

**INVENTION THROUGH TEXTUAL REUSE: TOWARD PEDAGOGIES OF
CRITICAL-CREATIVE TINKERING**

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This project investigates the many ways in which writers reuse preexisting texts in new writing. I introduce the umbrella term *textual reuse* to identify any practice of incorporating “old” text in a “new” composition. With this broad term, I expand and enrich the field of derivative writing beyond the two most prominent practices discussed in composition studies: remix and plagiarism. More than affirming that reuse is valuable or interesting altogether, I indicate what makes some instances of reuse more inventive than others. I ask how we can both recognize and produce inventive works of reuse. To investigate these questions, I examine a range of example texts, from sentence-level reuse in poetry and writing exercises, to larger-scale compilation in textual collections such as miscellanies and anthologies. In drawing on many instructional texts from the eighteenth century to today, I demonstrate how textual reuse has contributed to the teaching of reading and writing throughout the history of modern English studies and propose how it might continue to do so. I extract from these materials some key strategies for inventive reuse, including rearrangement, combination, substitution, addition, deletion, and reformatting.

These strategies form the foundation for a pedagogical practice that I call *critical-creative tinkering*, a mode of engaging with a text by rewriting it. I argue that manipulating a source text in this way can prompt critical insight into it while also generating new writing, making it a broadly creative activity. Critical-creative tinkering is a writing pedagogy that also teaches active close reading and thus appeals broadly to the teaching of reading and writing. It is a practice with

consequences for the text being reused and revised, as well as for the tinkerer, who gains facility with language and an enhanced understanding of how texts work. I theorize and advocate for critical-creative tinkering by explicating successful examples from literary works, the Internet and popular culture, professional writing, and student writing. I argue that tinkering can help to bridge courses across the different branches of English studies and outline classroom and curricular conditions that will support its wide integration.

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ABBREVIATED INTRODUCTION¹

There is nothing new under the sun. And so the case I build contains no particularly novel ideas... I mostly weave together certain perspectives and insights that others have already expressed.

Christian Smith

There is no greater mistake than the supposition that a true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine.

Edgar Allen Poe

words
are everyone's property and in vain
do they hide in dictionaries,
for there is always a rogue
who digs up the rarest
and most striking truffles.

Eugenio Montale

All confusion could have been completely avoided by including an attribution in his book, or at very least letting me know it had served as inspiration. Nothing clears things up like clarity.

Sean Tejaratchi

Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate.

M. M. Bakhtin

¹ I thank Herman Melville for including his "Extracts" at the start of *Moby Dick* and my colleague Peter Moe for suggesting that I imitate Melville.

All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands. By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote. We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs, and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

For quite some time I've been interested in the idea of allowing you the ability to tinker around with my tracks—to create remixes, experiment, embellish or destroy what's there.

Trent Reznor

I stripped Shakespeare's sonnets bare to the "nets" to make the space of the poems open, porous, possible—a divergent elsewhere. When we write poems, the history of poetry is with us, pre-inscribed in the white of the page; when we read or write poems, we do it with or against this palimpsest.

Jen Bervin

All great men have been great workers, indefatigable not only in invention but also in their ability to reject, sift, reshape and organize.

Friedrich Nietzsche

A literary situation begins to get interesting when one writes novels for people who are not readers of novels alone, and when one writes literature while thinking of a shelf of books that are not all literary.

Italo Calvino

In spite of a persistent fiction, we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on.

Michel de Certeau

The more we write, the more likely we will reuse something—imagery, phrasing, a sentence, an anecdote, an entire argument—that has served us well in the past and which has become a part of our writing vocabulary.

Patrick M. Scanlon

But isn't the same at least the same?

Ludwig Wittgenstein

All my life I've been arranging words on paper. (Now on the computer monitor.) Have always thought of composition (whatever kind) as construction work. How do we put the bricks together? Can we find new building materials? What does the final product look like? I've always enjoyed taking a piece of writing apart (in the laboratory, that is) to see what makes it "tick," "hold together." I see "writings" much as I see "buildings." What is the architecture? What is the style?

Winston Weathers

Walter Benjamin dreamt of publishing a book composed entirely of quotations. I lack the necessary originality.

George Steiner

These things are not strange or rare
They are waiting
In the warehouse, they are yours

Clark Coolidge

INTRODUCTION

It's hip to reuse. Look no further than the *Facebook* page "Repurposed Recycled Reused Reclaimed Restored," which shares ideas for turning old, surplus materials into both artistic and functional pieces. Use old corks to create a composite image of a face, bits of paper and cardboard to make a three-dimensional collage. Craft light fixtures and sculptures from obsolete CDs; convert tee shirts and sweaters into hats; turn a broken-down car into a chicken coop; plant flowers in hollowed-out books, used tires, unfashionable purses, or plastic soda bottles. Discarded objects can take on new value in the context of the artsy, crafty "up-cycling" movement. Cleaning up and tinkering with materials that most people would trash or recycle can yield beauty, surprise, and utility. Reuse doesn't just discourage waste and encourage conservation; it exercises creativity, produces unique, handmade goods, and impresses viewers. Do-it-yourself projects have special currency on social media sites like *Pinterest*, where users show off their work in photos, contribute ideas and instructions, and share advice for reusing successfully.

Material works of reuse inform how I think about the reuse of language and texts, and I suggest that material and textual examples share common goals, practices, and ends. Reuse in both contexts can facilitate conservation and convenience. Consider the reliance upon time-saving templates for writing in professional environments and the reuse of lesson plans and assignments in multiple sections of the same class. Reuse can also convey humor, surprise, and

silliness. Take, for example, the parodies, remixes, and spoofs that litter the Internet and late-night TV shows like *The Colbert Report* and *Saturday Night Live*. Compare them with the car-turned-chicken coop mentioned above or with the adorable trinkets that contributors to the website *Recyclart* fashion out of found metals, leftover building supplies, and natural ingredients like pinecones. (See, for instance, “Little Cork Animals,” which turn simple champagne corks into cute figures with the addition of ink and yarn.) As these trinkets indicate, many reused projects displayed online are works of art that entertain and delight viewers much as found poetry and collage essays might.

Some projects result from carefully following instructions that someone else shares, maybe via *Pinterest* or a craft book. *For this project, you will need an empty glass bottle, a pair of scissors, some string, sand, and tape. Step 1: fill the bottle with...* In such cases, reuse takes a procedural approach yet yields creative outcomes—a neat gizmo or stylish decoration. In other cases, creative results come from playing with spare materials that just happen to be nearby; a more open-ended, unpredictable process leads to inventive reuse. Yet both approaches, one more mechanical and the other more personal, have procedural elements *and* leave room for customization. Consider the analogous practice of cooking. One may follow a recipe invented and tested by others, or concoct something on the fly using general cooking techniques and leftovers from the fridge. Even when following a recipe, there are opportunities for interference and adjustment, especially given that ingredients and appliances may respond differently than expected. And even when taking a more ad-hoc approach, one relies upon tried and true cooking procedures. Projects that involve remaking, reusing, and transforming show that a binary distinguishing creative from mechanical work is simply unsustainable.

For me, the term *textual reuse* signifies a general practice of incorporating “old” writing into “new” writing. It encompasses reuse on the smaller scale of quotation and citation, as well as compilation on the larger scale of anthologies and news-aggregating websites. The benefit of this term is its capaciousness: it serves the various aims described above and brings together a slew of writing techniques typically considered individually. For example, video remix, patchwriting, and scrapbooking have each been treated separately by literacy scholars. Archival studies like Ellen Gruber Garvey’s, for instance, occasionally gesture toward loose connections between historical practices and present-day writing. Garvey ties nineteenth-century scrapbooks and periodicals to today’s websites and online bookmarks. I seek to go further than drawing comparisons, instead elaborating general textual strategies of reuse. I gather and analyze diverse examples of inventive reuse, including nineteenth-century writing exercises, experimental poetry and creative nonfiction, eighteenth-century compilations, samples of business documents, *YouTube* videos, and online news articles. In doing so, I seek to widen and enrich the field of derivative writing practices beyond what I see as the two most common topics currently enclosing it: remix on the one hand and plagiarism on the other.

Remix is a particularly trendy term in composition studies these days and is often used to denote *reuse* more generally. It has shown up over the last decade in numerous studies of sampling, digital media, mash-up, and DJ techniques² and was even the theme for the 2010 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Considered as a whole, such scholarship appears to me repetitive in both method and argument. The composing models that remix scholars offer, as well as the early forerunners of remix that they identify, are fairly

² Exemplary recent articles include Rice 2003; Hess 2006; Johnson-Eilola and Selber 2007; Leary 2007; Delagrange 2009; Ridolfo and DeVoss 2009; Yancey 2009; Davis, Webb, Lackey, and DeVoss 2010; Dubisar and Palmeri 2010; Carter and Arroyo 2011; Brown 2012; Stedman 2012; and Ray 2013 (“More”).

consistent among studies, creating more agreement than scholarly debate or conversation. Cultural references and models of remix often include several of the same groups: early and prominent hip-hop and DJ artists who demonstrate sampling (for example, the Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, and 2 Live Crew); postmodern collage, cut-up, and readymade artistic techniques (for example, those practiced by William S. Burroughs, Andy Warhol, and Marcel Duchamp); and legendary collectors such as Walter Benjamin and Joseph Cornell.

Scholars have opened up remix as a significant site for reuse but have not yet explored much of its territory, particularly that to do with text rather than multimedia. In extending my scope to the reuse of text more generally, I suggest that there is more to remix than what we have seen so far. I highlight additional materials and practices that illuminate the inventive potential of reuse in intriguing ways and therefore bring together texts that until now have remained unconnected. I pursue the potentialities of language play and manipulation that textual reuse exploits, seeking to offer productive strategies for future composition broadly conceived.

Terms like *reuse*, *recycle*, and *repurpose* have muddied with popular use, the distinctions between them growing unclear as they are collapsed under a common heading like *Recyclart*. Those little cork animals, for instance, don't actually evince recycling, but reuse. Recycling breaks materials down into their component parts and then reconstitutes them into something in which the originals are now unrecognizable. By contrast, viewers can discern the precursor materials in reused works. The cork animals are made up of corks; the former tomato sauce jar now used as a drinking cup still looks like a jar, but has been repurposed. All writing consists of recycled parts: the preexisting language that writers rely upon in order to communicate with one another. Words, some phrases, and structures are iterable. Their originators have been erased. I, however, focus on texts whose components can be readily identified as originating elsewhere.

This identification requires that authors signal that they have reused, or readers must be familiar enough with the original to recognize it. What to one reader appears to be reuse may appear to another reader as recycling, so I realize that these terms are not stable. The distinction between reuse and recycling is significant, however, because examining reused texts and not recycled ones allows me to infer writing practices that others can then employ in their own writing. I can identify some seams in a reused text that provide insight into how it was put together.

In applying the material concept of reuse to composition, I promote rethinking writing and rewriting as processes of moving, building, and shaping. Texts can be decomposed, broken down into constituent parts like phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and larger excerpts that can then be cut, pasted, recombined, rearranged, and reformatted. Just as one who repurposes a tire moves, repairs, and adds to an existing object, one who reuses a quotation imports it into a new context, adds a surrounding frame, and puts it toward a singular purpose in a singular piece of writing. A material model of composition is interactive and down-to-earth, less mystifying than the idea of writing on a blank page. It is a durable, widespread model. Some of the most casual and commonplace comments in our classrooms invoke material practices. We speak of cutting and pasting, of course, as well as cleaning up, fleshing out, and tightening our writing. In this dissertation, I contribute to the established tradition of envisioning writing as a material practice of making, often described through metaphors of sculpting, gardening, cooking, or tailoring.

Barbara Tomlinson excavates well-entrenched material metaphors for writing and revision in her 2005 book *Authors on Writing*. In surveying interviews with authors, Tomlinson looked for references to physical labor and embodiment amid what she perceived as a prevailing view of writing as a mental, imaginative activity. Though author interviews cannot offer an unmediated take on what writing is or what it means, they provide Tomlinson with lots of

evidence supporting the currency of external metaphors for writing. Authors contributing to her study spoke of writing as a form of mining and refining, invoking the tangible, transformative, and social aspects of such work (54-56). Others described writing through physical descriptions of traveling, moving, and searching, or as an organic process reminiscent of gardening and cooking (60).

Metaphors of *revision* in particular invoke many material practices, revealing the aptness of reusing and recycling as common writing activities. Authors frequently reference artistic and craft projects such as painting, sculpting, sewing, and tailoring. The latter two metaphors here emphasize that texts are divisible, that they can be broken down into separate threads, which can be rearranged, added to, and deleted. Acts of casting and molding also portray texts as malleable, pliable, and fluid materials that writers can play with. Writers describe attempts to improve their texts through mechanical and construction-related metaphors of finding needed parts or fixing an old car (66). Tightening, loosening, fine-tuning, and retooling frequently describe this work. Tomlinson suggests that such verbs apply best to “small problems” (66) and thus evades the deeper implications—the potential for more transformative revision—that these moves of “tinkering” could serve. I aim to build tinkering into more than just an off-the-cuff metaphor for patching up, serving remarks like, “I need to tinker with this draft a bit more before I turn it in.” I investigate tinkering as a learning process and general writing strategy and develop it into a flexible, robust practice that conveys more than just attention to surface-level repairs. I propose that when applied to writing, tinkering can yield both creative and critical gains.

Material metaphors reappear throughout studies of authorship and writing. (See, for instance, Garvey, who invokes quilting and gleaning crops from fields; Delagrangé, who imports museums and cabinets of curiosity into writing studies; and Tonfoni and Richardson, who recast

writing through the lens of visual art.) Perhaps these metaphors persist because they appeal to a definition of composition as the act of putting things together, a more simplified, less intimidating conception of writing than the notion of novel creation. In fact, F. Brookfield assures the young readers of his 1856 textbook *First Book in Composition* that composition means merely “*a putting together*,” and in the case of writing specifically, ““*a putting together*’ of the *thoughts* which belong to a subject” (17). In another textbook of this period (1869), Simon Kerl asserts that this definition holds at all levels of writing: “Sentences, paragraphs, compositions, and books are but combinations of parts and elements” (262). These comparisons accord with the visual emphasis that governs much of our language, particularly our metaphors, helping to demystify the process of writing. Tomlinson posits that external metaphors allow writers to see their writing as manipulable, allowing them to envision and thus grapple with revision (70-71). Hannah Sullivan articulates this point in *The Work of Revision*, where she speculates that “Counter-intuitively, being able to see texts *fixed* in many visually different forms seems to promote textual fluidity (as anyone who has had the experience of discovering mistakes in proof can attest)” (8). She adds that “revision *requires* interacting with something that is already achieved in material form” (8; emphasis added). Textual reuse is a kind of revision—and indeed most revision involves some reuse—so material metaphors of interaction, breakdown, and decomposition are essential to the theories of invention that I build in this dissertation.

I advance these material metaphors by consulting heuristics for technical invention and applying them to the invention of composite texts. A key scene in the 2008 film *Flash of Genius* initially directed me to this line of thinking. The film recounts Bob Kearns’s 1978 lawsuit against Ford Motor Company for infringement on his patent of the automatic intermittent windshield wiper. In a pivotal courtroom scene, a witness for the defense argues that Kearns did not invent

the device but rather, just combined and arranged some already invented parts—transistor, resistor, capacitor—in a new way. Kearns, who represents himself in the case, counters this argument with a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. He begins reading from the book, stopping to ask the witness, whom he is now questioning, whether Dickens invented the words that he has just read. No, he did not, the witness admits. Kearns reasons that Dickens too merely arranged anew some already invented parts: he used the tools available to him (words) to create an original, celebrated work of literature. To create new inventions, Kearns asserts, all inventors must rely upon parts already invented and used by others.

While drawn to this analogy between things and words, I noticed some limitations as well. The inventor of a novel has more parts to choose from than does the inventor of a new technology for automobiles. I don't imagine that Dickens placed before himself all the words in the dictionary and then chose from among them the best arrangements and combinations he could muster. But most likely he did rearrange and recombine various words, sentences, and passages as he wrote, his thoughts and his materials interacting with and responding to each other, invention becoming a component of revision. A central question formed for me: How do we as writers know when new combinations and arrangements are useful? When exactly does arrangement meet invention?

