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The Inscription of Self in Graphic Texts in School

In this chapter I focus on a small set of U.S. high school seniors to reveal the ways in which they wrote themselves into graphic texts that they designed and produced for school. All students attended the same high school in the Southwestern U.S., and most had struggled with school in the past. Indeed, of the four students featured in these three case studies, only one graduated on time with her class, and she did so with assistance from a medication prescribed for her Attention Deficit Disorder. Among the others, one dropped out of school altogether many credits short of the required minimum, one had insufficient credits to graduate on time and his graduation status remains unknown, and the third completed high school well after his scheduled date of graduation.

Even given their general lack of affiliation with the institution of school, they nonetheless demonstrated a deeply engaged commitment to tasks that involved a provocative stimulus, the application of life experiences and funds of knowledge that mapped well onto the assignment's requirements, and the opportunity to compose multimodally in an artistic or graphic medium. Although art and other graphic expressions are considered of lesser importance in the logocentric and analytic sphere of school (Gardner, 1983), these students not only immersed themselves in these tasks but produced work of impressive insight.

This degree of involvement and learning was abetted in each case by the opportunity to inscribe their own experiences and worldviews in the texts they produced. While the connection between personal lives and educational material has long been lauded in much educational writing going back at least to Dewey (e.g., Dewey, 1902), it is still considered frivolous by many involved in making educational policy (see, e.g.,

Rowan & Correnti, 2009; and Smagorinsky, 2009, for a rebuttal). Their work was afforded by the availability of spontaneous concepts developed through personal experience in conjunction with scientific concepts following from school knowledge, and the possibilities available through multimodal expression in a school assessment. Allowing such cognitive pluralism in students' schoolwork thus appears to provide great potential for educators who seek to engage and retain students who otherwise find school to be a tedious and dispensable experience.

The three case studies that I highlight illuminate the potential available when teachers open interpretive and expressive possibilities to students by expanding their interpretive and expressive tool kids to include artistic and graphic media in which they can inscribe their own experiences as they engage with the curriculum. Each case study features students producing texts in response to assignments that involve varying degrees of availability for personal connection:

- A mask produced in a senior British Literature class as part of a unit on identity, taught by Cindy O'Donnell-Allen; in this assignment, the inscription of self was a deliberate and obligatory dimension of the students' work (see Smagorinsky, Zoss, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005; Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007).
- In the same British Literature class, a collaborative graphic interpretation of John Keats' "When I have fears that I may cease to be" in response to an assignment with no specific cue for students to relate the poem to their personal experiences (see Smagorinsky, Cameron, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007).
- A set of architectural plans for a house that the student designer envisioned inhabiting one day; this assignment implied an inscription of self, one requiring

indirect expression in the layout of a home designed to support a particular, self-determined lifestyle (see Smagorinsky, Cook, & Reed, 20005).

In the sections that follow, I detail each of these productions by introducing the students and their task and then providing an account of their inscription of self in the texts. The data reported are from the studies referenced above, but do not represent the whole of the findings. Readers are directed to the referenced publications for a broader understanding of the students' situated design of these graphic texts.

Individual Composition of an Identity Mask

Zoss et al. (2007; cf. Smagorinsky, Zoss, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005) report on three students who created masks in their senior British Literature class; in this chapter, we focus on one of those students, Peta (a pseudonym, as are all student names in this chapter). Peta was a male who counted a variety of nationalities in his ethnic heritage: The Native American tribes of the Cherokee, Delaware, Kiowa, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho; and the European nationalities of the English, Irish, Scottish, and French. His primary identity was as a Native American, and he maintained an active role in the local Native American community. In contrast, he found school to be largely irrelevant, and dropped out shortly after he completed his mask in mid-October of his senior year of high school, well short of the minimum requirement for credits.

The mask activity took place as part of a unit on identity that included literature and other media through which authors and speakers considered their unique places in society and personal life trajectories. As part of the assignment, students were told that "masks serve as identities because when you put on a mask you become what the mask represents—we become our mask." Students

dedicated several days of class on a block schedule to constructing the mask forms in relation to their facial contours, allowing them to dry, and producing images on the exterior that indicated the identities they hoped to present to the world. The interior of the mask was available for the side of themselves that they kept more private.

