panama City, Panama. In many parts of the city, much of the housing has little or no electricity because of a combination of year-round balmy weather and extreme poverty. Bill's notion of common sense assumed that a house has electricity—hardly a surprise in a U.S. suburban-style community. On one occasion, Bill described another design principle that followed from his common sense:

> What they have to think about, and what I try to make them think about, and the process I try to make them go through is what is easy and what is convenient. And I don't mean easy as far as easy for them to draw. Easy for them to live in. When you walk in [a room], make sure the light switch is on the door handle side, so you don't have to walk into a dark room.

The housing market of the city in which Bill's brothers needed to compete for house sales, then, provided the mediating culture that contributed to his notion of a cultural schema for commonsensical design. These principles might not apply to other areas and markets in which the culture has formed around other problems and conditions that must be addressed during the design of homes.

Tensions between goals

While accepting many of Bill's common sense views about architectural design, Rick found himself often at odds with the conventions Bill invoked for his house plans. One recurring tension we found came between Rick's goals for his drawing and the expectations of the adults who read and assessed his work. Rick's house design was intended to afford a particular way of living, including his preference for odd angles and his need to have an open design to account for his feelings of claustrophobia. Bill, on the other hand, embodied the norms of the field of architecture and the subfield of southwestern, suburban, mass-market tract housing design.

Rick's projection of the house design in relation to his lifestyle needs was quite different from Bill's sense of convention and market pragmatism. Bill emphasized what could realistically be built and sold in a community such as the one they lived in. The recent economic recession and resulting housing depression that left local builders wary of building unique houses that were difficult to market. Bill's sense of housing norms and marketability was based on his knowledge of which house designs resulted in quick and thus profitable turnarounds on the market, a consequence of his close relationship with his brothers and their business, which like all local construction firms, as well as any enterprise in the region at large had struggled during the market decline.

Rick, on the other hand, had a unique vision of himself and his lifestyle that caused him to resist certain norms invoked by Bill; further, he had gone through adolescence during the economic recovery and so had no deeply rooted sense of how the market had crashed during his childhood. Rick was unconventional for his school: He had dropped out and then returned to take this course after having taken classes at the local Vocational-Technical school. He had long blond hair tied back in a ponytail and got about town on rollerblades. He was a self-described

nonconformist in general, and he continually found himself at odds with the conventions governing the shapes of rooms emphasized by Bill. Rick worked against these conventions because he wanted to include unusual angles in his design.

Rick often revealed his preferences for his house's function through his narratives that illustrated how his lifestyle would be accommodated by his design decisions. He explained, for instance, one design decision as follows:

> Rick: The teacher wanted to put some coat closets in there, and I didn't. … I couldn't think of a place to put it without taking away from the overall—he was talking about, okay, let's cut this wall down like this, and we'll make this a closet. The door will be right there. Well, at, really to me, that just wouldn't be right. To have that study, then, like that. It just doesn't look right.
>
> Q: Wouldn't be symmetrical like that?
>
> Rick: Yeah. It would, it would make it, the plan, easier. But yet not what I was shooting for. I was shooting for something just totally different. I wanted something nice and open, but at the same time I wanted some closed off areas. I used to have a—there was a door coming out here. And there was actually a patio, like a garden that you could go out in the morning and drink coffee or whatever, and it was, there was a four-foot brick wall going all the way around it. So that, you know, you had a little bit of privacy, but not too much. Which kind of fit in with the rest of the theme of—you know, your dining room, you've got a little bit of privacy, that wall there, that had no shade. But at the same time, you could still get, you could still see into the living room.

These angles created a feeling of open space for Rick. Rick said, 'I didn't want everything tight, compact … A lot of the houses, and even the houses that won [the state high school architectural design competition], looked tight and uncomfortable to me … I don't like feeling cramped in. I am extremely claustrophobic and I don't, I wanted something large'. Yet an open design worked against the notion of efficiency that Bill hoped to impress on his students. And in the context of the virtual neighbourhood plot that Bill had provided for the students, Rick's preference for inefficient angles and open spaces would violate the sense of uniformity expected in such neighbourhoods.

In a sense, then, the assignment created a conundrum for Bill and Rick. The task required students to design a house that would afford their lifestyle; yet he also required that the house be situated on a plot similar to those on which his brothers built houses. This constraint produced tension between Bill and Rick in that Rick's lifestyle was not well suited for such neighbourhoods, at least from a marketing standpoint, which was paramount to Bill and irrelevant to Rick.

Tensions between writer's inscription and reader's encoding

Rick had little trouble reading his audience, given his close relationship with Bill throughout the design process. The tension resulted from the kinds of competing goals for the house's design and Bill's reluctance to recognize Rick's sense of style and notion of economy as legitimate in the context of the task. Rick's design became problematic for Bill when it departed from Bill's normative sense of what constituted practical or common sense approaches to designing a home as a commodity within the economy to which he had become enculturated, the postrecession suburban mass housing market. Rick, however, had a different purpose for his design: to embody and facilitate a specific and unique approach to living.