Whether creating reused toys, tools, or texts, producers must first gather spare materials. Reuse entails accumulation. Is accumulating itself an inventive activity?³ We might perceive our personal collections of notes, cards, and trinkets as unique and novel. In book-form (like in a miscellany or scrapbook) or just in a spare shoebox, such materials can inspire insight, humor, or

³ Liz Rohan and Todd S. Gernes have each argued compellingly for the inventive potential of collecting. Rohan asserts that collecting is a literate practice that can contribute to research and invention, and Gernes establishes how personal textual collections, such as scrapbooks, commonplace books, and friendship albums, evince signs of thoughtfulness.

pleasure in viewers, just as writers hope an inventive story might. But a shoebox full of corks doesn't express creativity or surprise as the cork art or animal figures described above do. Instead, the raw materials have inventive potential, to be realized when combined with other sources and when processed further through gluing, cutting, or marking up. Accumulation alone involves some modification, but it is minimal. The collector imports materials from one context into another (a shoebox), where they combine with others, though tenuously. Greater intervention makes a project more recognizable as an invention. Modifying collected materials through rearrangement, addition, and deletion not only manifests further work, and thus requires more intellect, but can also develop out of those materials something with a new function or effect.

To begin teasing out invention amid accumulation, consider the abbreviated introduction of extracts that precedes this introduction. These few pages are analogous to a box of collected objects that hold some value for their collector. I have saved and compiled into a single document an array of quotations that I encountered while completing this dissertation. Of course they represent only a small portion of the reading I have done, so clearly, I have had to select them from a much larger mass of possibilities to create this brief collection. The suggestion that I have chosen these implies some forethoughtful planning. But a number of factors both personal and incidental have contributed to my choices. One quotation was easy to copy and paste; another was ready at hand because I happen to own the book in which it appears; another appealed to me because it sounds nice. Surely I encountered other extracts that can crystallize the arguments of my dissertation, but failed to copy them down, or forgot them altogether.

As I selected, I also combined, arranged, and rearranged. Once I chose and positioned one quotation, another possibility appeared. For instance, placing rock star Trent Reznor's words

alongside Emerson's emerged as an intriguing idea (because it is an unusual combination) once I had already populated the document with several particularly quotable individuals. Ultimately, each quotation occupies a distinct location, making these textual scraps unlike physical scraps and other collectibles jostling haphazardly in a box.

I can claim that the order and arrangement of these quotations exercised significant thought and decision-making and thus that I have rightfully *made* something, but does the list itself convey this? Have I intervened sufficiently, through selection, combination, and arrangement, to stake a claim for invention? To explore these questions, we might examine whether my display expresses meaning or conveys value. Its appearance in a dissertation lends the list a certain weightiness and sophistication that it might not convey if encountered elsewhere. Its placement at the start of the dissertation suggests that it previews the writing to come, so readers might gather from it that the dissertation will question ideas about creativity, originality, and reuse. The sources that the list cites reflect scholarly reading material, perhaps imbuing the list with value regardless of whether the quotations are transformed at all. And completing a dissertation comes with the expectation of performing months, even years of research and regularly engaging with the ideas of others in what is imagined to be an original way. Given the expectation that the author of a dissertation has read widely, selection would seem a difficult matter of collecting excerpts of the best quality, or those that convey a specific point of view or argument.

Can a reader tell if the arrangement is thoughtful or haphazard? The academic context again attaches extra importance to every compositional decision, so that readers are unlikely to assume I threw some quotations on a page at random. But detecting any specific meaning in the arrangement depends upon the reader's personal interaction with and interpretation of the

extracts. Readers might think that the first extract represents a certain degree of forethought, given that it so blatantly conveys the idea that originality is a myth. As readers continue, they may notice echoes from the first quotation in those by Poe and Emerson, for instance—all affirming the prevalence of reuse and calling into question the nature of originality. Readers might also try to extract special meaning from the way in which I have concluded the list, with a verse that encourages further appropriation, suggesting a mild call to action. Having read the extracts and gathered a general argument from them, readers might puzzle over why I included Sean Tejaratchi's statement, which claims that attribution is necessary and important and thus may conflict with the sentiments around it. But to me, this comment conveys irony, and I want it to be read with suspicion. I re-voice this quotation by placing it in a new environment. Accumulation certainly contributes to invention because it happens alongside re-contextualizing and combining disparate texts, which create new meaning and effect through interactions with each other, with the larger context, and with the reader who encounters them. It is my goal in this dissertation to help readers disentangle these different contributions to invention when attempting to evaluate works of reuse.

In an 1882 rhetoric James De Mille proposed that accumulation is inventive, but to a lesser degree than what he called creative invention. The difference between accumulative and creative invention, according to De Mille, lies in the source material. Accumulation involves finding, translating, collecting, conducting research, and remembering what already exists, rather than creating anew, as in creative invention. Reuse involves working with extractable raw materials like historical facts and prior texts. But as we have seen reuse to be creative, it is clear that accumulation and creation are not opposed; some middle ground ties together the collection of prior materials and the transformation of them into something with a new function or aesthetic

effect. De Mille conceded as much, noting that his two modes of invention often intermingle. Still, he expressed preference for the creative variety (309).

I reject the hierarchy that De Mille's terms suggest not only because it is an unsustainable one, the two terms often overlapping, but also because I wish to affirm that accumulative work has its own merit. Compilation is a form of intellectual work, with results that I do not think can be easily subordinated to more explicitly creative endeavors like composing original fiction. Librarian Donald Altschiller attempted to rehabilitate compilation as a laudable intellectual pursuit in a 2012 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. He pays tribute to the authors of massive reference works like *Famous First Facts* (first published in 1933), the newspaper column "Ripley's Believe It or Not," *Roget's Thesaurus* (first published in 1852), and *Schott's Original Miscellany* (2002). After detailing the meticulous, sometimes decades-long labor that contributed to such publications, Altschiller makes a convincing case for honoring the single-authored compilations that serve as essential forerunners and supplements to the seemingly infinite wisdom of *Google* and *Wikipedia* today. He concludes,

As Google users confidently type keywords in the search box and often uncritically assume the veracity of the results, they may be ignorant of the crucial, meticulous research performed by Joseph Nathan Kane, Norbert Pearlroth, and others—both earlier and later—who strived to publish authoritative information. Since computers have made many people think that all knowledge is only a keystroke away, it is well worth remembering the question Kane continually posed to his high-school teachers after they pronounced something a fact: "How do you know?" (n. pag.)

Altschiller does not appear to me as an out-of-touch antiquarian trying to resuscitate work that now seems to lack necessity. Instead, I see him asserting the value of compilation because it performs a much-needed service of verifying information and consolidating it into central clearinghouses that innumerable people rely upon. It is worthwhile to acknowledge such work because even if it is a rare undertaking to write an encyclopedia, almanac, thesaurus, or dictionary, similar writing strategies form the foundation for ubiquitous modes of composition. Thus, when I address compilation, I also address writing more generally. Consider, for instance, the commonalities compilation shares with typical scholarly and student writing projects: gathering research; authenticating quotations and dates; creating bibliographies, reading lists, and course-packs; and writing fact sheets, abstracts, and annotations that distill arguments and wide swaths of information into easily readable chunks of text.

In concluding his article with that skeptical question “How do you know?” Altschiller highlights one of the re-user’s key attributes. With this question Altschiller portrays Kane, the compiler of *Famous First Facts* and almost fifty other fact books, as suspicious of authority, eager to conduct his own research. Kane conveys a desire to inquire, investigate, research, and explore on his own, without someone else telling him what is true and what is not. This attitude underlies many do-it-yourself pursuits, including trying to fix a sink without hiring a plumber, tinkering under the hood of a car, and compiling primary research materials to verify facts on the web. This subversive, stubborn ethos drives the writing practice called *critical-creative tinkering* that I theorize and promote in this dissertation. Tinkering requires engaging with prior texts on a material level, not just reading them, thinking about them, and jotting down some notes or a response, but getting inside them and shifting their parts around to discern what makes them tick—and how they might “tick” differently. The tinkerer exercises a restless, inquisitive stance

marked by interaction with old materials, rather than deference to them, just as the up-cycler won't let perfectly good scraps of wood or metal go to waste, but will consider what else they can be made to do through further manipulation.

At the same time that I characterize practices of reusing and tinkering as subversive, I want to clarify that they follow a durable tradition that cuts across fields, from arts and crafts to writing and technical invention. Given their persistence over time and their continuity across fields, these practices are not as eccentric as they may seem. They are central to composition. It may seem contradictory to characterize reuse as both subversive and common. Yet a practice can become widespread and still remain subversive. Reuse is widely valued today as modern cultures grapple with waste management and environmental degradation; up-cycling is a hip, leisurely practice. But both remain subversive because they fundamentally rethink how we relate to and use material goods—for purposes that they were not initially meant to serve.

I make a case for the prevalence and currency of reuse by citing, describing, and analyzing many texts not usually considered together. I use these examples to demonstrate the variety and complexity of reuse and to establish its long history in the teaching of English. My analysis of example texts is informed by theories of making and inventing from composition studies, literary studies, and technical contexts. Through reading and experimenting with reuse, I demonstrate the ways in which it can be inventive, while maintaining that not *all* reuse is inventive and that there are degrees of inventiveness. The key inventive strategies that I extract from sample texts become the foundation for critical-creative tinkering. I suggest that this practice, with its fusion of generative and critical-interpretive functions, could serve much English instruction and become a source of greater continuity across English studies. I articulate

ways of integrating tinkering into various courses, so that in addition to theorizing this practice, I imagine how it fits practically into classrooms and curricula.

This project thus has implications for invention and the teaching of writing in several settings and disciplinary locales. As an approach to reading critically while producing writing, tinkering is a pedagogy that can serve the teaching of reading and source use and further connect reading and writing activities. And as its effects are especially potent when used to manipulate sentences, tinkering can readily serve sentence, style, and grammar pedagogies. Tinkering offers some strategies for returning language instruction to prominence in composition studies. I share this goal with Susan Peck MacDonald, whose 2007 *College Composition and Communication* article “The Erasure of Language” contends that attention to language has dropped out of composition studies and only seems of interest in contexts where students are struggling with it (595). Like MacDonald, I recognize that the field of composition studies lacks a common focus and suggest that language study, via critical-creative tinkering, could add some consistency to it.

This dissertation contributes to the history and future of composition as both a field and a practice. I reframe how we read and value historical materials associated with the development of composition studies as an academic field, while also introducing new approaches to teaching composition and conceptualizing its relationship to literary studies and creative writing. I address composition broadly conceived by appealing to contexts academic and popular, alphabetic and digital. I investigate several different spheres of writing, including literary and creative writing, student writing, professional correspondence, and popular culture, each of which forms the foundation for a separate chapter. Ultimately, I adopt what I consider a “writing studies” approach in this dissertation: linking together different types of writing without restrictive regard

to where in the discipline they tend to gather. I examine writing as a general form of making and inquire into what we can value in it altogether.

1. COMBINATION, ARRANGEMENT, INVENTION: HEURISTICS FOR TEXTUAL REUSE AS A PRODUCTIVE PRACTICE

B. S. Johnson's 1969 novel *The Unfortunates* comes in a box. Inside, the reader finds 27 small bundles of paper held together by a removable red wrapper. A note inscribed on the box explains, "Apart from the first and last sections (which are marked as such) the other twenty-five sections are intended to be read in random order. If readers prefer not to accept the random order in which they receive the novel, then they may re-arrange the sections into any other random order before reading." Johnson abdicates control over arrangement, almost seeming to give up on it or leave it out and produce unfinished work. Yet at the same time, he draws special attention to arrangement, its effects on the reading experience, and its essential contributions to the making of meaning. His novel becomes a project for readers to participate in and puzzle over. Readers do not submit to a preconceived package conveying authorial control, but readily direct and redirect their reading by taking on an organizing role.

A rambling, confessional novel devoid of linearity, *The Unfortunates* is well-served by a structure that supports randomness. The form reinforces its content. As Jonathan Coe explains in his 1999 introduction to the book, Johnson wanted to portray the thoughts and memories drifting through his mind as he tried to take in a soccer game as a sports writer. Coe writes,

It was this randomness, this lack of structure in the way we remember things and receive impressions, that Johnson wanted to record with absolute fidelity. But randomness, he realized, is "directly in conflict with the technological fact of the

bound book: for the bound book imposes an order, a fixed page order, on the material.” (ix)

Coe goes on to explain that paradoxically, “Johnson was an extremely orderly man, and he liked to exert absolute authorial control over his material” (ix-x). Indeed, the form of his combinatory novel is not as open-ended and variable as it could have been (for that, see Marc Saporta’s 1962 loose-leaf novel *Composition I*), framed as it is by designated first and last sections. Furthermore, each section itself contains some narrative structure. Still, the experimental form invites recombination and rearrangement and thus underscores through substantial material features these easily neglected facets of reading and writing. Arrangement is a creative element for writers to manipulate.

I begin this chapter by invoking this obscure text in order to foreground the inventive and experimental dimensions of (re)arrangement. *The Unfortunates* champions reading as an interactive, material process in line with the model of composition that I assert in this dissertation. Re-users are reader-writers, who simultaneously take in the old and produce something new; thus, reading by shuffling and reshuffling also describes a reciprocal practice of invention that I begin elaborating here.

Perhaps surprisingly, composition exercises share commonalities with Johnson’s avant-garde techniques. I have uncovered a set of nineteenth-century textbooks that position sentence-building as an activity devoted to reshuffling pieces, much as a reader might reshuffle Johnson’s packets to experiment with different effects. Sentences demonstrate the interconnectedness of invention and arrangement strikingly well because of their brevity. In embracing a capacious view of reuse, I recognize that when read as textual practice, even decontextualized school exercises can offer rich insight into the techniques underlying productive reuse. More than

recovering pieces of composition's history and assimilating them to experimental writing and current trends such as digital remix, I use them to reframe theories of composition—specifically, our thinking about the inventive potential of (re)arrangement. I affirm that arrangement can be a generative activity that feeds back into invention. Further, a significant goal of this project is to determine which forms of (re)arrangement are most likely to be productive. This question is one that remix scholarship, despite its emphasis on combination and arrangement, has not pursued.⁴

I. MERGING INVENTION AND ARRANGEMENT

I turn now to a selection of popular nineteenth-century composition and rhetoric textbooks that contain a set of exercises in arrangement common during this time. The interrelationship of invention and arrangement figures prominently in these exercises, as well as in the composition of the textbooks themselves. These books are compilations whose compilers readily characterize their work as reuse in which arrangement is central. The compiler Albert Newton Raub, for example, suggests that what he has added to the derivative materials making up his textbook is an *arrangement* both “practical” and “interesting” (4). James R. Boyd similarly illuminates his process as one of accumulating and selecting worthwhile materials and then presenting them in a valuable, convenient arrangement (iv). In elaborating the rhetorical canons, some of these books also include arrangement within the realm of invention (Day 35; Raub 258).

⁴ One exception is Brown 2012, which acknowledges a need to move beyond the argument, already affirmed by many in composition studies, that DJs offer rhetorical methods that are valuable to the teaching and study of writing. He begins distinguishing between examples of remix, particularly with regard to their modes of delivery. However, this important discerning move becomes buried in Brown's elaboration of what he calls “dromological” composition. He uses remix to introduce new terminology rather than challenge or reshape composition more broadly.

These textbook compilers thus practice rearrangement techniques analogous to those that their exercises teach. Their exercises in rearrangement show that invention and arrangement, though classically considered distinct canons of rhetoric, can merge. They position arrangement as central to composition by recasting writing as an act of arranging and rearranging preexisting textual elements. They ask students to arrange miscellaneous words into a sentence (Boyd; Harvey); to rearrange the order of words in existing sentences (Hart; R. G. Parker; Swinton; Williams); to synthesize sentences into paragraphs (Waddy); and to create narratives from detached sentences (Parker; Swinton). This range of exercises demonstrates how concerns of arrangement will enter into a text at all levels, from constructing sentences and paragraphs to organizing complete narratives, essays, and even books like these compilations. I begin at the local level with the sentence because it makes particularly clear that arrangement affects meaning, thanks to the ready effects that syntactical manipulations produce. But this relationship between arrangement and meaning extends beyond the concerns of grammar to the concerns of rhetoric when one begins manipulating larger chunks of text—hence the classical formulation that arrangement concerns the sequence of parts in an oration.