Peta was absent during the decoration of the masks but took the plaster form of his face home, where he spent considerable time inscribing his identity on the exterior. When he returned to class, he provided a retrospective protocol about his process of composition; that is, he sat with me, and I recorded him as he explained his process of composition on the mask exterior. His dedication to this task—which only briefly preceded his decision to leave school altogether—suggests that it provided an unusually stimulating activity for him in what he regarded as the dull and dispiriting environment of school. Figure 1 presents the product of his work; I next draw from those portions of his protocol in which he explained how he inscribed himself in his design.

Place Figure 1 about here

In the context of this assignment, Peta revealed himself to be a serious, thoughtful, and committed young man in relation to issues that concerned him—issues that were outside the scope of the abstract curriculum provided by the school in general. The mask allowed Peta to express emotions that the disembodied school curriculum

generally discouraged from arising in student work. In the following exchange, for instance, Peta discussed his use of color to represent deep feelings of anger:

Peter: Why is your nose yellow with a kind of a red triangle or pinkish?

Peta: Because that is how I was wanting to represent the inner rage.

Peter: The yellow is rage?

Peta: It's coming from—you know, sometimes when you get mad, you have pressure that's like right here. . . . I put it around the brow.

Peter: Uh huh. Is that why the nose is yellow?

Peta: Uh huh.

Peter: So that's where you feel it coming—is it coming out or is that just where—or does it stay there?

Peta: It seems to like—it kind of feels everything else. It's, I guess maybe—yeah, it just kind of feels everything else. It kind of—it sets things in motion. Of course, by thinking about it and expressing it and all that stuff, it cools it down.

Peta's comments illustrate what Gee (2003) calls a *projective identity*, which employs two senses of the work "project," as both verb and noun: "to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character" [in a video game and to see] "the virtual character as one's own project in the making." Gee's observations come in the context of how video game players infuse their avatars with personifications of their own identities, but are appropriate for considering Peta's work on his mask. From a gamer's perspective, argues Gee, this virtual character is "imbue[d] with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want that character to be and become" (p. 55).

Through this graphic text, Peta depicted his identity as a person whose experiences had caused him to develop a "rage from deep inside." In this instance he used his mask design as what we called an *emotional mediator*: as a tool for exploring or representing his emotions in relation to his identity.

Peta's use of art as a way of expressing, monitoring, and controlling his emotions further illustrates Vygotsky's (1994) construct of *perezhivanie*, which accounts for the central role of affect in framing and interpreting human experience. *Perezhivanie* refers to "the emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] arising from any situation or from any aspect of [a child's] environment [which] determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child" (p. 339). People frame and interpret their experiences through both emotional and cognitive means working in tandem. This meta-experience—that is, the experience of one's experiences—provides the means through which people render their socially and culturally situated activity into meaningful texts of events. Peta's mask appears to have served this function in his composition of and reflection on his mask, allowing him to work both cognitively and affectively to explore, represent, and monitor his emotions. (See Smagorinsky & Daigle, in press, for the role of *perezhivanie* in school writing.)

In addition, Peta's mask served as a *spiritual mediator*: as a way to express his broader connection to the earth, an orientation that Jacobs and Jacobs-Spencer (2001) maintain is central to a Native American outlook. In describing the vine on the mask, for instance, he discussed how it enabled him to illustrate his view of the interconnectedness of his life's activities:

Peta: It's just, I guess, the way I write and stuff. I bring it out, it's kind of entwined . . . and fluid, and it just seems natural—the vine. And I've got the leaf as my lips.

Peter: As I look at it, I'm wondering, it doesn't look as though the leaf is, say, covering up to keep you silent. Is that—or is it intended as something you can open?

Peta: That's kind of how it looks, but that's not really how I intended it. I just made the vine red because—and it's like a life that was kind of entwined through it all.

He depicted his spiritual connection with the earth through a variety of images. In describing his choice of background for the mask, for instance, he said that he chose brown "because it's earth tones . . . And it just happened to be the color of my skin, but it's, it has nothing to do with my skin." His decisions about how to depict his identity on the mask, then, were simultaneously designed to convey emotions (e.g., rage) and manage those emotions (to cool the rage). He further represented his spiritual connection with the earth and the whole of life in ways that were absent the adversarial emotions that followed from his interactions with his (mostly White) schoolmates and teachers whose fragmented curriculum, and whose ways and values, he abandoned when he left school for more important pursuits.