In one sense, Rick's composition might be read with reasonable proximity to his intentions by anyone conversant with the codes of architectural design. Readers who have inhabited American homes, even those with no experience in reading architectural plans, might have little difficulty in determining from Rick's drawing what is a hallway and what is a bedroom. In other words, he produced his design with attention to conventions typically employed by architects, and

his house was not so unconventional that a lay reader would have difficulty figuring out that a square room on the second floor was a room while the narrow, rectangular figure running down the centre of the design was a hallway.

In another sense, Rick's inscription is potentially lost when the text is unmediated by his own account of his decision-making process. Our research method provided access to Rick's inscription of meaning through his accounts of narratives and other schematic tools. These narratives suggested the sorts of experiences his design might induce and how those experiences might contribute to a more meaningful life for him within the home.

Texts are in one sense static in that they are fixed upon the page. Yet Rick's narratives revealed that he inscribed his house design with abundant movement and activity that he anticipated within the house, movement of a particular kind and motivated by a particular ideology. We have described, for instance, Rick's brief story of how he hoped to negotiate the premises: 'There was actually a patio, like a garden that you could go out in the morning and drink coffee or whatever, and it was, there was a four-foot brick wall going all the way around it'. These narratives were central to the kinds of design decisions he made, and suggest the ways in which his drawings represented not simply a structure but a way of living within that structure.

Bill's encoding of meaning during his reading, however, was quite different: The octagonal rooms suggested narratives in which consumers house hunting in this neighbourhood, and thus seeking a tract home, walked through the door, saw the odd angles, and quickly walked out in search of a home more accommodating to their furniture layout, pathways for movement, and the life afforded by such a configuration. Just as importantly, Bill's narrative extended to include the contractor stuck with an unmarketable home in an economy recently troubled by low housing starts and scant new home purchases.

Identity construction through textual composition

Rick was both a product of his culture and one who resisted it. He accepted and acted within the constraints suggested by institutionalized rules such as building codes and 'common sense' rules that governed building construction in this geographical area. In doing so he accepted the trajectory of producing marketable suburban tract housing that was encouraged by his teacher and followed by his classmates. At the same time, Rick's vision of how he wanted to live, reinforced by narrative images of how a house might facilitate his particular living and spatial needs, created critical points of departure from this trajectory, particularly with regard to his angular design:

> Everybody's got this real basic shape. You see a lot of squares. And I wanted to stray away from that.

John-Steiner and Meehan (2000) have argued that creativity follows from new juxtapositions of existing ideas. Rick brought new juxtapositions (e.g., a different sense of geometry) to Bill's class and the field, yet they were discouraged, because they departed from Bill's common sense with regard to profitable architectural design and house construction. We see Rick and Bill working collaboratively, if occasionally at odds, to produce an architectural design that juxtaposed existing conventions in new ways. Rick did not invent the octagon but did, at least in this setting, introduce this shape as a new configuration. As such, it was a creative decision consistent with his belief in himself as a unique individual. We see his design of this cultural text as both an embodiment of his vision of himself and as an opportunity to develop that vision.

DISCUSSION

Undoubtedly, I've gone far afield from conventional notions of literacy in this tour of

European churches and American and Panamanian houses. I hope that these forays have shed some light on what I consider to be key issues in the teaching and learning of how to write. I would stress the following points:

1. Composition refers to the intentional, conventional design and production of a text, regardless of medium. While writing is often considered the tool of compositional tools (a metaphor variously attributed to Dewey, Vygotsky, and Luria with respect to speech), I would argue instead that it is but one among many ways in which people can communicate, construct meaning, and learn.
2. The quality of writing or other composition is a function of readers' and writers' relationships and expectations, rather than a static quality of the text. Understanding the cultural construction of expectations is important in understanding any judgment relative to quality.
3. The meaning of a piece of writing is not always apparent. I extrapolate that just as Rick's design was comprised of narratives that were not visible to the uninformed reader, what students have to say through writing is not always evident in the texts alone. Greater perspicacity may be in order on some occasions if students do not sufficiently elaborate their writing. On the other hand, certain types of expression call for economic and even cryptic textual depiction, as in an architectural drawing or a poem. When the goal is to distill meaning and suggest it through relatively parsimonious compositions, it is incumbent on the reader to read the textual codes and what they potentially represent in terms of the author's purposes in constructing the text in a particular way. In this era of standardization of student work (see Hillocks, 2002), such generous readings are greatly at risk, a problem that research into multimodality must contest if the meaning of student expression is to be taken seriously.
4. The importance of a piece of writing to the writer ought to matter in developing school opportunities for composing. Students who willingly invest time and emotional energy in their compositions are likely inscribing meaning and their emerging identities in them as well (Smagorinsky et al., 2007). Such writing is better evidence of one's ability than the uninspired writing produced during wide-scale assessments and much other school-based writing.