Some of these exercises prompt students to generate new, additional textual elements as a result of rearranging those provided, and thus, they point to the production of new text as one potential sign of invention via rearrangement. They position arrangement as a productive stepping-stone to further composition, while other exercises more fully showcase the meaning-making properties of arrangement by demonstrating that rearrangement of prior materials can be inventive on its own—no new text necessary. I highlight these latter exercises here in order to begin with the strongest case for the inventive potential of rearrangement.

Below is a representative exercise from R. G. Parker's 1832 textbook *Progressive Exercises in English Composition* that requires students to build sentences under great constraint: they must generate variety while relying entirely upon the words provided.

10 PROGRESSIVE EXERCISES IN

LESSON IV.

Variety of arrangement.

Sentences consisting of parts and members, and sometimes very simple sentences, can be variously arranged, *preserving the same idea*. The following sentences are to be written (or read) in as great a variety of arrangement as the pupil can invent. He may afterwards take the same words and express different ideas with them.

MODEL.

On the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy, I ascended the high hills of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.

Same sentence, with the members differently arranged.

On the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer, I ascended the high hills of Bagdad.

Same, again varied.

I ascended the high hills of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer, on the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy.

Again.

In order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer, I ascended the high hills of Bagdad, on the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy.

Again.

In order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer, on the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy, I ascended the high hills of Bagdad.

Again.

I ascended the high hills of Bagdad, on the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.

N. B. It is recommended to Teachers to require the pupil to tell which arrangement of the sentence he thinks the best.

EXAMPLES FOR PRACTICE.

1. John was buried here.

This simple sentence may be read in twenty-four different ways, six of which will be questions.

2. The farmer Peter ardently loves the beautiful shepherdess Mary.

Figure 1: Parker's Sentence Rearrangement Exercise

The instructions state, "Sentences consisting of parts and members, and sometimes very simple sentences, can be variously arranged, *preserving the same idea*. The following sentences are to be written (or read) in as great a variety of arrangement as the pupil can invent" (10). Beneath

the model sentence are five variations on it, each with its phrases and clauses differently arranged. Rearranging these “parts and members” may seem an insignificant mechanical task, creating or contributing nothing, yet hints of invention do emerge: changes in emphasis or effect readily occur as the writer repositions syntactical structures on the page. Rearrangement does not entirely preserve the same idea, as Parker proposes, but introduces slight shifts in meaning.

Consider the model sentence: “On the fifth day of the month, which I always keep holy, I ascended the high hills of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.” This sentence seems to reflect on the past because it foregrounds the date by beginning with the phrase “On the fifth day of the month.” In contrast, the third sentence after the model emphasizes what motivated the speaker that day because it begins, “In order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.” A note beneath the final variation admits, in fact, that the above sentences are not actually equivalent: “It is recommended to Teachers to require the pupil to tell which arrangement of the sentence he thinks the best.” Likewise, alongside a similar rearrangement exercise in another composition textbook, *A School Manual of English Composition* (1887) by William Swinton, is this explanatory remark: “The particular place that a phrase should occupy will generally depend on the sense intended; hence phrases should usually be placed beside the parts of the sentence they are designed to modify” (11). If appropriate arrangement depends upon what the writer wishes to convey, then rearrangement—the exercise that students are performing here—can, as I have shown, introduce a new “sense,” a sign of invention that does not depend upon the addition of new text. Exercises such as this one show that rearrangement alone is a productive form of writing and that one sign of its productivity is meaning- or sense-making.

In dramatizing how invention seeps through even the most elemental, sentence-level manipulations, exercises like Parker's reveal the fundamental interconnectedness of invention and arrangement. When one is composing under the kinds of constraints that these exercises impose, making only limited arrangements possible, the effects of moving and manipulating each element become magnified. Each attempt at rearrangement produces a subtle change in meaning or emphasis. Sentence exercises such as these deserve attention today not only because they can show scholars how arrangement and invention merge, but also because they have pedagogical implications with continued value for student-writers. Attending to arrangement on the sentence level through exercises like these can sharpen a writer's sense of the intricate ways in which meaning and emphasis stem, in part, from location. One can see how meaning changes as words, sentences, blocks of text, and by extension, images and objects change their placement and also their relationships to one another. Exercises in arrangement and rearrangement can foster a critical awareness of location, space, and design; they can promote a way of thinking.

In addition, writers come to see through repositioning syntactical structures in as many ways as they can that bits of preexisting language have inventive potential in and of themselves and furthermore, that this potential can be revealed through play and manipulation. While Swinton suggests that "the sense intended" will guide arrangement, Parker's exercise shows that a writer need not begin composing with a sense of the meaning or effect he or she intends to produce. Rather, language can be manipulated to present multiple possibilities, including those that one could not anticipate before initiating the manipulation. Interaction with language reveals its possibilities. Constrained exercises that challenge students to interact with language in new and multiple ways have generative value.

Remix scholarship has championed similar assignments that call for combining, juxtaposing, and arranging textual components. For example, Susan H. Delagrange advocates for student projects in arrangement by connecting them to the shadow boxes of twentieth-century visual artist Joseph Cornell and the composing methods promised by digital technologies. Yet textual practices like exercises from composition's history can illuminate this connection on their own, without the need to leap from visual arts back to writing. Attention to arrangement does not require a move to multimodal composition: it can reenergize the study of structures and sentences in any medium.

Consider, for example, the opening remarks to James R. Boyd's widely used nineteenth-century textbook *Elements of Rhetoric and Literary Criticism*, first published in 1844:

Even the humble business of copying accurately from a book, from reading books, geographies, grammars, or any other text-book, is a suitable exercise, until it can be done with exactness in every particular. Why is it that those who are accustomed to set type in a printing-office not only spell well, but so generally learn to compose well, but that they have thus employed themselves in copying the language of those who compose well? (x)

Boyd seems needlessly preoccupied with correctness here, yet his analogy between composing and setting type is nonetheless illuminating. It imagines writing as a material practice, one that requires physically arranging and rearranging preexisting elements, a repetitive activity from which one gains a sense of the locations or "slots" where words, phrases, sentences, and other bits of text fit—that is, a sense of space and of how that space and the objects within it combine to create meanings. Boyd may mean to stress only the benefit of copying from good writers, but for me, his question suggests a visual analogue to nineteenth-century exercises in rearrangement,

many of which appear in his own text. It posits an externalized model of invention and discovery that encourages experimenting on the page with combinations of text that may yield effective writing. As Boyd notes, repeating this kind of exercise develops a writer's understanding of how changes to syntax will affect meaning and emphasis and thus how arrangement more broadly generates meaning. Boyd provides a preview of the technical-material model of invention that I advance in this project.

II. INVENTION AS INTERVENTION

Because of their association with “current-traditional” pedagogies, sentence exercises in rearrangement have been largely discredited in histories of composition. Thus, such materials do not appear in recent scholarship like Delagrange's that acknowledges strategies of creative reuse almost exclusively with reference to digital practices and outside fields. I seek to reanimate the study of these exercises and more importantly, to reaffirm the interventional model of invention that they suggest. In this way I perform a version of reuse myself: importing old materials into the current context, interweaving them with disparate other materials, and from that combination advancing practices of writing.

Prominent histories of composition have tended to pass over what I am calling an interventional approach to composition. This approach encourages writers to go into existing sentences and paragraphs, tinker with their parts, and ultimately, reinvent them, reusing and rearranging old parts in productive ways.⁵ In *Composition-Rhetoric*, for example, Robert J.

⁵ I adapt Rob Pope's “in(ter)ventive” model of invention, elaborated in his book *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice*; it recognizes every invention, textual or technical, as an intervention into an existing state of affairs. This

Connors criticizes sentence exercises altogether by contrasting them with more open-ended, and thus more palatable, writing assignments throughout their history. He outlines the evolution of schoolbooks from abstract rhetorical treatises to textbooks like Parker's, noting that as classes in rhetoric shifted their focus from oral composition to written composition, instructors first realized a need for facilitating writing practice. Because they wanted to maintain a focus on rhetorical theory, they opted for offering questions and exercises rather than more open-ended writing practice, which would have in addition overburdened them with developing and evaluating assignments (73). Thus, a "lesson-illustration-exercises approach" eventually became the norm in secondary- and college-level composition textbooks (79). In recounting this history, Connors treats exercises as inadequate from the start, a poor substitute for more effective writing practice.

When he again acknowledges sentence exercises, Connors critiques them more precisely. He aligns them with an ineffective "pedagogy of levels" that developed throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, a pedagogy known for atomizing writing instruction by dividing language into discrete blocks or levels of discourse. Connors explains that this pedagogy "assumed that knowledge of smaller elements was a prerequisite to the ability to manipulate larger ones" (240)—hence, textbooks display a gradual movement from word to sentence to paragraph exercises, culminating in theme-writing. This approach was widespread because, Connors suggests, "teachers needed a way to break the seamless skin of the phenomenon of writing into teachable pieces. Doing the carving spatially seemed reasonable within a general approach that, because of cultural fears of illiteracy, paid great attention to the

model undergirds Pope's instructional book *Textual Intervention*, which offers strategies of "critical-creative composition" (170) requiring reader-writers to rewrite, rearrange, and remake example texts for interpretive and productive purposes, often following procedures characteristic of nineteenth-century sentence exercises. Pope's work demonstrates that there is strong continuity in composing practices across the history that I am establishing.

written product” (250). Rather than looking at what else these exercises might teach composition scholars today, Connors uses them merely for critique and thus, I think, forecloses further study of them. He convincingly debunks their pedagogical foundation, noting that “teachers have known for years that atomistic theory and the drill-for-skill pedagogy that usually accompanies it simply do not transfer drill skills into writing ability” (250). Because he places sentence exercises within a broadly problematic system of writing instruction, it has become difficult to read them on their own terms, as a textual practice that exemplifies how arrangement and invention can intermingle even under the artificial constraints of textbook-teaching.

In a similar way, Lucille M. Schultz shifts attention away from the nuances of these exercises by furthering Connors’s distinction between interventional, sentence-level work and open-ended writing prompts. She identifies a new composition pedagogy that emerged in the nineteenth century in contrast to a traditional, rule-based approach like the pedagogy of levels that offered little or no instruction in “original” composition. The new pedagogy, which Schultz locates in introductory composition books such as John Frost’s *Easy Exercises in Composition* (1839) and F. Brookfield’s *First Book in Composition* (1855), asked students to begin writing their own thoughts before learning rules or completing sentence exercises. Schultz has valued practice exercises like those that Parker presents (Carr, Carr, and Schultz 164), but in *The Young Composers* she valorizes students’ “original” expression on the blank page, to the exclusion of other modes of invention such as an interventional one. Giving students the freedom to write on a blank page is made to sound more progressive and productive than requiring them to intervene in what someone else has already written, even if the latter option promotes invention. The blank page here appears even more a gift to beginning students given that composition texts typically sequenced their exercises from more interventional ones toward less interventional and more

open-ended ones, from fill-in-the-blank activities toward eventual essay-writing. Yet the blank page is a myth: it too requires intervening among prefabricated constraints.

Invention always involves intervention into some kind of prior text. Even when students practice composition in more open-ended essay-writing, rather than in sentence exercises, they are nonetheless intervening in what already exists: the topic or prompt provided, which along with the instructional setting forms a context shaping their writing. Essay-writing is more explicitly interventional when a series of preparatory questions accompanies the prompt in order to prime students' responses, as in this sample page from Brookfield's textbook:

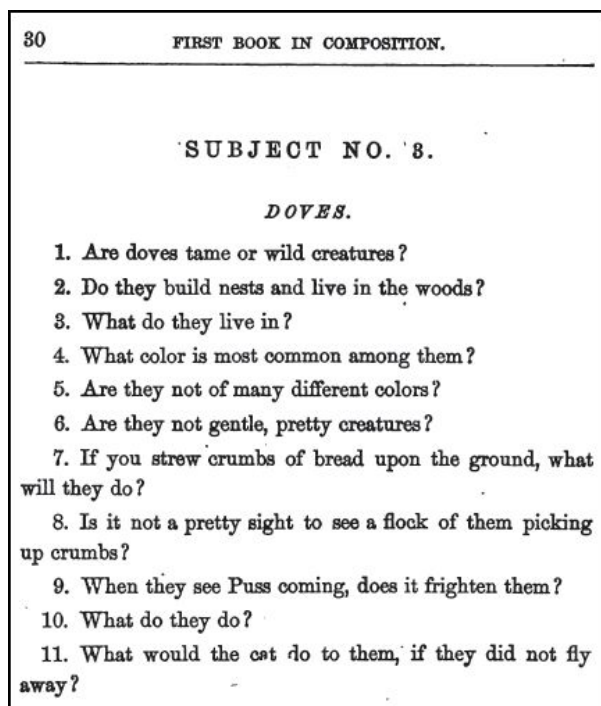


Figure 2: Brookfield's Essay Prompt

On a continuum charting degrees of prefabrication in writing assignments, Brookfield's page would appear more prefabricated than other possibilities, yet even with just a topic or prompt, the writer must practice intervention. His or her page is not actually blank, even if prompting questions like these have been made invisible: they may not be explicitly enumerated but nonetheless circulate in conversation, in prior assignments, and in other contextual features,

prefabricating the writing to an extent. The writer intervenes by modifying the text provided, even if it is only a question, phrase, or idea, by responding to it, adding to it, shaping, assimilating, and redirecting it.

Intervention registers the mixed agency inherent to writing; it signifies an act of entering into or getting between what already exists. The blank-page approach, in contrast, idealizes the act of writing by setting it apart from all other previous texts, ostensibly because benefits accrue when students seem to have more freedom, autonomy, and agency to express themselves. Yet this separation is unsustainable. In the teaching of writing, in thinking and writing about writing, existing texts necessarily gain attention. They become fodder for invention—objects of potential influence, study, and revision, even if made invisible. That is, even when they are not invoked in an assignment, not cited or analyzed, preexisting texts impinge upon our writing. Writing happens in relation to prior writing, whether a student’s own or examples given by teacher, textbook, or classmates. Invention occurs amid a set of “givens” or prompting materials that tacitly shape and constrain one’s writing in defiance of the blank page.

III. A MATERIAL-TECHNICAL MODEL OF INVENTION

These exercises in rearrangement support an interventional, material approach to composition, which theorizes writing as a practice of building and rebuilding like the physical work of setting type that Boyd invoked above. Bits of language constitute parts or building blocks, materials amenable to movement, manipulation, and transposition. I recognize, as Robert Macfarlane has, that invention involves recombination and that texts, like things or devices, are reconfigurable, consisting of parts that composers can combine and arrange in numerous ways to yield distinct

outcomes. As I conceive it, then, composition should share the ethos of technical and artisanal activities, with their emphasis on making, crafting, building, and assembling. I argue that an inventor of texts works in a way much like an inventor of things (devices, tools, and structures), and I recast textual invention through the lens of technical invention.

Modeling composition in this way provides guidelines for determining whether a given combination and arrangement of parts is in fact productive. As technical approaches acknowledge, not all combinations and arrangements will be useful or even attainable. I was able to show that Parker's exercise in rearrangement produced new meaning because changes to syntax produced recognizable changes in emphasis and effect. Beyond the sentence, however, there is no rule-governed system like grammar that signals whether a given combination or arrangement makes sense. In moving from grammatical manipulation to rhetorical manipulation, we lose the syntactical principles that guide grammatical rearrangement toward effective results. A technical-material model of composition facilitates thinking at a macro level about how reuse and rearrangement can yield new functions, values, and meanings. It can offer guidelines like those of syntax that we can use to judge larger manipulations of text.

This material approach has a history beyond the nineteenth-century textbooks that I have focused on thus far.⁶ Macfarlane and Marjorie Swann have each described literary composition at different historical moments through artisanal analogies. In taking up the Victorian era and championing an interventional approach to invention, Macfarlane describes the inventor's mind, as "a lumber-room in which are stored innumerable odds and ends" (4). The inventor gathers bits and pieces of text (spare parts) and later assembles and shapes them into a new compilation.