The previous examples show how Peta employed symbols to express himself in his mask design. He used color (e.g., brown to represent the earth) and symbols from nature (e.g., the vine to represent the interconnectedness he saw in life) to depict central aspects of his Native American identity. Other aspects of his design similarly used

iconography, such as when he described the blue drops of water on the forehead of his mask:

> I wanted that to look like a rain image, and I wanted the purple—since I had already used blue for the rain, I wanted the purple to give it sort of a mellow [mood] because the way I think. The way I actually *think* is pretty calm. The way I *feel* is very, I guess, sort of—I wouldn't want to say violent, but it's kind of that degree. [emphasis added]

Peta also used what we termed a curvilinear element throughout his mask design to symbolize his relationship with nature. When I noted that his mask included "a lot of swirls. . . . a lot of circular motion," Peta replied, "Chaos is very circular. And randomness is very circular. So it's just kind of—I guess nature is kind of chaotic." This curvilinear element was also evident in Peta's use of the vine as an interconnective element in his design.

The images that Peta selected were chosen to depict narratives he constructed from his life experiences. When asked about his use of bright yellow, red, and green, and a less lustrous green in the background, he said,

> Peta: It's kind of the—it's like the sorrow and the envy and the pain that—I mean we all go through certain things, and I feel that I have experienced many things to give me insight on a lot of—and it kind of reflects on how I write. And I've always noticed that, you know, you get that sort of ache when you hurt? And I've always noticed that it's been stronger like on my left side.
>
> Peter: Interesting. Is that what the sharp images are?

Peta: Yep. I guess that it could be it. Yeah. It's sort of the pain and emotion. It's always very—like I said, I was—the way it—is always strong. I guess I always go to extremes on how I feel like being extremely happy or extremely angry.

Peter: Uh huh. Is that all on the inside, because you told me that you have kind of mellow outer appearance and that's mostly what I see.

Peta: Yeah.

Peter: But inside, there's a lot more going on than you show?

Peta: Yeah. But it doesn't bother me because I can write about it.

Peta's last remark reveals his employment of multimodal means of expression; his mask project was accompanied by a poem that he wrote in addition to what he'd been assigned. On the whole, his work on the mask illustrates how a graphic text may involve a great deal more thoughtfulness and consideration that might be attributed to nonverbal productions in school. Unlike most of what was asked of him at school, the mask project stimulated him to draw on his personal and cultural background to express his understanding of his world through a provocative creation. His decision to leave school appeared to follow from the absence of such opportunities through assignments across the curriculum and the lack of seriousness with which he believed the majority of his classmates took life and its social investments.

Collaborative Graphic Interpretation of a Poem

Roughly two weeks after the mask activity, Cindy followed through with an assignment in which students analyzed poems within the theme of identity by using colored markers to draw their interpretations on large sheets of butcher paper. Each group

then presented their interpretation to the class and led a brief discussion on the meaning of the text. We focus on two students who collaborated on an interpretation of John Keats's "When I have fears that I may cease to be." Figure 2 includes the Keats poem; Figure 3 depicts the interpretation provided by the two students, Rita and Dirk. (Rita and Dirk also collaborated with other students on a multimodal interpretation of the character Gertrude from Shakespeare's *Hamlet;* see Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998, 2000.)

Place Figures 2 and 3 about here

Rita was a European American female who had experienced difficulty with her academic learning, a problem that improved dramatically during her junior year of high school when she was tested for learning disabilities and was found to have Attention Deficit Disorder, for which she was prescribed Ritalin. She received a grade of B in Cindy's class for both semesters of her senior year. Dirk was a very personable, soft-spoken, and friendly African American male. Like Rita, Dirk experienced problems with concentration, although had no formal diagnosis and treatment upon which to base an assessment of his mental state. Dirk passed the first semester with a low D and was the only student in all of Cindy's five senior English classes who failed the second semester because of his grades (other students failed because of excessive absences). Because he failed English, Dirk did not graduate with his class.

The Keats poem potentially provides a number of interpretive obstacles for readers who have difficulty focusing on schoolwork, in that it requires great concentration to sort through the 18th century British language and literary conventions to

arrive at a construction of meaning. The analysis suggests that the students' reading of the poem was heavily influenced by recent experiences they had had with death, the fear of which is the focus of Keats's poem. Keats's brother had recently died from tuberculosis at the time at which he wrote the poem, and he himself died of the illness shortly after completing it.

Dirk's pastor had died three years previously, an event that led to his withdrawal from church; and just before the assignment, Mary, the 24-year-old sister of Rita's best friend, committed suicide. This latter event emerged in their discussion as the more significant influence on their interpretation and will be the focus of the following analysis.