5. Achieving authenticity is not necessarily, and not likely, painless, but requires cognitive and emotional investment, the willingness to revise or start over, and the willingness to grow, along with whatever growing pains are required to advance the process.
6. What teachers consider to be conventional and commonsensical is not always the same as what students think is appropriate for a text. These different expectations should be made explicit and perhaps negotiated as a way to help students understand the cultural expectations into which they are composing, and to provide them with experience in articulating and defending their understanding of rules and procedures. Typically, in school, students are simply provided with rules and downgraded for violating them. As Rick's experience illustrates, students often have good reasons for breaking rules. Given the opportunity, they might be able to explain and justify their understanding of the communicative and expressive needs of their compositions and why they can produce forms more appropriate to their purposes.

I see, then, both the whole school curriculum and the whole of compositional expression as appropriate settings in which to think about writing and writing instruction. Too often, I think, writing across the curriculum is imposed on other disciplines by English teachers as a panacea for the general malaise of the educational experience. In my view, English teachers would benefit from thinking about the broader notion of text composition and the ways in which it is practiced across disciplines. In my school observations, much of the most dynamic learning has come outside English or other 'core' classes and outside the realm of writing. Often, this learning has come in parts of the school typically considered to have low academic status: home economics, agriculture, and so on.

In these classes I have observed, and often collected data, as students have composed texts of great meaning to them, such as the clothes that students in a sewing class prepared for their own wardrobes. These students almost universally took great care with their compositions, willingly revising them and meticulously producing a final product

of which they were proud. At the same time, I have seen students in 'core' academic courses snoozing through lectures and dashing off assignments so that they can finish and move on to something they find worthwhile. It strikes me that rather than imposing the values and practices of English on every discipline, English teachers might benefit from thinking about how students experience school across the curriculum, observing and talking with students who are involved in the design of texts (often nonverbal) for other 'low status' classes, and rethinking how they might invigorate their own discipline by spending time with teachers and students in others.

REFERENCES

Alvermann, D.E. and Xu, S.H. (2003) 'Children's everyday literacies: Intersections of popular culture and language arts instruction across the curriculum', *Language Arts*, 81: 145–154.

Black, R.W. (2008) *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction*, New York: Peter Lang.

Black, R.W. and Steinkuehler, C. (2008) 'Literacy in virtual worlds', in L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, and P. Smagorinsky (eds), *Handbook on Adolescent Literacy*, New York: Guilford.

Cole, M. (1996) *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

D'Andrade, R. (1995) *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gardner, H. (1983) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, NY: Basic Books.

Gies, F. and J. Gies (1994) *Cathedral, Forge, and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages*, New York: HarperCollins.

Harste, J.C., Woodward, V.A., and Burke, C.L. (1984) *Language Stories and Literacy Lessons*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hillocks, G. (2002) *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*, New York: Teachers College Press.

John-Steiner, V.P. and Meehan, T.M. (2000) 'Creativity and collaboration in knowledge construction', in C.D. Lee and P. Smagorinsky (eds), *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Development: Constructing Meaning Through Collaborative Inquiry*, New York: Cambridge University Press. pp.31–48.

Kirkland, D., Jackson, A., and Smitherman, G. (March/April 2001) 'Leroy, Big D, and Big Daddy speakin Ebonics on the internet', *American Language Review*, 22–26.

Lotman, J. (1977) *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (Tr. G. Lenhoff and R. Vroon), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures.

Mead, G.H. (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The New London Group (1996) 'A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures', *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1): 60–92.

Norwich, J.J. (1989) *A History of Venice*, New York: Vintage.

Nystrand, M. (1986) *The Structure of Written Communication: Studies in Reciprocity Between Writers and Readers*, Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Olson, D. (1977) 'From utterance to text: The bias of language in speech and writing', *The Harvard Educational Review*, 47: 257–281.

Scribner, S. and Cole, M. (1981) *The Psychology of Literacy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smagorinsky, P. (1995) 'Constructing meaning in the disciplines: Reconceptualizing Writing Across the Curriculum as Composing Across the Curriculum', *American Journal of Education*, 103: 160–184.

Smagorinsky, P. (2001) 'If meaning is constructed, what is it made from? Toward a cultural theory of reading', *Review of Educational Research*, 71: 133–169.

Smagorinsky, P., Augustine, S.M., and O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2007) 'Experiences with personal, academic, and hybrid writing: A study of two high school seniors', *English in Australia*, 42(3): 55–73.

Smagorinsky, P., Cook, L., and Reed, P. (2005) 'The construction of meaning and identity in the composition and reading of an architectural text', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40: 70–88.

Smagorinsky, P., Pettis, V., and Reed, P. (2004) 'High school students' compositions of ranch designs: Implications for academic and personal achievement', *Written Communication*, 21: 386–418.

Smagorinsky, P., Zoss, M., and Reed, P. (2006) 'Residential interior design as complex composition: A case

study of a high school senior's composing process', *Written Communication*, 23: 295–330.

Street, B. (2003) 'What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice', *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 77–91.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991) *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Witte, S. (1992) 'Context, text, intertext: Toward a constructivist semiotic of writing', *Written Communication*, 9: 237–308.