⁶ Carl Fehrman distinguishes two visions encompassing all of creative production, one relying on natural, organic imagery, which he associates with romantic aesthetics, and another, common during the latter half of the nineteenth century, adopting mechanical, architectural imagery associated with craftsmanship and industry.

Swann uses similar language to describe commonplacing, or “the notebook method,” in early modern England, a method whereby inventors mine texts for fragments to incorporate later in their own writings (as writers have continued to do up until the present). The poet Ben Jonson was one commonplacing enthusiast, who likened the practice to gathering timber and envisioned the poet as a laborer whose artisanal object is the poem (157-159).⁷

Such analogies reframe the composer as a craftsman, someone occupying a humbler and more accessible position than the mythical genius poet who writes via unconscious inspiration. I reject the image of mythic genius as many scholars before me have. But at the same time, I want to avoid resuscitating a simplistic notion of the craftsman-author, one that Martha Woodmansee has located in the Renaissance and the long eighteenth century. This version of the craftsman-author relied upon formulaic “predefined strategies” in composing (427). In contrast, I want to retain the sense of experimentation inherent to technical invention, even while offering, below, what may seem more mechanical guidelines for composition. Technical invention calls for openness, play, and exploration. An interventional, recombinative approach to invention encourages moving and manipulating textual blocks toward different ends and in the process, generating new meanings and new functions. Moving and manipulating texts can alone yield productive results, as in Parker’s rearrangement exercise, but it can also prompt a composer to rethink, rewrite, and add to component parts. Even while breaking text into discrete blocks like words and sentences, a technical model can nonetheless accommodate the recursivity of the writing process that Connors worries the pedagogy of levels typically cannot (*Composition-*

⁷ Scholars of modern and postmodern poetry have also made a connection between language and materiality in recognizing how poets exploit the sounds, images, and textures of words rather than just their meanings, particularly in projects of concrete and conceptual poetics. (See, for example, Jerome McGann’s *The Point Is to Change It*; Ross Hair; and Kenneth Goldsmith.)

Rhetoric 242, 250). Arrangement is a general writing practice that can contribute to the development of further ideas and plans. It has inventive potential.

In forwarding a material perspective on language, I argue that invention need not begin with intentions and goals. Nor must it begin wholly in language. Instead, thoughts, intentions, and language inter-animate each other in an experimental process of invention. Language does not represent fully intentional thoughts that a composer has already experienced and now wishes to report; language is material that feeds back into thoughts and intentions, influencing them through a textual agency. Paul J. Kameen encapsulates this perspective via Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his elaboration of an exploratory theory of writing. He asserts,

To build a text is not then to master language but to yield to it, to let it guide meanings toward fruition. Language is not cloth for intentions abstractly conceived. Language conceives intentions and nurtures them into texts. Language is in this sense itself a “forethoughtful query” which invites certain responses, responses that do not waft in fully fleshed on the breath of inspiration, but issue forth from the dwelling of the query. And that dwelling is language. (82)

Kameen suggests that it is through dwelling in language—the open and experimental process of moving and manipulating textual parts—that one practices productive writing. Note that his metaphors link language and writing to material practices of building and dwelling (in Heidegger’s words). Kameen disputes a wholly formalist approach to writing, one privileging thought over actual interaction with text by positing that intention must precede language and can be transparently translated into textual structures (74-75). He likewise disputes a wholly expressivist approach to writing, one that locks the writer in a mental space without relationship to the outside, material world (76-77). These divergent approaches both subordinate language to

thought, rather than cast language as material to play with and explore through manipulation and appropriation, writing as “work and play with words” (82). The model that I imagine here figures writing as the kind of exploratory give-and-take process that Kameen develops in opposition to these two approaches. The difference, however, is my focus on interaction with blocks of reused text—concrete raw materials, rather than language in abstract, as Kameen has it. I believe that the visual, almost tangible nature of reused chunks demystifies writing a bit more than does the idea of playing with language more generally, as expansive as it is.

Robert J. Weber’s guide to technical invention, *Forks, Phonographs, and Hot Air Balloons: A Field Guide to Inventive Thinking*, provides for me a promising foundation for theorizing productive arrangement. Weber shows how prior tools and devices can be “joined” into meaningful composite inventions. In a join, parts come together so that their separate functions mostly remain while a new function or affordance emerges too (113). Consider the Swiss army knife, a convenient composite derived from joining several smaller inventions—a knife, scissors, tweezers—into a common handle. All textual reuse involves putting parts together, at least some of which are preexisting parts and others of which may be new; Weber’s concept thus seems an appropriate one to try out in the textual domain. An obvious textual analogy for a join might be an anthology or a miscellany, which compiles or joins reading materials for a class, a family, or some other context into a common volume. A technical model of invention like Weber’s is fitting too because it is clearly interventional. Weber’s guidelines encourage aspiring inventors to intervene in—to get between—existing inventions in order to join them into functional composites.

Intervention involves mixed agency yet remains an active process that allows composers to exert agency. Even as I disavow theories of invention that necessarily begin with plans and

intentions, I acknowledge that the composer must nonetheless act. Invention remains an active process while it accommodates mixed agency, some give-and-take among composer, text, and context. Here I depart from theories of invention that deemphasize authorial control to the point of recasting the composer as a passive receptacle for language rather than one who contributes through actions like dwelling and playing. Jason Wirtz and Paul Magee have recently put forth such theories. Writing as theorists of creative writing, they have each fiercely refuted conscious, intentional authorial control over artistic productions. Wirtz argues that years of developing one's craft can cultivate an intuitive, unconscious mode of production characterized by what he calls the "receptive stance." The composer becomes a channel or conduit for language rather than a conscious, active constructor of it (16). Wirtz intriguingly reconciles something like spontaneous inspiration with learned knowledge, suggesting that one can learn how to facilitate unplanned creative moments. Yet he and Magee both move so far from conscious intention that the writer loses agency. According to Wirtz, invention involves "surrendering to the material" (17) and acknowledging that "*the writing is smarter than the writer*" (18; emphasis in original). I want to affirm the power of textual agency and to deemphasize writerly intentions and desires, as Wirtz and Magee have, but not while ignoring the writer's actions. A technical-material approach to invention requires *interaction* among agents, especially movement and manipulation of textual components. It is an active approach, even while it is open-ended, with often unpredictable results coming from the other agents in play.

Weber describes four heuristics for choosing promising components and then joining and arranging them effectively. One, join inverse parts, those that undo the actions of each other, such as a pencil and an eraser. Two, join complementary parts, those that are often used together and thus promise convenience or increased functionality when joined, such as shampoo and

conditioner. Three, join parts with shared properties to eliminate redundancies and condense space and costs, as the Swiss Army knife does by combining tools that all require handles. And four, join parts that when combined produce an emergent function, a capability that no single part can accomplish on its own (115-118). Weber uses hand tools as simple examples of parts that can be combined. In adapting Weber's heuristics, I create an analogy between tools and textual parts, one that correlates with a functional perspective on language. This perspective serves my larger vision of language as material, one congruent with the "truly dialectical relationship between self and world" that Kameen affirms (77). Language for Kameen "is both the instrument and expression" of this inventional dialectic (78); it both facilitates the necessary give-and-take between internal and external spheres during invention and constitutes the composition that results. Language as a tool is both a means of invention and an outcome of invention; the metaphor works because it accommodates invention as both process and outcome.

Though Weber's guidelines pertain to tools much weightier and less abstract than texts, they nonetheless accord with Kameen's elaboration of an inventional dialectic and his refutation of formalist and expressivist thought. Weber's and Kameen's disparate models of invention are surprisingly compatible, for the technical-material model that I develop via Weber is not *just* combinatory (mentally combining ideas) but material *and* combinatory (combining things). A simply combinatory approach leaves open the possibility that invention is entirely mental or unconscious, a mythologized account often associated with expressivism and the blank page, that is difficult to prompt and perhaps impossible to teach. Like Kameen, Weber deliberately aims to distinguish his approach from a purely mental or unconscious one like Arthur Koestler's concept of bisociation, which defines creative synthesis or joining as "an unconscious connection between ideas" (Weber 112). Weber finds fault with Koestler's concept, writing that "[I]f we

explain inventive thinking as the coming together of unconscious ideas, what should we do when the muse does not strike? Certainly, I do not wish to deny the role of unconscious processes, but if our sole way of generating inventive ideas depends on the unconscious, we must admit to little influence on the creative process and little possibility of teaching or learning about it” (112). Without guidelines like Weber’s, an inventor might wait for the muse to strike or attempt joining parts together at random, an option that he says leads to “combinatorial explosion” and useless composites like a dictionary and a fishbowl (113).

Weber’s approach is provocative and amenable to my project because it is material and methodical yet still allows for spontaneity. This approach helps demythologize invention without oversimplifying it. Weber promotes orderly, accessible heuristics while not limiting their outcomes to predicted results. In adapting Weber’s guidelines to textual invention, I am making an inherently pedagogical move. Even as I turn now to analysis of previously composed texts, this project maintains an orientation toward practice—toward the production of additional composite texts. In what follows, I explicate each of Weber’s four heuristics with reference to various cases of reuse from the eighteenth century to today, looking for additional signs that reuse and rearrangement are productive writing practices. So far I have shown that these practices can be productive in introducing new meaning into a group of already existing textual components. Thinking through Weber’s guidelines helps to identify additional features that can mark a composite text as inventive.

IV. MODELING TEXTUAL JOINS

The Inverse Join: Parts Undo the Actions of Each Other

An inverse join in the textual realm combines opposing or contradictory arguments or points of view, selections that when mixed together, produce uncertainty or ambiguity and offer multiple functions and ways of reading. Complexities emerge from the combination of divergent positions, making reuse a productive practice. Arrangement matters here too. The relationships among component texts change as their placement on the page or screen changes, enlarging or diminishing the opposition, contradiction, or ambiguity among them.

An example appears in Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan Hunter's 1993 collage-style *JAC* article, which combines and juxtaposes short chunks of preexisting composition scholarship. Attribution occurs only in brief endnotes. After explaining their methods in an introduction, the compilers present three separate sections organizing their materials around central questions in the field. Early in the first section ("What Do We Believe about the Teaching of Writing?"), the following excerpt appears. (My transcription mimics the original's formatting: the blank line demarcates these two chunks as separate selections from the field.)

We believe:

that almost all persons can write and want to write;
that not writing or not wanting to write is unnatural;
that, if either occurs, something major has been subverted in a mind, in a
life;
that as teachers and researchers we must try to help make writing natural
again, and necessary.
Credo; credemus. And so may we continue together.

For the BW student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. The spoken language, looping back and forth between speakers, offering chances for groping and backing up and even hiding, leaving room for the language of hands and faces, of pitch and pauses, is generous and inviting. Next to this rich orchestration, writing is but a lie that moves haltingly across the

page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws.

By the time he reaches college, the BW student both resents and resists his vulnerability as a writer. He is aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes. He can usually think of little else while he is writing. But he doesn't know what to do about it. Writing puts him on a line, and he doesn't want to be there. For every three hundred words he writes, he is likely to use from ten to thirty forms that the academic reader regards as serious errors. Some writers, uninhibited by their fear of error, produce but a few lines an hour or keep trying to begin, crossing out one try after another until the sentence is hopelessly tangled.

The second and third lines declare, "We believe: that almost all persons can write and want to write, that not writing or not wanting to write is unnatural," yet in the following selection, several statements appear in conflict with these lines: "For the BW student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone" and "By the time he reaches college, the BW student both resents and resists his vulnerability as a writer. . . . Writing puts him on a line, and he doesn't want to be there" (397). Read together, these selections convey opposing sentiments, with the first selection affirming that everyone can write and wants to write and the second selection admitting that actually, basic-writing students do not in fact want to write. The first selection projects a rosier view of writing and the teaching of writing, positioning writing as a natural and desirable activity that teachers can help students to discover. In contrast, the second selection adopts a more down-to-earth tone, writing from inside the minds of basic writers to expose their thoughts and fears.

With these two selections placed one after the other, their differences become magnified; they appear more in debate by demonstrating some of the disjunctions in composition scholarship, the mix of idealism and realism floating among separate specimens from the field. The resulting ambiguity and uncertainty accord with the compilers' stated rationale for adopting an approach to scholarly writing unusually dominated by reused text. Fontaine and Hunter explain in their introduction that they want to resist definitive answers to their organizing

questions, in order to affirm their inconclusive open-endedness. A collage style can “redirect the search for an exclusive disciplinary definition” and create instead “a celebration of the potential openness and incompleteness of the discipline” (Fontaine and Hunter 395). Here reuse and rearrangement are productive practices, in that they generate new effects that neither of these two selections produces individually.

M. M. Bakhtin’s theories of speech genres and intertextuality illuminate the ways in which reuse produces such effects via arrangement. Bakhtin stresses that every utterance, whether oral or written, always responds to other utterances within its context. In such a context might be utterances attached to acknowledged individuals or utterances like those in Fontaine and Hunter’s essay whose authorship is deferred (in their case, to the essay’s conclusion). Separate selections interact with each other based on arrangement, their interactions generating meaning through complementarity or inversion. Context (created in part via arrangement) contributes to the expressive force of a given utterance, which according to Bakhtin, will lack intonation only when occupying a neutral and abstract sphere like a dictionary definition. Intonations attach to specimens like Fontaine and Hunter’s as they take up the essay’s environment. The same language can express more than one intonation, however, because it gains competing meanings through interactions in different contexts. Therefore, the same language “can serve equally well for any evaluations, even the most varied and contradictory ones, and for any evaluative positions as well” (Bakhtin, “The Problem” 90). Each reader occupies an individual context or ecology of reading, one that is largely shaped by adjacent texts and paratexts, allowing for the play of meanings that Fontaine and Hunter hope to generate through the inconclusive interactions among segments.

In the 2010 collage text *Reality Hunger*, author David Shields provocatively plays with the contradiction and ambiguity that inverse joins facilitate. A similar format connects his book to Fontaine and Hunter's article, in that both examples consist of small unsigned chunks of text, with bibliographical information available only at the end. A chapter on contradiction compiles various quotations endorsing simultaneity and ambivalence. Shields proclaims via F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" (135). With Montaigne he muses, "We are, I know not how, double within ourselves, with the result that we do not believe what we believe, and we cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn" (136). And with Adorno, he applauds writing that would demonstrate fundamental inversion according to Weber's principle: "Ambitious work doesn't resolve contradictions in a spurious harmony but instead embodies the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (136). These musings on uncertainty, of which there are many additional examples, illuminate Shields's methods for selecting and arranging his excerpts, especially the puzzling placement of some that seem to contradict others.

For example, in a chapter on genre-bending called "blur," one section (186) stands in stark contrast to all others. From its start, this chapter affirms the benefit and inevitability of mixing genres, even beginning with two strong statements not attributed to anyone (and thus perhaps Shields's own contributions): "I think of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and all forms of storytelling as existing on a rather wide continuum, at one end fantasy (J. R. R. Tolkien and the like) and the other end an extremely literal-minded register of a life" and "'Fiction'/'nonfiction' is an utterly useless distinction" (63). Section 186, however, strangely proclaims that "Genre mingling is responsible in no small measure for the moral debility of

intellect and character and will” (64). Section 186 forms an inverse join with the sections around it; together, they produce contrary arguments. At the same time, given its placement in a book that supports genre-bending from the start and that even mixes genres itself, section 186 may read as parody. When read in this way, it cannot contribute to an inverse join. Parody and irony facilitate a reading opposed to the literal meaning that this section would convey outside this context, without the expressive force with which *Reality Hunger* imbues it. Ambiguity and contradiction do not emerge out of this section’s interactions among neighboring ones as it comes to adopt the same sentiment as them.