The chronology of Mary's death is important in understanding Rita's reading of the Keats poem. Mary was a soldier in the U. S. Army and on Tuesday, October 10, committed suicide during a period of clinical depression. On Wednesday, October 11, Rita was at school but did not attend Cindy's class. In her absence, Cindy assigned a set of readings, including "When I have fears that I may cease to be," for the next class meeting on Friday of the block schedule. On Friday, October 13, Cindy provided butcher paper and colored markers for the students to use in small group artistic interpretations of the various literary works assigned for homework, with each group selecting a different poem. On Friday Rita and Dirk interpreted the Keats poem, and on Saturday Rita attended Mary's funeral. The following Tuesday, each group presented its artistic interpretation to the class. On Thursday Rita and Dirk provided a retrospective protocol for the research in which they reconstructed their process of composition, using their completed drawing as a stimulus.

Rita's close relationship with a family that had experienced a terrible loss was a powerful influence on their reading of "When I have fears that I may cease to be." We next illustrate the relation between Rita's experiences with a death in a family with whom she was very close, and Rita and Dirk's collaborative reading of a poem centered on fears of death by a member of a family seemingly cursed by tuberculosis.

With a strong personality and heartfelt beliefs about the intersection of her experiences with death and her reading of the poem, Rita was the dominant interpreter of the poem. She drew a number of parallels between Mary's outlook and that of the poem's narrator, in particular their negativity toward life, the degree to which their actions were amenable to choice, and the possibility of an afterlife. Rita described her feelings toward the speaker, saying:

> It is real negative of this guy not to think that once he dies things will be better. And he is thinking of all this bad stuff that is going on right now, and after he dies, and why he was put on the earth, and thinks of the positive things that he has done with his life. . . . But I still think he should be afraid to die. But I don't think he should bring out all this sadness and this feeling sorry for himself, and I don't think that is right. I think he should be scared of what is going to happen to him, but not to a point that he is so negative towards everything.

Her view of Mary was similar to her view of the speaker. Both, she felt, capitulated to overly pessimistic views of their lives:

> She shouldn't have been so negative, and this guy [the poem's speaker] shouldn't have been so negative. This guy didn't have a choice if he would die or not. But he should not have been negative. And she did have a choice. . . . She wasn't

> dying of [an illness] . . . She was dying because of depression. I guess that is an illness, but she was so negative towards everything. . . . It [the interpretation] was a way for me to say how scared I was of dying, and how I think everybody should fear death, and it hit so close to home for me that week.

Their presentation to the class repeated these themes. It invited a discussion among the class of how to understand and respond to death. What follows is an account of the discussion, reconstructed from the field notes and so generally if not specifically accurate:

Rita:	When you cease to be, you're dead. Why should he be afraid to die?
Jenny:	Because maybe he hadn't accomplished everything he wanted.
Cindy:	(points students to the biographical passage that accompanied the poem explaining that both Keats and his brother died young)
Rita:	This is a hard one. The guy is afraid to die because his brother has just died young. He uses a lot of metaphors. The first line is about, he's trying to take all that he has in his brain and use a pen to get it out, so he's using a pen to get all this crap out of his head. What does he want to do after he gets the ideas out of his head, into books?
Alan:	Why should everyone be afraid of death?
Rita:	I've never been around death till this weekend when one of my friends killed herself. I think everyone should be scared of it. Nobody knows what death is, so you should be afraid of it.

Shondell: I'm not scared, but if I knew I was dying, I'd be upset because of how young I am. But I'm not scared of what happens after that.

Lucy: A lot of people are curious, not really scared.

Rita: I think you'd be scared. Even if you have a really strong [religious] faith like I do, you'd be scared.

Shondell: No.

Billy: Say if you're an old man and you've did your purpose on earth, then you're not gonna be scared.

Alan: Maybe that's all you're meant to accomplish. What if you're 24 years old and going to die? Maybe that's all you're meant to live.

Shondell: You might be upset but not necessarily scared.

Rita: (addressing two students who were talking quietly about fears of death) I gave you my attention [during your presentation], now give me yours. It pisses me off when people don't look at me when I'm talking.

Rita & Dirk: (explain the symbols in their drawing.)

Shondell: That's a good poem, Rita.