This example underscores the complications in authority and authorship that reuse introduces. How do we read in the presence of proliferating authors? Even as Shields disavows authorship and champions appropriation, relegating his references to the back of the book (in an appendix that he encourages readers to remove entirely), he nonetheless authors *Reality Hunger*. He attaches his name to it, includes an autobiographical chapter titled with his initials, and reuses pieces from his earlier publications. A controlling hand has clearly shaped this book, even as the majority of it derives from authors other than Shields. With Shields as authorizing orchestrator, section 186 appears a curious, almost laughable voice of dissent amid many opposing arguments, a piece of double-voiced discourse that Shields might well want readers to read tongue-in-cheek, as parody in favor of his position. Again, inversion would not result. The utterance appears this way when readers take it to be what V. N. Volosinov calls reported speech, speech that both retains traces of its original context and gains intonation from its new context, the one developed via an author’s selections (Shields’s in this case). Section 186 appears as parody because it is intoned by a context infiltrated by Shields. Volosinov asserts that “Language devises means for infiltrating reported speech with authorial retort and commentary in deft and subtle ways” (120).

When an author like Shields has not (ostensibly) added anything new⁸ to an appropriated section like this one, then what produces the commentary and retort are contextual and paratextual features, including previous statements supporting genre-bending, both in this chapter and in the book itself, and the assortment of formal features making *Reality Hunger* an example of mixed genre.⁹ (For example, its argumentative tone characterizes a rhetorical or theoretical approach, and its creative appropriations and unconventional page design characterize an artistic approach. Furthermore, it reuses bits of texts from across genres, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.)

Ousting Shields altogether and reading the book instead as a sea of voices like Fontaine and Hunter's collage results in more of an inverse join. Oppositions emerge only out of the text, not out of association with any authorizing agent. A context still shapes the intonations of each utterance, but that context lacks a crucial contributor: its authorizing orchestrator, Shields. The dissenting section 186 still stands out because it conflicts with the predominant surrounding sentiments. Some possibility for parody still exists, but depends more on the reader's individual experience with the text. There is no authorizing agent adding cohesion to the book—although it nonetheless repeats themes and positions that give weight to the position that genre-bending is in fact productive, not debilitating as section 186 suggests.

Likewise, the inverse join from Fontaine and Hunter that I included above supports multiple readings because reuse so completely upsets the idea of autonomous authorship and univocal, intentional meaning. One potential reading is generous, without emphasis upon one or the other of these selections. The join offers two near-opposite perspectives on writing, but they

⁸ Shields's appropriations are not entirely un-retouched, however. As I show in Chapter 2, Shields often tweaks his sources, cutting them up, converting verb tenses, and adding conjunctions and contractions, for example. For most readers, these touch-ups probably become evident only when *Reality Hunger* is compared with its sources.

⁹ Removing the appendix as Shields advises would convert the reported speech into what would appear Shields's own speech (except in those instances when a reader can attribute a selection to its originating source). In such circumstances, parody would remain a well-informed reading of section 186 because it would contrast with the majority of surrounding statements supposedly asserted by Shields.

are merely offered, presented rather than intoned. Yet at the same time, the starkly contrasting sentiments could support a more parodic reading of the first selection, one that dismisses it for its cheery idealism. It comes to sound like an overly optimistic mantra with its repetition of sentence structure and the word “we.”

Works of reuse open up several interpretive possibilities because they collect selections that have originated in multiple places. Combining pieces with separate origins and removing their authorship enhances readers’ uncertainty. Bakhtin notes that a context will assimilate different bits of texts to different degrees: “Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness,’ varying degrees of awareness and attachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate” (“The Problem” 89). *Reality Hunger* itself assimilates, reworks, and re-accentuates the selections it compiles, and readers do the same, though in idiosyncratic ways that cannot be predicted. The inverse join helps to show that a provocative sign of productive reuse and rearrangement is complexity, marked by the generation of multiple intonations that can support multiple readings. This is a new function that the components of an inverse join cannot produce individually, without combination and arrangement.

The Complementary Join: Parts Frequently Used Together

Weber’s second heuristic is the complementary join, which with texts, yields composites that package together texts that go together, perhaps because readers may need them at the same time or one after another, in a common context such as a school or home. Writing handbooks exhibit this join: they typically compile several preexisting bodies of work that can also serve as individual publications. These include grammar and punctuation, documentation, style, research

methods, and tips for writing. Collecting them within one handbook offers a convenience to users but may also help them to make productive connections among disparate writing concepts (such as the important role that arrangement plays both in syntax and in essay organization). These works take after their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterparts, which would conveniently join texts for several school subjects, sometimes even presenting a full curriculum. Boyd's textbook, for example, combines materials that now we might expect to divide among separate books: lessons on writing and rhetoric followed by a small anthology of literature. This organization might enable students to apply writing lessons to their reading of literature, or to write in response to or in imitation of literary excerpts. Today, course-packs facilitate further customization so that instructors can compile for students all the texts required for a given semester, rather than distribute them one at a time. Organization within a course-pack or textbook might also derive from the logic behind complementary joins: they present material in a sequence that will best mimic or accommodate the sequence of learning that students are expected to follow. The sequence groups together materials that students are likely to need simultaneously or consecutively.

Anthologies and miscellanies may also demonstrate complementary joining. For example, *Miscellaneous Pieces*, from 1752, compiles previous literary works like fables and poems alongside prose pieces about various concerns of the home and farm. Arrangement seems haphazard because component texts are not organized by type and paratextual materials do not articulate any kind of plan. Yet there is in fact a loose pattern: several poems, followed by one or two prose excerpts, then several more poems, and so on, with tips for gardening in each month dispersed chronologically throughout the volume. This miscellany thus furnishes a year's worth

of reading for a family, an audience announced in its full title¹⁰ and supported by its variety in content. The combination and arrangement of texts encourages reading together as a family, reading one selection for a parent, followed by another for a child, then another for a parent, and so on, without having to flip back and forth throughout the book searching for pieces that will appeal to each individual. This miscellany enables something like parallelism, Weber's principle whereby users can simultaneously access the capabilities of each joined invention. Although readers may be unable to read separate selections at the same time, the miscellany combines materials to accommodate a family's multiple reading needs and satisfy individuals' parallel interests and habits. Selections work together to serve the collective family space.

The Shared Properties Join: Parts with Something in Common

Weber's third heuristic, joining parts with shared properties, bolsters the argument that compiling related texts (whether complementary or inverse of one another) in a central volume or document demonstrates invention. Repackaging via shared material features confers convenience, a mundane yet nonetheless valuable affordance. Instead of juggling several books on writing and rhetoric, for example, one can reference a convenient handbook, with its components sharing a binding. The same heuristic applies to an encyclopedia, with entries and articles on various subjects occupying one set of volumes, and to an anthology, with numerous selections stored in one text with consistent design and material features.

Compilations like these can save space, cost, and time by bundling related texts. For example, *The Family Library* (1752), another miscellany published and sold by the people behind *Miscellaneous Pieces*, suggests convenience in cost and content with its title alone: it is a

¹⁰ *Miscellaneous Pieces. Consisting of Select Poetry, and Methods of Improvement in Husbandry, Gardening, and Various Other Subjects, Useful to Families.*

single volume designed to serve as a family's complete library. Furthermore, its full title announces goals "to advance the cause of religion and virtue; and to improve, in all useful knowledge, the understanding of those who have not time to read, or abilities to purchase many books." Compilation encourages wider dissemination of reading materials by conveniently combining texts. Edited collections can do the same by joining disparate articles on similar topics. Joining can yield significant convenience by bringing together what may otherwise seem unrelated individual texts originally appearing in divergent contexts. For example, in his preface to the 1986 collection *The Territory of Language*, Donald A. McQuade articulates the value and legitimacy of compilation by acknowledging the benefits that can accrue via convenience. He characterizes the book as "a convenient and concentrated forum" and stresses that it "draws together in a single volume significant original essays which would otherwise be scattered throughout any number of professional journals" (xiv). The collection synthesizes insights from three related yet separate fields (linguistics, stylistics, and composition), performing a service while encouraging further collaboration. A join like this one reduces the need for readers to labor individually in finding and gathering texts with a property such as subject matter or objective in common.

Combination and arrangement can thus make for productive reuse by offering the convenience that comes with packaging texts together. Convenience can make possible new functions such as family reading and can also offer value in simply saving space and cost. Judging a composite convenient, however, requires some speculation about how it will be used, and information about likely use is not always available to compilers. A re-user may begin a project with a set of intriguing materials rather than with plans or intentions and so may not produce something for an expected use. I acknowledge that joins can derive from material

features alone—the size, shape, and availability of textual components—rather than features related to eventual use of the composite, such as its content and intended audience(s). Still, compilation is not the random putting together of texts. Complementarity requires that component texts go together in some way, just as all of Weber’s heuristics specify relationships among components based on their features and affordances. Combination and arrangement are neither fully intentional nor fully random acts of composition; rather, they lie somewhere in between, a site on a spectrum of intentionality that accommodates the mixed agency inherent to reuse.¹¹

Furthermore, shared properties need not relate only to material features and expected modes or places of use; they can involve textual features such as vocabulary, tone, rhythm, structure, and sound. Putting similar texts together can create patterns that make for smooth, cohesive, and effective artistic composites, for example. The musical mash-up called “Miracles,” compiled by a popular remix artist known as Norwegian Recycling, demonstrates this join, surprisingly in combining songs from popular artists as diverse as Michael Jackson, Taylor Swift, Britney Spears, Survivor, and Snoop Dogg. Here cohesion results from combining and layering bits of songs consistent in their lyrics, tone, and rhythm. Many mashups made available via *YouTube* and other Internet services seek to unearth songs that come from different time periods, artists, and styles of music yet sound similar and thus go surprisingly well together. One recent popular example combined Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep” with the Eurythmics’ “Sweet

¹¹ Jeffrey Todd Knight has uncovered compilations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that demonstrate joining based on material complementarity unrelated to expected readerly use. He observes, “Texts of similar size or works printed by the same shop were frequently bundled together, creating volumes of consistent form but inconsistent content” (321). Knight’s explication of compilation practices moves toward a less intentional and individualist approach to composition, which has shown up in studies of scrapbooking and commonplacing, both practices of reuse that are distributed and material. Garvey and Gernes have each emphasized that these practices allow readers to cut personal, private paths through mass-produced materials via thoughtful selection and arrangement (Garvey 209, 219; Gernes 117). They seem to attribute undue conscious design to a material, less personally directed writing practice.

Dreams” and was noted for the unanticipated synchronicity of its divergent sources (Jonasc37). Reuse is productive here because it aids in discovery and creates aesthetic value. The two songs enhance one another when they are made to share features via layering.

Exercises in sentence-combining also operate on a principle of shared textual properties. They come in different varieties, but the dominant approach to sentence-combining asks students to link together two or more simple sentences that share certain words and phrases (these are their shared properties). The sentences go together because they contain some redundancy, a repeated word or phrase as in this example: “Weber wrote a guide to technical invention. Weber’s guide is useful for my purposes.” When combined via subordination, these two sentences become one longer, less redundant complex sentence: “Weber wrote a guide to technical invention that is useful for my purposes.” Consolidating simple sentences into a complex, compound, or merely longer simple sentence via deletion, substitution, and insertion is analogous to combining pages in a binding or paragraphs on a page. Combination saves space, reduces redundancy, and adds concision. When frequently practiced, sentence-combining exercises have been shown to reduce errors, increase sentence length and complexity, and improve stylistic sophistication.¹² They expose students to options for composing sentences, so that they become less likely to sequence several simple sentences one after the other and create a choppy rhythm characteristic of some writing that lacks cohesion. Sharon A. Myers, in recently attempting to recover the sentence-combining exercises of the 1960s and 1970s, argues that they confer additional benefits too: they teach students formal vocabulary and collocations by requiring them to actively copy and combine sophisticated example sentences (616).

¹² As Connors recounts in “The Erasure of the Sentence,” these are some of the successes that made sentence-combining a prominent pedagogical tool from the 1960s through the 80s. He charts the rise and fall of these exercises, beginning with their development alongside Chomsky’s transformational-generative grammar, reaching prominence during the 1970s, and declining roughly around 1983 (105).

More broadly, then, sentence-combining exercises teach students how to arrange and sequence words, making them essentially exercises in combination and arrangement through reuse. They belong with the exercises in arrangement and rearrangement that I described earlier, for they appear alongside one another in many nineteenth-century textbooks. They predate the twentieth century and even Connors's estimation that they originated in the 1890s ("The Erasure" 97). They appear in the textbooks by Parker (1832; p. 25) and Swinton (1887; p. 22, 29) that I reviewed above and most likely in similar textbooks, which often shared and re-circulated the same exercises and in some cases, even the same models. Sentence-combining exercises sometimes appear as exercises in "contraction" or "synthesis" because they require eliding (or contracting) a repeated word or phrase by combining (or synthesizing) given sentences.

When considered under Weber's heuristics, sentence-combining is a productive form of writing, despite the common argument that Connors relates to explain the anti-formalist backlash against sentence pedagogies in the 1980s. He describes "a line of argument against syntactic methods that later came to seem conclusive: that students need training in higher-level skills such as invention and organization more than they need to know how to be 'sentence acrobats'" ("The Erasure" 111). These two types of training need not be mutually exclusive, however. Sentence-combining teaches invention and organization through combining and arranging separate parts into one whole. Recognizing that sentence-combining fits under this heuristic shows that one general principle (shared properties) can explain combination at a grammatical level and at a rhetorical level, such as the level of the compilation or miscellany, which combines paragraphs, pages, and complete texts like poems. Heuristics for combination and arrangement dispute easy dismissal of the pedagogy of levels on the grounds that focusing on the sentence level neglects writing skills at higher levels because exercises at one level do not readily transfer to another.

This sentiment is one that even proponents of sentence pedagogies uphold. Myers, for example, claims that “Making decisions at the level of paragraphs and beyond encompasses sets of variables many orders of magnitude greater than those found in lexical and intrasentential patterns and are not likely to be learned in the same way” (625). Reframed as a join, however, sentence-combining shows continuity among principles operating at different levels of discourse. Even if a different process accompanies combination at these different levels, similar principles underlie them. Shared properties offer a consistent way of conceptualizing the organization of related texts, whatever their size. Instructors might communicate this continuity to students by sequencing writing assignments in rearrangement and combination, moving from completing sentence exercises to reorganizing essays through recombination and rearrangement of paragraphs.

The Emergent Join: Parts Produce a New Function

Weber models this heuristic with two early hominid tools, the pointed awl and rounded blade. These join to form the pointed knife, which not only enables convenient sequential use of both tools, but also achieves a new action called etching, a function that only emerges with simultaneous use of the two component inventions (117). Neither the pointed awl nor the rounded blade can perform etching on its own; etching is an emergent function generated via joining. Again, a textual join like a miscellany may not allow access to separate components at the same time, as the pointed knife does, but parts can come together to form a whole performing a new capability, such as the family reading that *Miscellaneous Pieces* and *The Family Library* each facilitate. In texts emergent functions can broadly include targeting a particular audience, building new knowledge, establishing an argument, or responding to an exigency.

Samuel Johnson's celebrated English dictionary provides examples of this join. First published in 1755, it compiles and arranges illustrative quotations alongside definitions in order to establish the meanings of words and thus build new knowledge. Figure 3 provides a sample entry, for the word *chain*.