Rita took the occasion quite seriously, snapping at students whom she believed were not paying attention. During the retrospective protocol Rita described the gravity of this moment, saying, “I have never had a grandparent die. I have never had anybody that I have known [die]. I have never been to a funeral in my life. And until this past—I really, I kind of got upset with the people who weren't listening to my viewpoint.”

Rita's own personal connection to the speaker's introspection about death was explicit in her remarks as discussion leader. Both these comments and her questions to the class prompted other students to ponder the ways in which they might face death at different life stages. The discussion that we have reconstructed reveals the students talking less about Keats's language and more about their own feelings about profound issues: the degree to which one's death is fated, the role of religion in confronting death, the purpose of human life on earth, the possibilities of an afterlife, and other questions raised in light of Keats's speaker's facing his own mortality.

This discussion, facilitated by Rita's connection of her recent experience with her friend's death, continued during the retrospective protocol. While reflecting on the presentation, Rita said,

> All the religion that has been piled into me by my parents, and by my church, I do have a strong [Catholic] faith. But I have no idea what is going to happen to me after I die. Nobody can say that they know what is going to happen after they die. And it is just like, one of the girls [during our presentation to the class] was not afraid to die. But I think that if it came down to it, I think she would be scared half to death, because she has no idea what is going to happen to her.

Rita and Dirk sustained their focus on the topics raised in the poem across a period of over a week. Stimulated by the speaker's ruminations and the death of a friend, they moved from a concern that both Mary and the narrator were too negative about their lives to a more complex consideration of how a person most appropriately faces death. This attention came in response to a poem that, as Rita said at the beginning of their presentation, is a "hard one." Through their multiple iterations of the initial reading, their

effort to represent the poem multimodally, their presentation and discussion with the class, and their reconstruction of their interpretive process and search for meaning for the research, Rita and Dirk had the opportunity to develop their ideas across multiple interpretive discussions and experiences, particularly the intense emotions surrounding the death of Rita's friend. As Rita said, in addition to attending to the language of the poem, their graphic interpretation provided her with "a way for me to express also my feelings about this girl's death," illustrating the potential for schoolwork that allows students to draw on their funds of knowledge to enable feelings of *perezhivanie* and greater insight.

Individual Architectural Design

The third text I will review was produced for a class in Architectural Design at the same high school. The student was Rick, a white male who had dropped out of a Vocational-Technical school during his senior year, only to re-enroll the following year at age 19 in his community high school's architectural design class. Rick's most immediate plan following school was to rebuild a car with a friend and perhaps become, like his father, an auto mechanic. He was also considering the possibility of returning to the Vocational-Technical school he had dropped out of previously. When contacted several years after the research, he was working as a carpenter in a different city in the same state.

Rick's teacher Bill described the task as being "to design a house from 1,250 square feet to 1,800 square feet. There are restrictions: single story, must have two car garage, must have at least one full bath, does not have to have a formal dining, but must have a kitchenette, like a breakfast nook. Must have a minimum two bedrooms, 3/4 brick

veneer." This style matched the designs produced by Bill's brother, a local contractor, and so fit in with residential designs currently being marketed in a community that had recently suffered from a major housing depression. Bill further encouraged each student to enter his or her design in a state competition in which their drawings were read by architects and university architecture professors who evaluated their full set of house plans. Bill's assessment of the students' work explicitly anticipated the standards used by these judges. (See Figure 4 for Rick's design.)

Place Figure 4 about here

Rick inscribed several aspects of his personality in his design. One overarching quality he described repeatedly was his need to be different, a dimension of his makeup that often placed him at odds with Bill's preferences for his design. Much of the design work that Rick saw going on in his classes relied on norms and conventions that he wanted to break:

> I wanted to do something that just didn't look average. You know, you can drive through some of the nicer neighborhoods here, and there's the same basic shape to all the houses. And I just, I wanted to do something different inside, and if you look at [my house] plan . . . there are three rooms that are the shape of stop signs. There are three octagons in the house. And [my teacher and my girlfriend's father, an architect] didn't like that.

The octagons were a continuing source of tension between Rick and Bill, who viewed such a design as unmarketable and out of place in the sort of neighborhood he envisioned for the houses. In spite of this difference, Rick's design placed fourth in the state competition, suggesting a broader view of housing options among the judges, one less driven by marketability and other practical considerations.