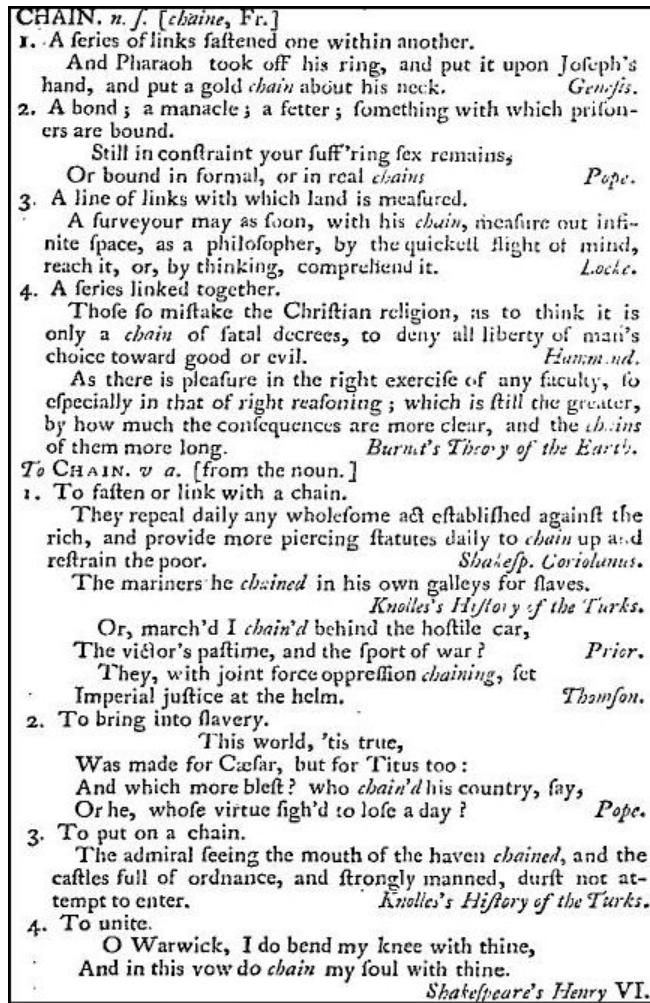


Figure 3: Sample Join from Johnson's Dictionary

(From Gale. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. © Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions.) On their own, these quotations would appear as isolated instances of usage, but when joined together, some affirm each other and others demonstrate differences in meaning. Patterns emerge as Johnson intervenes and organizes separate definitions. The noun entries for *chain* convey such slight distinctions while

also echoing each other: “a series of links fastened one within another,” “a line of links with which land is measured,” “a series linked together.” Divorced from contextualizing quotations, these definitions would appear abstract and unsubstantiated, difficult for dictionary users to understand and apply. But joined together, quotations and definitions make new knowledge, both in entries (defining individual words) and in the dictionary as a whole (defining a lexicon, or part of one). Out of Johnson’s massive composite joining thousands of words and quotations emerges new knowledge.

In some cases an emergent function only develops out of a reader’s interaction with a text, so composers may be unable to foresee emergence altogether, to plan for it intentionally as though the heuristic were a formula for invention rather than an aid to invention. Yet once composers begin gathering, reading, and interpreting component texts in relation to one another and to their context, functions indeed emerge. Hence, the value of play and experimentation, of moving and manipulating components to test for emerging outcomes. Personal agency and textual arrangement interact, both implicated in invention. The arrangement of component texts and the composer’s interpretive and imaginative thinking feed back into each other, mimicking Kameen’s dialectic between self on the one hand and world and language on the other hand. Textual and human agencies intermingle: a composer-reader orchestrates the interplay of selected parts, as those parts also generate effects on their own via combination and arrangement, their visual presentation within a common context. Instead of helping composers to launch successful composites, then, the presence of an emergent function may help them to recognize instead when they are making or have made a successful composite. Reuse, combination, and arrangement are productive moves, aiding in the *process* of composition, as well as inventions themselves, textual outcomes from which new functions emerge.

In texts an emergent function is a looser, less stable, and more open-ended phenomenon than it is in technical devices. When looking for an emergent function—a promising but perhaps subtle question, suggestion, or argument—a person skilled in reading and critical thinking may easily find one or more. Emergence in texts can be a function of interpretation, whereas in devices it is a function of utility. Weber’s heuristics have thus far encouraged framing invention in terms of textual features, rather than entirely in terms of the reader-text relationship, which in its relativity is problematic for proposing methods for composing. Developing guidelines for judging invention is impossible when invention is up for grabs by each individual reader, dependent upon his or her ability to extract meaning from a textual encounter. This fourth heuristic, however, makes interpretation more central to detecting invention. Emergence occurs when detecting functionality demands something of the reader-writer interacting with the composite text: he or she must intervene via interpretation or even reconstruction (as in the special emergent function identified below), for functionality is less self-evident here than in the above three forms of joining.

This understanding of emergence as a moment when interpretation takes over unfortunately creates an opening for tenuous notions of emergence that do little to help distinguish more productive from less productive textual combinations and interventions. For example, Margaret A. Syverson lends credence to my claim that texts can exhibit emergent properties, but her treatment of emergence is so broad that it would regard any pattern arising out of a text as emergent, and thus inventive according to Weber’s principles. “Meaning, genre, irony, style, authority, credibility—these are all emergent properties in texts,” she writes (11). If any textual feature can constitute an emergent pattern, then nearly all texts will demonstrate emergence according to some reader, and emergence will lose its reliability as a marker of

invention. I aim to ground emergence in textual features wherever possible and thus present a special, more traceable, version of it in the next section.

A Special Case of Emergence: The Textual Chain

I propose that one emergent sign of productive reuse is the composite text's capacity to prompt invention for readers, to generate a textual chain and even be reused again. The capacity to spur invention sounds quite like the capacity to generate meaning or simply to inspire, outcomes difficult to plan and predict because readers can experience texts in such diverse ways. For example, Bakhtin suggests, in arguing that every utterance occurs in response to another utterance, that writing should be "oriented toward the response of the other (others), toward his active responsive understanding, which can assume various forms: educational influence on the readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on" ("The Problem" 75). He affirms that textual chains are typical of written discourse yet puts forward an uncomfortably abstract and immaterial account of them by referring to responses like "influence" and "persuasion," for instance. I want to ground emergence in traceable features that actually demonstrate a productive connection between text and reader, rather than merely propose the probability that readers will in some abstract way respond to the text.

The capacity to spur invention always depends to some extent upon reader-text interaction because a textual chain will not result without the reader first interacting with the text and being prompted to make something of it. And admittedly, detecting textual chains is difficult because much citation is invisible and unacknowledged, as Bakhtin indicates: "[A]ny utterance, when it is studied in greater depth under the concrete conditions of speech communication, reveals to us many half-concealed or completely concealed words of others with varying degrees of foreignness" ("The Problem" 93). However, Weber illuminates one way of grounding this

emergent function in textual properties, rather than wholly in idiosyncratic interactions, with his concept of levels of joining (118-120). Higher levels designate stronger integration of component parts, which grow less discrete as they become more tightly bound. In a composite text, looser arrangement may produce a more mixed or jumbled result, components more distinct, whereas tighter arrangement may produce a smoother result, components more consistent, thanks to textual features such as vocabulary, syntax, voice, and tone and material features related to space and layout. Looser joins can cultivate a sense of incompleteness, offering readymade openings for intervention.¹³

Shields, for example, achieves relatively loose joins. Although consistent design features and repeated terms provide some needed cohesion, many chunks of text differ widely in voice, point of view, vocabulary, tone, and subject matter, and white space between them emphasizes distinction rather than integration.¹⁴ *Reality Hunger* thrives on combination *and* separation, distinguishing sections with conspicuous numbers in a style decidedly unlike collages that tightly mix sources (such as David Markson's collage novel *This Is Not a Novel*, which omits section numbers and chapters altogether). It facilitates further intervention, its components easily extractable and reconfigurable, ready to be remade in response.

Fontaine and Hunter's article demonstrates loose joining too. A single white line separates one excerpt from another, and frequent shifts in person, voice, style, and tone occur as a reader moves through the essay.¹⁵ Rather than synthesize representative samples of

¹³ Consider, for example, that it can be easier to intervene in a draft that one is revising when its components (i.e., paragraphs or sections) are less cohesively arranged, without the tightness characteristic of carefully worked-out sequences and transitions. The draft appears more open and unfinished, amenable to the manipulations and insertions that smooth transitions may less easily accommodate.

¹⁴ An aphoristic section like 136 ("Attention equals life or is its only evidence") precedes a dialogue in section 137, which is followed by an excerpt from a poem in section 138 (48-49).

¹⁵ Note the shifts in person and voice in the following exemplary excerpt:

The new rhetoric, in short, is based on the notion that the basic process of composition is discovery.

composition scholarship into a summary of the field, newly expressing their findings in consistent vocabulary, style, and tone, the compilers have instead *shown* the field; they have presented a sort of bird's-eye overview, a documentary collage that displays and exhibits, rather than an article that tells.¹⁶

Fontaine and Hunter liken their method to an oral tradition called “rendering.” They explain in their introduction,

Unlike conventional quoting, the act of rendering lines, of simply presenting them in an oral performance, leaves the words standing without authorship or interpretation. What is missing from the rendering, much like what is missing from the written collage, are transitions, analyses, comparisons, and summaries. In a rendering, the “meaning” traditionally supplied by such rhetorical hinges emerges instead from the quality of the individual voices, the detachment of lines from their sources, the juxtaposition of one set of lines with another, and the listener's own assemblage of meaning. (396)

We believe it's important for teachers to become conscious of the philosophical dimensions of their work because nothing short of that consciousness will make instruction sensible and deliberate, the result of knowledge, not folklore, and of design, not just custom or accident.

A student stopped *me* in the hall and said, “Do you think I should submit this to *The Review*? I have this terrible instructor who says I can't write. Therefore I shouldn't teach English. He really grinds me.” (Fontaine and Hunter 398; emphasis added)

¹⁶ Similar effects emerge from documentary histories such as Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori's *Pedagogy: Disturbing History, 1819-1929* and John C. Brereton's *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925*. Both of these works use compilation to *show* readers what they have discovered through archival research, rather than tell them about it. Documentary histories invite readers to use the provided materials for further discovery and response and thus exploit a special affordance of reuse. Sounding much like Fontaine and Hunter, Salvatori frequently refers to her compiled materials as “voices” that we should “listen” to; for instance, after describing a debate over terms like *education* and *pedagogy*, she writes, “But let us listen to some of the voices in the debate” (238). This formulation posits collage or compilation as visual conversation, static as it sits on the page but dynamic in its relationship to readers. It furthermore recognizes the mixed agencies (or voices) that inter-animate any compilation.

The compilers recognize that meaning will emerge from the reader's individual interaction with the text, but also from textual features consistent with looseness: pure, reused text rather than transitions and extensive commentary or summary, which would characterize a tighter join, texts that have been worked over and smoothed out in the process of combination. This looseness will, Fontaine and Hunter hope, elicit response, more than a tighter, more mediated join might. They imagine that the compiled voices will "loose their boundaries, spilling their words into those clustered around them in both predictable and unexpected ways, creating a potentially endless play of meanings" (396). Readers will respond by "be[ing] drawn in, questioning the value of some of the voices, noting the absence of others, sensing the idiosyncrasy of our arrangement" (396). Ultimately, they may intervene, continuing the work that Fontaine and Hunter have begun by interacting with the text, inventing something new by taking up the compilers' invitation "to add and delete, create your own categories and arrangements" (397). This essay exploits a mode of reuse—loose collage—in order to provoke response and further reuse, to achieve something more dialogic than a more traditional, tightly organized, and argument-driven article. Dialogism is thus one additional emergent property that works of reuse, combination, and rearrangement can yield, one that is in fact observable when it inheres not just in immaterial thoughts but in textual traces too. It is a significant emergent function that I choose to highlight here, because it spurs further reuse, sustaining it as an inventive enterprise.

Materials derived from or responding to an initial piece provide empirical, external evidence that one work of reuse has been productive of further works—sometimes themselves works of reuse. One can see, for example, that *Reality Hunger* has provoked response and further invention by noting the many book reviews and other published commentaries that it has garnered, including citations and analysis in academic writing such as this chapter and even a

user-generated web version of the full text (“Reality Hunger, Remixed,” available at realityhunger.com). One can trace the response to articles like Fontaine and Hunter’s by searching for citations of it, as well as any follow-up articles in *JAC* and other journals. Interactive websites that offer commenting, liking, and sharing features can show whether readers have been moved by the content to intervene in some way: to question it, support it, add onto it, or simply forward it to other people (a form of reuse via recirculation). Books, songs, and films can demonstrate that they are durable, appealing, and inventive enough to provoke response when they inspire adaptations, covers, remixes, and other forms of updating and rereleasing. Videos uploaded to *YouTube* typically announce whether they are “response videos” motivated by a previous video, which on its own page will display any response videos labeled as such. Responses may be mostly or entirely new footage prompted by the initial video, or they may actually remix and remake that video, participating in a cycle of reuse.

Some compositions are specially equipped for rewriting, redistributing, and reusing; they have what Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss would recognize as high rhetorical velocity, properties contributing to ready appropriation by a third party. Some of these properties derive from loose arrangement and layout: ample white space, careful organization into discrete parts, and easily extractable components or paragraphs can facilitate quick copy-and-paste, little or no adjustment necessary. Other properties derive from authorship and content: for example, a reliable and durable definition written by a credible and trusted expert may correlate with high reuse, even becoming a standard in wide circulation in a given discourse community. Marking text as a quotation can also afford it with greater rhetorical velocity because doing so suggests to readers that the words between quotation marks have been faithfully copied from an authority and thus can be readily reused, without recourse to the original source. Digital tools such as

search engines, website statistics, and extensive databases of both historical and contemporary materials allow us to examine the extent to which a given block of text has been reused and recirculated; they thus provide an empirical means of tracking actual, rather than just imagined or expected, rhetorical velocity.

Adapting joining to a textual context has revealed that there are continuities in textual reuse across the widely divergent example texts that I have cited. Consistent patterns of thinking and writing can undergird practices of reuse, making appropriation and rearrangement not entirely random, merely subject to the whims of individual compilers and their contexts. I offer joining as just one mode of linguistic and textual manipulation that can contribute to productive works of textual reuse. Because reuse always involves putting parts together, at least some of which are reused and others of which may be new, combining or joining will remain a key composing procedure even as I identify additional moves that characterize effective examples of reuse in the following chapters.

These are moves that reveal the potentialities inherent in blocks of preexisting language (whether simply words and phrases or longer excerpts like paragraphs), potentialities that only emerge through play and manipulation. I am promoting an interactive relationship to preexisting texts, one that does not presuppose an exigent situation. Language play may occur outside the demands of any immediate context, without stated purpose, need, or intention. Yet such play develops grammatical and rhetorical facilities that one can exploit later, given a plan or exigency. Importantly, such play develops facility with language in general, not with a version of language or a set of compositional tools appropriate only to a specific disciplinary locale like literary studies, creative writing, rhetoric, or composition. The range of materials already constituting

this early sketch of textual reuse demonstrates that such language practice can cut across all textual production.

2. TEXTUAL REUSE AND THE LITERARY DOMAIN: PROCEDURES FOR CRITICAL-CREATIVE TINKERING

In 1977, poet Ronald Johnson systematically erased words, phrases, and even whole sentences from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to produce a new poem reduced to the title *Radi Os*. Two hundred years earlier James Buchanan had methodically converted the first six books of *Paradise Lost* into prose-style syntax, keeping the diction intact and placing this "translation" alongside the original as a guide for readers. Several of Buchanan's contemporaries had already undertaken similar projects of adaptation and translation, seeking to correct, improve, or simplify Milton's epic (see Green, Hopkins, and Jackson, for example). Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, snippets of *Paradise Lost* were scattered across countless instructional texts to assist in teaching grammar, rhetoric, reading, writing, and speaking. And in recent years, new paraphrases and prose renditions have emerged, as writers continue to fiddle with Milton's language to entertain and instruct ever more modern readers.¹⁷ As these examples suggest, works of reuse easily intersect with what I am calling "the literary domain": writing with and about literature. In

¹⁷ Translations of *Paradise Lost* advertise their services in remarkably consistent ways. In the preface to his 1994 *Paradise Lost: The Novel*, Joseph Lanzara claims, "To the legions who never embarked on this poem's heroic journey, or who, not knowing better, did, only to meet quick defeat in its convoluted syntax or endless digression, is dedicated this simplified version, which promises new access to long buried treasure" (n. pag.). A blurb on the back cover of Dennis Danielson's more recent parallel prose edition likewise proclaims, "Dennis Danielson's new edition of Milton's great epic offers a vibrant, authoritative rendition in modern prose alongside the original text of Milton's story of heroism, pathos, beauty, and grace, making accessible for the first time a work that continues to be acclaimed as 'possibly the most profound meditation on good and evil ever written'" (n. pag.). In their emphasis on accessibility, these rationales also echo those of Buchanan and Green in the eighteenth century. Buchanan acknowledges that *Paradise Lost* "has been generally found to be above the capacities of ordinary readers" and thus hopes to render "this first English classic universally read with ease and delight" (1). And Green endeavors to "harmonize the Versification and explain what is abstruse and distasteful to the modern Reader" (n. pag.).

manipulating literary sources, one may create a new or alternative piece of literature, practice writing or reading, or find a starting point for further text generation. In short, then, this literary domain offers vast potential for invention through reuse, regardless of which official institutional context a person or work comes to occupy.

When writing with and about literature, one might look for guidance from a handbook such as *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. As their title indicates, Graff and Birkenstein supply techniques for writing in relation to others' words and ideas (sources that may be literary). They have examined samples of critical writing in order to extract from them common rhetorical moves that effectively position one's contributions with regard to others. In their shift from extracting these "moves that matter" to distilling them into abstract, content-less templates, however, Graff and Birkenstein present textual structures that merely evince strategies, not moves in a more active sense.¹⁸ What emerge are reductively mechanical approaches to positioning one's ideas. These approaches stress an easy division between what "they say" and what "I say," a readymade relationship between one's own ideas and those that came before them. Yet as the examples in the previous paragraph indicate, such clean division is not always possible or desirable. Innovative reuse often blurs the boundaries between old and new, integrating both into one text (such as a translation) in ways that Graff and Birkenstein do not sanction even while proclaiming that "one of the main pieces of advice in this book is to write the voices of others into your text" (3). For Graff and Birkenstein, writing the voices of others into one's text is a seriously limited endeavor dependent upon simplistic, conservative notions of textual ownership and positioning.

¹⁸ To clarify, *They Say/I Say* does not deal entirely with textual reuse. Sometimes following its templates will involve quoting a source (a form of reuse) or copying Graff and Birkenstein's language or structures, yet general writing *with* sources will not necessarily entail actual material reuse *of* sources.

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, writers like David Shields have been practicing alternative critical approaches that embrace the kind of textual blending and blurring that Graff and Birkenstein discourage. *Reality Hunger* and Jonathan Lethem's essay "The Ecstasy of Influence" have established that writers can combine critical with creative techniques to produce compelling hybrid texts that comment on reuse while experimenting with its moves.¹⁹ In *Reality Hunger* "they say" blurs with "I say": there is no clear distinction between what Shields contributes and what has come before him, as attribution occurs only in an appendix that he encourages readers to ignore. Furthermore, citations may be misleading because Shields does not faithfully reproduce quotations but tinkers with them instead, adding, deleting, and substituting words, phrases, clauses, and punctuation in importing old text into a new context. In blending and manipulating its sources, *Reality Hunger* playfully deviates from Graff and Birkenstein's instructions to "make sure that at every point your readers can clearly tell who is saying what" (67). Instead of sandwiching each source between his own commentary as Graff and Birkenstein advise ("Since quotations do not speak for themselves, you need to build a frame around them in which you do that speaking for them" [41]), Shields employs the book itself as a frame for enclosing and organizing various and discordant voices. *Reality Hunger* thus disturbs the disciplined standards that Graff and Birkenstein promulgate in collecting and arranging quotations yet avoiding explicit direction on how to read and understand them. Even as Shields himself appears in moments throughout the book (e.g., in recounting childhood memories [168] and repeating bits of writing from his earlier publications [24-25]), he emerges as compiler and

¹⁹ Two additional examples include Mark Amerika's book *remixthebook*, which demonstrates how to create textual remixes while arguing for their affordances, and Lance Olsen's essay "Notes toward the Musicality of Creative Disjunction, Or: Fiction by Collage," which much like *Reality Hunger*, advocates for a collage-style blending of criticism and fiction by offering its own collage of critical voices. Peter Elbow also uses collage in an essay arguing for its value as a writing practice. Both Olsen and Elbow clarify, however, that collage does not require the combination of *reused* materials. One can also use collage "as a structuring principle for *new* textual units—not only as a juxtapositional combination of readymades, then, but of just-mades" (Olsen 131; emphasis added).

arranger rather than as the distinct leading presence whom Graff and Birkenstein envision as the “I” in their title.

Where Graff and Birkenstein stress explicit and diplomatic positioning among sources, Shields and Lethem pursue the inventive potential in flouting such a traditional approach. They exploit the playful possibilities that open up when reused text stands on its own or interacts with surrounding text in unpredictable and even antagonistic ways. They shape and modify their quotations beyond what academic writing typically allows for via bracketing and italicizing bits of quoted text. They show that more options are available when writing with sources, options for intervening in and reconstructing prior materials. Identifying such options encourages moving beyond the confines of what Graff and Birkenstein label “academic writing,” into a flexible literary domain populated by hybrid works of creative nonfiction, translation or transposition, and adaptation.²⁰ Lethem’s essay sharply demonstrates how creative reuse can push critical writing into a domain of greater uncertainty. After being called out for reusing but not crediting a sentence written by Lawrence Lessig, Lethem defended his artistic decision to eschew attribution by implying that his essay does not fit traditional categories like journalistic, scientific, or academic writing (Lessig et al. 4-5). The discrepancy between how Lessig and Lethem treat attribution reveals how critical-creative texts like “The Ecstasy of Influence” trouble critical conventions for writing with sources.

Significantly, then, critical-creative collage texts call for broadly reconfiguring the field of writing with sources. Shields draws attention to the uncertainty that always underlies textual origins, the impossibility that a particular idea or quotation can belong to an easily discernible “they.” Revision occurs as texts move among different contexts via reuse and re-appropriation,

²⁰ With the terms *translation* and *adaptation*, I mean to refer to texts that rely upon and diverge from identified substrate texts, as will become evident in this chapter.

merging bits of what “they say” with bits of what “I say.” Furthermore, in quoting, a writer does not just import a “they”; he or she acts as an “I” contributing something via selecting, framing, arranging, and combining prior text. Thus, “I” can say something just by re-appropriating another text, making “I” and “they” one and the same. This heavy exchange and reuse of language and ideas makes it so that any text is not singular but multiple, hybridized, inflected all over by prior texts, rendering the “they say” designation particularly inapt and oversimplified. It is perhaps for this reason that following the guidelines in *They Say/I Say* would seem to make weak straw-man arguments so inevitable: our ideas are so multiple and fluid, our language so shared, that we invent persons or positions with which to argue, those that do not actually exist because they cannot be clearly distinguished from ourselves and positions that we can imagine inhabiting.

In this chapter, I reconceptualize the field of writing with sources, moving beyond what Graff and Birkenstein offer by focusing on works of reuse that explicitly blend “they say” with “I say,” those like Buchanan’s rewriting or Johnson’s erasure poetry that rely simultaneously upon old and new text. As such, I theorize a hybrid practice of critical-creative composition that I call *tinkering*, a practice that embraces reading through writing, interpreting through producing. I develop this practice and argue for its value by tracing its varied appearances across the fringes of English studies today and throughout its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century archives. In doing so, I seek to move this practice from a peripheral to a more central position in the discipline.

I theorize and advocate for critical-creative tinkering by defining the tacit procedures underlying example texts like Buchanan’s, procedures that offer promising strategies for textual reuse more generally. Significantly, however, I avoid reducing general procedures into decontextualized templates like Graff and Birkenstein’s. Templates are characterized by routine.

In contrast, I underscore that even as procedures guide experiments with reuse, some degree of deviation through customization will nonetheless occur (as both Shields and Lethem demonstrate in tweaking their sources, sometimes in substantive and other times in trivial ways). I offer some order while foregrounding the sense of openness and play that Graff and Birkenstein merely suggest is possible with templates. (They insist that their templates do not stifle creativity and can be imaginatively manipulated [10-11], yet devote so much attention to structuring and enumerating said templates that manipulating them seems a less readily available undertaking for users.) Since I do not restrict my treatment of reuse to a single domain of writing like Graff and Birkenstein's "academic writing," I propose that the procedures I offer can be taken up and combined in numerous unforeseen ways, depending to an extent on context and any concomitant constraints. Thus, I advocate a spreading out and blending of procedures of reuse across the realms of critical writing, resulting in playful, hybridized forms of composition that until now have been too narrowly labeled: confined to "creative writing" as it is defined against "academic writing."

I. "GOING WRONG": RHETORICAL-POETIC LANGUAGE PLAY IN W. D. SNODGRASS'S REUSE

"I am laying out a game, then, that provokes readers (alone or in a group) to ask what makes fine poems fine" (Snodgrass xx).

I offer W. D. Snodgrass's 2001 collection *De/Compositions: 101 Good Poems Gone Wrong* as an emblematic example of reconstruction and intervention through reuse of literary materials. Snodgrass, a poet, critic, and translator, reprints mostly canonized poems that readers can safely

call “good.” (They include, for example, poems by William Butler Yeats, Walt Whitman, John Crowe Ransom, Thomas Hardy, Dylan Thomas, and Ezra Pound.) Alongside each poem appears at least one “de/composed” version, a rewriting that deforms the original by corrupting or diminishing a feature like diction, voice, meter, or imagery. Snodgrass divides the collection into five sometimes overlapping parts, each one focused on “the particular excellence [he] was trying to dissolve or drive out” (xviii): Abstract and General vs. Concrete and Specific, Undercurrents, The Singular Voice, Metrics and Music, and Structure and Climax.

These five section headings provide a snapshot of Snodgrass’s methods. Each de/composition moves, manipulates, and plays with the poem’s original language and structure yet retains enough of it to maintain a link between versions (a link that is further developed with the side-by-side combination of original and de/composed poems). Sometimes Snodgrass replaces subtle with blunt language to alter connotation or tone or to develop one theme or interpretation over others. In his de/composition of “Traveling through the Dark,” for instance, he depersonalizes the speaker’s relationship to a deer slain along the side of a road by substituting clinical terms like “rigor mortis” and “unborn foetus” for the warmer, less detached language in William Stafford’s original (“she had stiffened already,” “her fawn lay there waiting”) (70-71). Even while describing a near-identical scene, Snodgrass converts the speaker into someone just a bit colder, more hurried, rushing to “go ahead / with the errands [he’d] started out on” (71).

Other times, Snodgrass rearranges and replaces diction and punctuation to fiddle with meter, sound, and rhythm. In “The Main Deep,” he lengthens James Stephens’s careful two-beat lines, removes some of the commas and hyphens sprinkled among them, and interrupts the steady rhythm of participles piled one on top of another. Each of these changes diminishes the

relationship between form and meaning by dissolving the wave-like movement that Stephens both describes and mimics in his original. Snodgrass often tinkers with spacing, format, and organization to achieve similar deficiencies. Merely adjusting the line breaks in William Carlos Williams's "Poem, 'As the cat'" strips away its intricate intermingling of sound, shape, and meaning. Snodgrass's lines facilitate more natural pauses, reflective of grammatical units like the phrase and clause, whereas Williams's comparatively jagged sentence personifies the poem's subject: a cat gingerly climbing among household items, extending one paw and then another just as the poem's speaker must extend one line into another, never certain of maintaining his or her vocal balance.

As his de/composition of Williams may suggest, Snodgrass also removes and corrects poetic quirks, such as the choices in diction, punctuation, and capitalization that characterize a unique style like Emily Dickinson's or e. e. cummings's. "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass," for example, becomes for Snodgrass "A Slender Creature," a poem that generates an eerie chill similar to Dickinson's original, yet in a more straightforward manner, without the bizarre dashes and capitalization. Likewise, Snodgrass may insert new language or rearrange the old in order to give away a poem's climax or conclusion, sometimes aiding in a more straightforward transmission of meaning and other times more quickly fulfilling expectation. In de/composing "The Miller's Wife," for instance, he replaces Edwin Arlington Robinson's subtle hints of suicide with bolder, more direct statements explaining that both the miller and his wife indeed take their own lives.

De/Compositions exemplifies at some point each of the procedures of reuse that the literary domain helps me to expose in this chapter. In brief, these are combining, compiling, or joining; importing or copying; arranging and rearranging; adding; substituting; deleting; and

repackaging or reformatting. Here I demonstrate how Snodgrass enacts these moves, while later I will show that they regularly enter into the literary domain as I have defined it, not just Snodgrass's rather unusual project.

Snodgrass often clarifies what the original poem only suggests (to informed readers), channeling one's reading of the original in a helpful though potentially limiting direction. Snodgrass closes down possibilities for some readers while opening them up for others. His contributions are by turns humorous and enlightening, illuminating some quality in or perspective on the original. Occasionally they are actually quite good, somewhat in defiance of his subtitle (as I think is the case with "A Slender Creature," though perhaps because it stays close to Dickinson's original). Yet "good poems gone wrong" does not necessarily imply that wrong means poor in quality. "Going wrong" signifies tinkering, playing with and diverging from the seemingly natural and familiar structure of the original poem. It means opening up a poem, dislodging its pieces, and moving them around. It entails intervening while reconstructing, relying upon the old to make something new and separate, necessarily blending "they say" with "I say." De/composing requires simultaneously putting together and taking apart, constructing while deconstructing, producing while reading and interpreting. It is, as Snodgrass suggests, a language game, one in which both the original *and* the de/composition can clarify "what makes fine poems fine" as they feed back into each other (xx). The *pair* of original poem plus de/composed poem is essential, for this relationship establishes procedures of reuse that elucidate the original *and* transfer beyond the pair into further writing, into ever more de/compositions.

Snodgrass's game is one that functions like familiar writing endeavors such as gloss, summary, interpretation, response, explication, and commentary—yet with a difference. In de/composing, one reads, explains, extends, and comments on a text, moving it in one direction

or another just as responsive writing does: grasping a text in one place, inquiring into it, and through summary and commentary, moving it to another place (and ultimately, perhaps back to one's starting place). It is hybrid play, interweaving reading and writing, explaining and deforming, adding and subtracting. Like any kind of writing with sources, de/composition means reading a source and writing in relation to it. The difference, however, is that the object of inquiry does not remain as separate as it normally would: where a more conventional approach to writing with sources, a "they say"/"I say" approach, demands explicitly stating that some "they" (perhaps Dickinson or Williams) offers a quotation or idea and then explaining it or responding to it as an "I,"²¹ de/composition interweaves these two steps, fusing "they" and "I." Quotation and interpretation merge in the de/composed poem, while the original remains beside it, an uninterrupted quotation from which one can infer a mode of reading and understanding through comparison to its de/composition.

Where a gloss typically remains in the margins of a poem, in a glossary appended to a book, or in a separate volume, in de/composing Snodgrass moves its explanatory power into the poem itself. There the "gloss" interrupts the original text, distorting and deforming it, sometimes in ways made unusually explicit for Snodgrass. In de/composing Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish," for example, he draws special attention to his substitutions by italicizing them, thus highlighting how Bishop's original characterizations become dulled and diminished with his tinkering (244-249). Less explicit yet still gloss-like are the substitutions made to Cummings's "anyone lived in a pretty how town," which clarify for readers how they might understand vague pronouns like "anyone" and "no one" by replacing them with "a certain man" and "a certain woman" (114-

²¹ To be clear, in the "they say"/"I say" approach, the "I" need not be explicitly stated using first-person pronouns, which students often avoid because the five-paragraph essay format habituates them to more depersonalized writing. However, broadly speaking, the "I" refers to commentary added to quotation and summary, the material that moves beyond merely restating the "they" toward saying something *about* the "they."

115). In “The Miller’s Wife” and other poems whose “undercurrents” Snodgrass seeks to expose, substitutions function like glosses that give away what happens only subtly in the originals. Where a traditional gloss requires that readers insert the explanation into their reading, mentally or perhaps in writing, Snodgrass’s “glosses” go further than even an interlinear note: they are readymade, plugged in, central rather than peripheral to the reading endeavor.²²

The Procedural Nuts and Bolts of De/Composition

I turn now to Snodgrass’s de/composition of Robert Creeley’s poem “I Know a Man” because it features each of the procedures identified above and demonstrates how they work together to alter the original poem. (In my commentary I italicize these procedures for emphasis.) Creeley’s original is a brief, conversational modern poem of four stanzas, notable for a singular style marked by abbreviated words and haphazard line breaks (26-27). As in each of his entries, here Snodgrass *copies* the original poem and *combines* it with the de/composition, *arranging* them next to each other so that they work together, each informing the other. *Repackaging* Creeley’s poem alongside another version of it establishes that de/composition can serve an interpretive or explanatory role, in the gloss-like sense I noted above. Some *reformatting* also accompanies each of the de/compositions, which appear in a slightly different font, signifying their divergence from the original.