In addition to this independent streak that Rick drew into his plans, he infused his text with narratives of how he intended to live. He designed his kitchen, for example, to accommodate his love for rollerblading:

> As far as the kitchen goes, I wanted a breakfast nook in the bar with another small round type of table, which is just an extension that goes all the way around. Just for an easy—half the time, if I go in my house and I want something to eat, I'm not going to fix something to eat and sit down at the table in the dining room, because that's just not me. And we've got new white carpet in our house, so we're not allowed to take it in the living room. So, I'll just pick it up and just eat in the kitchen. We don't have a bar, so I can't actually sit down. If I've been out rollerblading all day I can't sit down, so I've got to stand there and eat. And so, you know, that was something that played a part in it. I wanted something just so I could sit there.

Although static in appearance, then, Rick's design was infused with all of the movement and traffic flow that he envisioned as the inhabitant of the premises. This movement was articulated in the narratives that provided the "story of the house" and thus its layout. Rick's design of the foyer, for instance, was informed by the following narrative:

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.

Rick's design ideas did not meet Bill's cultural schema for a home entry, one in which a resident or visitor was immediately met by a coat closet upon entering the house for convenient uncloaking and storage. Including an entry closet did not, however, meet with Rick's need for openness and symmetry, as evidenced through his narrative of how he envisioned using this living space. Yet Bill composed a different reading for this

foyer, one that imagined visitors who had no place to hang their coats and hats upon entering the house.

Rick's need for an open design was a consequence of his belief that "I didn't want everything tight, compact. . . . A lot of the houses, and even the houses that won state, 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." This need for open space operated alongside Rick's need to be different and live a specific sort of life within his design. He could not produce a conventional home of the sort anticipated by Bill; he said, "Everybody's got this real basic shape. You see a lot of squares. And I wanted to stray away from that." Rick's open design with octagonal rooms and unconventional layout reflected his inscription of a preferred way of living in the home, one suited to life as he envisioned it. Even as his plans departed from local convention, they worked within the broader cultural requirements of architectural design sufficiently to earn him a high ranking in the state competition.

Discussion

These three cases illustrate the inscription of self in very different sorts of graphic texts in school. The two produced in the British Literature class were unusual in that general setting because of the canonical nature of such courses, both in terms of what is read and how readings are allowed to be interpreted. The third was highly conventional for an architectural design class but rarely considered in research on literacy practices. As a whole they suggest the ways in which issues of identity can become more central in mainstream teaching and learning and how the production of multimodal texts across the

curriculum may enable students with access to learning that is not available through the conventional analytic and logocentric curriculum.

Brockmeier (2001) views individual identity as emplotted within a larger cultural identity. One's identity is mediated by society's teleological goals and the cultural practices that they suggest so as to provide "some of the fundamental trajectories of our existence (p. 216). . . . it is the individuals who 'suture themselves into the story'" (p. 221). People's identities are bound in broader cultural narratives, "creating a narrative 'emplotment,' a synthesis of heterogeneous elements" (p. 225; cf. Ricoeur, 1983). Drawing on their prior narratives from personal experience, readers and authors may emplot each new textual experience, situating each in dialogue with and in extension of other texts (Wertsch, 1999).

These processes appear to have been at work in the case studies reviewed in this chapter. The students wrote themselves into their texts in ways that involved their personal experiences and funds of knowledge as mediated by cultural phenomena such as Native American concepts and related imagery, conceptions of fear and death drawn from religion and other sources, and conventions for producing architectural drawings. Both the inscription of self in academic texts and the availability of multimodal texts for expression and interpretation lie outside the norms for public education and its emphasis on detached abstract linguistic analysis of curricular material. Given that the affordances of these tasks engaged students who in general had little interest or investment in school—to the point where their work occupied them extensively outside class—the inclusion of graphic means of textual expression and interpretation appear to have considerable potential for providing access to academic interest and success for students

whose prospects for graduation are dim. Although the current climate of educational accountability appears to diminish the prospects for such possibilities yet further, these studies demonstrate that opportunities for the inscription of self in graphic texts in school, and the emotional connection between the personal and the academic that is often lacking in school work, may help provide the bridge that some marginalized students need to find the curriculum worth staying around for.

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Figure 1: Peta's mask

Figure 2: “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” by John Keats (1818)

When I have fears that I may cease to be
   Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
   Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
   Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
   Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
   That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
   Of unreflecting love;--then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Figure 3: Dirk and Rita's Interpretive Drawing

Figure 4: Rick's Architectural Drawing