Snodgrass suggests in his brief commentary on the de/compositions that much of his work with this poem entailed eliminating marks of its “eccentric style” (35). We can see, for instance, that the de/composition *rearranges* Creeley’s lines, breaking them at more

²² In reproducing the original poems, Snodgrass includes an occasional standard gloss as a footnote to the main text. For example, in Hardy’s “The Man He Killed,” he glosses “We should have sat us down to wet / Right many a nipperkin!” as “Have many small drinks” (68). What Snodgrass is doing with de/composition is like a gloss yet not identical to it, so the traditional gloss remains a useful practice for quickly defining unfamiliar language.

grammatically appropriate places than in the middle of a phrase. Snodgrass's first two lines each encompass an entire clause ("I said to my friend" and "we always discuss this"), where Creeley's split up a possessive adjective and its accompanying noun ("As I sd to my / friend") and interrupt a verb phrase ("because I am / always talking"). Creeley's line breaks produce a jagged, fragmented grammar that disrupts the flow of reading and thus mimic the bumpy, jerky, and perhaps aimless movement that the poem's speaker must be producing while distracted from driving by talking. The original arrangement of lines and syntax "forces a reader to attend closely to details, just as the speaker's friend says he should do" (35). Eliminating these eccentricities distances readers from this close attention and thus removes the relationship between form and meaning that Creeley's original cultivates.

Snodgrass further dissolves this eccentric fragmentation by adjusting diction and punctuation: *adding*, *subtracting*, and *substituting* throughout the poem. *Substituting* "said" for "sd" and *deleting* "yr" altogether eliminate the sense of quick, spontaneous speech characterizing this conversation while in transit. Likewise, *deleting* the opening word "As" converts the de/composition into something more like reported speech than a conversation that readers are witnessing in process. This deletion furthermore eliminates the possibility that the friend is addressing the speaker just *as* he is speaking—that is, at the same time, in the chaotic moment that the poem portrays. *Inserting* and *substituting* appropriate capitalization and punctuation like quotation marks add formality, again contributing to the sense that Snodgrass's poem merely reports a previous conversation. Quotation marks also clarify when shifts from narration to dialogue occur, removing the uncertainty that Creeley's missing quotation marks create in order to match the speaker's fear that "the darkness surrounds us." Formality also accompanies some of the *substitutions* that deform the poem from more specific and concrete to more general and

abstract (and indeed this pair of poems appears under that first section in the book, *Abstract and General vs. Concrete and Specific*). Creeley's "goddamn big car," for instance, becomes for Snodgrass "more luxurious comforts." An especially substantive substitution shifts Snodgrass's conclusion away from Creeley's, as "John" warns "For the future's sake . . . consider the possible / harm to the ecology" instead of "drive . . . for / christ's sake, look out where yr going." Where the original stresses immediate concerns like driving right here and now, the de/composed worries about larger, more diffuse and unpredictable phenomena like ecology.

In this particular de/composition, we can see that Snodgrass employs each procedure—copying, combining, rearranging, repackaging, substituting, deleting, and inserting—and that together, these moves work to draw attention back to the original poem. Snodgrass diverges from the original yet retains enough similarity to maintain a link between original and de/composed: for instance, keeping the total number of lines, the number of lines per stanza, the speakers, the setting, and many words (twenty of the original fifty-two). In doing so, Snodgrass implicitly highlights the features that make the original interesting. Rather than describe such features through explication, Snodgrass enacts an explication through contrast: a performative act that reveals the original by dissolving and reworking it. I suggest that de/composition results in more engaging and humorous writing than a typical explication would. It invites reader interaction as well, since readers must try to infer Snodgrass's evaluative and interpretive perspectives by comparing his de/compositions to the originals.

More than directing attention back to the original, Snodgrass also directs attention to poetry more broadly, subtly commenting (through designating the de/compositions deviations from "good poems") on what makes poetry provocative or enjoyable. His version of gloss seeks not to disappear back into what it glosses (i.e., the original poem)—to move inward—but to open

outward. Snodgrass's practice is not just a reading practice but a writing practice too, one that exploits the generative capacity in reusing literary texts. As I will show later in this chapter, English instruction has long exploited this capacity in textbook exercises for reading and writing that anticipate Snodgrass's methods of de/composition. Snodgrass underscores this capacity in several special cases where he develops multiple distortions from a single original, offering two or three de/compositions or a de/composition alongside a re/de/composition—poems going wrong and wronger. In presenting multiple possibilities, with their alternative meters, registers, shapes, and forms, Snodgrass repeatedly showcases the inventive potential in the same underlying procedures, applied to more and more texts, the originals as well as their newly improvised distortions. Here gloss does not just clarify; it amplifies.

From Rhetorical Criticism to Critical-Creative Tinkering

Poet, critic, translator: Snodgrass exemplifies each of these professional designations in his work as a de/composer. He intervenes in his chosen poems with a mix of critical and creative insight: as a poet, producing new poems; as a critic, collecting, reading, and commenting on previous publications; and as a translator, rewriting a text in a different language, retaining its structure and content. Altogether Snodgrass generates new poems through a mode of translation (what some have elsewhere called “English-to-English translation” [see Legault]) while commenting on their sources and on poetry in general. Like Shields and Lethem, Snodgrass blends critical with creative composition while undertaking a project dominated by textual reuse. I affiliate this blend of critical and creative, of reading, commenting, and making, with rhetorical criticism, an active mode of reading directed toward production. Yet I advance an enhanced version of rhetorical criticism, a more playful, hybridized version that accommodates textual reuse more specifically: what I call *critical-creative tinkering*.

My take on rhetorical criticism builds on Jeffrey Walker's notion that its essential feature is its "double orientation": toward criticism and reflection on the one hand and toward production or practice on the other ("Dionysius"). Rhetorical criticism is an essentially pedagogical pursuit—a mode of seeing and reading that leads eventually to enacting in writing the moves that one observes in reading. Considered as rhetorical criticism, *De/Compositions* would elide some of the procedure here: beneath any finalized de/composition are Snodgrass's practices of reading, interpreting, and manipulating the original poems, as well as his general facility with poetic techniques, developed over some time. What appears like simultaneous noticing and enacting in Snodgrass's side-by-side comparisons may often in practice take on a more segmented approach: reading a text, noticing and elaborating its poetic and rhetorical strategies (perhaps through writing *about* them), and experimenting *with* them (and their absence) in a new text. But these steps need not be linear; here is where I see an opening for theorizing the more integrated approach to rhetorical reading that tinkering embodies. A rhetorical orientation toward textual reuse encourages a recursive intermingling of reading and writing: exploring texts and their strategies through tinkering with them in a process with both mental and material components.

Thus, while I can fit de/composition into Walker's conception of rhetorical criticism, imagining it as a process of discrete steps that lead from reading to noticing to analyzing to enacting, the practice I advance here actively exploits the critical-creative overlap that traditional rhetorical criticism only makes possible. Where rhetorical criticism works *toward* production, tinkering makes it the central endeavor.²³ Playing with poems or tweaking quotations, for

²³ I would similarly distinguish poaching (via Michel de Certeau) from tinkering. Poaching means excerpting items from reading materials, making reading an active endeavor oriented toward production. Excerpting and even simply underlining require intervening in a source, yet without the more immediate interference that characterizes tinkering,

example, become creative practices that produce critical insight, which can then feedback into further tinkering. In contrast, a rhetorical approach like Graff and Birkenstein's relies upon a more orderly process, one that begins with analysis and concludes with invention.²⁴ Graff and Birkenstein have studied effective critical writing and have catalogued the moves that characterize it, offering them as templates for readers to try. Lists of rhetorical tropes and figures (such as Richard A. Lanham's *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*) do the same, yet typically avoid cataloguing empty templates, opting for the textual examples that Graff and Birkenstein also include but deemphasize.

Reality Hunger and "The Ecstasy of Influence" may appear more legibly as *rhetorical* tinkering than Snodgrass's poetic exploit. Both Shields and Lethem advocate for textual reuse while experimenting with the moves that characterize it: appropriating, combining, juxtaposing, and manipulating preexisting sources to build a patchwork of discernible voices and genres. They argue for the affordances of reuse in part by demonstrating them, making their mode and style of criticism another means of persuasion in what are quite clearly rhetorical publications. In merging play with rhetorical work—playing not chaotically but methodically, to elaborate theory and argument—Shields and Lethem demonstrate the possibility for rhetorical-poetical fusion. And in fact, Snodgrass's apparently poetic endeavor is rhetorical too. The de/compositions argue for a set of methods for reading and understanding poetry: readers can glean from them and from Snodgrass's commentary on them how they might produce their own de/compositions.

where again, production is central, not something saved for later. Furthermore, poaching generally draws upon what is merely available rather than targeting a source text for interpretive purposes, as in de/composition.

²⁴ We can see this orderly process in Graff and Birkenstein's characterization of invention here: "Working with the 'they say'/'I say' model can also help with invention, finding something to say. In our experience students best discover what they want to say not by thinking about a subject in an isolation booth, but by reading texts, listening closely to what other writers say, and looking for an opening in which they can enter the conversation" (xiii). While they rightfully reject "blank-page" approaches to invention, Graff and Birkenstein suggest that invention comes *after* extensive reading and thinking about others' texts, not while in the midst of them (both materially and temporally), as tinkering would have it.

Snodgrass thus presents de/composition as a critical-rhetorical tool through a sort of epideictic demonstration of it. Snodgrass's method helps to identify features consistent with "good" poetry. We can gather, for instance, that according to Snodgrass, subtle undercurrents and quirky stylistic ticks undergird effective poetry; eradicating these elements can easily strip a poem of its appeal. In marking some poetic techniques more effective than others, Snodgrass provides a tacit set of moves for aspiring poets to try, though without reducing them to simple templates like Graff and Birkenstein's.²⁵

In contrast to Shields and Lethem, Snodgrass experiments with some moves that he does not wish to promote. That is, rather than enacting what he admires in reading, as Shields and Lethem do via collage, Snodgrass diverges from what he admires. Yet this divergence shows recognition of the moves that Snodgrass values, for he reaffirms the qualities from which he diverges. De/composition is a mode of explication and interpretation through contrast. Explicit commentary occurs only outside Snodgrass's actual tinkering (in brief sections concluding each division in the book), yet his de/compositions offer explications from which one can infer arguments and interpretations. Unlike a traditional gloss that seems to define unfamiliar words objectively, a de/composition is never disinterested.

With Snodgrass's project, I extend rhetorical criticism beyond what Shields and Lethem demonstrate and what Graff and Birkenstein offer. First, Snodgrass identifies a method that interweaves reading and writing in order to understand, interpret, and critique poetry (surely applicable to other kinds of sources too). He models an essentially playful, poetic approach to

²⁵ Snodgrass broadly labels his strategies (but not his writing procedures) by organizing the book into five general sections, each addressing particular poetic concepts. As I indicated above, he also occasionally emphasizes or makes visible his techniques by italicizing substitutions or identifying metrical transformations beneath the titles of his de/compositions. However, he never breaks down his poetic moves into lists of suggestions, which would detach them from both content and context, as Graff and Birkenstein's templates do.

critical writing. Second, implicit in Snodgrass's de/compositions are guidelines for generating "good poems." Where Graff and Birkenstein digest into templates "The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing," Snodgrass illuminates through de/composition "The Moves that Matter in Poetic Writing." Hence, de/composition appears relevant and appealing to several familiar disciplinary contexts: teaching close reading and/or poetry in a literature class; producing poetry, perhaps through imitation, in a creative writing class; or even solidifying grammatical and rhetorical concepts through language manipulation in any English class.²⁶ *De/Compositions* is a model work of reuse, in that it merges critical with creative, rhetorical with poetic, and reading with writing under a capacious notion of textual production that can accommodate the breadth of English as a discipline.

II. DE/COMPOSITION AND ITS ALLIES ACROSS THE DISCIPLINE

In fact, critical practices akin to de/composition show up across the common institutional branches of English studies: in literary studies, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing. Attending to the reuse of creative and literary texts in particular reveals that their reconstruction occurs in various types of exercises and publications, with some consistency in their underlying procedures. The field of textual reuse is wide and diffuse, comprising techniques that do not serve just one type of writing. Studying textual reuse requires a more flexible and comprehensive notion of textual production. In broadly sketching a terrain of related practices, then, I show that modes of reuse like de/composition can be applied generally, to language play at large, rather

²⁶ Of course these classes and their goals can—and I argue, should—overlap. As I show in Chapter 3, in my writing-intensive introductory literature class, for example, students de/composed poems to help them understand reading materials, prepare to write about them, and practice writing in general.

than to writing in disciplinarily specific domains. I pull together disparate strands of English studies by highlighting common yet marginalized practices of reconstructing and intervening in texts. At their core, these are techniques for tinkering with language.

Along the fringes of literary and textual studies, Rob Pope and Jerome McGann have each elaborated techniques like de/composition known as “textual intervention” and “deformative criticism,” respectively. Both approaches encourage readers to get inside existing texts to fiddle with their parts and thus discover some meaning, value, or perspective. Critical insight emerges from creative play, as in Snodgrass’s project. They are experimental approaches to teaching critical reading and thinking through the same foundational procedures of making via reconstructing: combination, rearrangement, insertion, subtraction, substitution, and repackaging. McGann takes a poem and rewrites it backwards or eliminates its nouns and verbs (*Radiant* 131-133). Pope recognizes interventional techniques as methods of critical-creative composition and champions their heuristic and interactive potentialities. They comprise those that I have shown in *De/Compositions* as well as those that McGann might try, yet are applied to literary as well as everyday texts like advertisements. Pope instructs readers, for example, to convert verb tenses, substitute subjects, insert qualifiers, translate poetry into prose or any text into another register or dialect, mix separate texts together, or present them in alternative media and formats. Where Pope and McGann elaborate methods of intervention and deformation and address their theoretical stakes, Snodgrass operates more demonstratively, providing material examples of these common reconstructive techniques.

I acknowledge that textual intervention and deformative criticism may appear eccentric practices operating from obscure corners of the discipline. However, I suggest that it is significant that they are not isolated, exceptional examples but rather, repeat throughout the

discipline (and as I will later show, throughout its history too). In gathering these odd critical techniques under the broader umbrella of reuse, I move them from the fringes into a more integrated practice that I argue should have a wider role in composing at the present moment. Furthermore, I demonstrate the breadth of reuse, the range of texts and contexts in which it works, and thus strengthen its status as a general rather than eccentric writing practice.

The procedural instruction that both Pope and McGann include sounds much like the procedural writing that the French avant-garde collective Oulipo theorizes and circulates. Something like McGann's suggestion to "eliminate[e] everything from a poem except certain words, to see what happens when they are alone on the page" (121) could easily support an Oulipian procedure, for the same deformative, playful thinking underlies each of these modes of composition. The Oulipo, or *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (Workshop on Potential Literature), elaborates new procedures and structures for writing under constraint, many of them built upon mathematical concepts, and researches and resurrects prior models of constraint (such as the villanelle and the lipogram, which Oulipians would call "plagiarisms by anticipation"). In addition, it produces and often publishes new texts via such methods. Many Oulipian procedures require enacting a series of moves on a preexisting text, literary or mundane, much in the spirit of reuse that McGann, Snodgrass, and Pope exemplify. (Other procedures direct the generation of new text without any reliance on a source text.²⁷) There are countless procedures, carefully catalogued (particularly in Mathews and Brotchie) and studied extensively; I outline two here that demonstrate some overlap with McGann's deformations and with the foundational procedures I have enumerated. One example is homovocalism: take a text, isolate its vowels, discard its consonants, and build a new text that retains the initial sequence of vowels while

²⁷ The instructions delineating such procedures are indeed sources directing results, but their actual material will not appear in the results generated. Thus, they are more prompts or directions than source or substrate texts.

replacing all consonants (Mathews and Brotchie 160). Another is haikuization: making a haiku from a sonnet by preserving only its rhyming sections (Mathews and Brotchie 157). Deletion and insertion are essential to these examples, while substitution, rearrangement, and combination enter into many others.

The Oulipian mission is both artistic or literary and pedagogical: members publish intriguing creative works themselves and invite and teach others to reuse Oulipian procedures. It is a literary movement and a mode of literary history (in researching earlier models of constraint) that affirms literature as a practice, not just an object. The prolific and prominent Oulipian Georges Perec has written against traditional approaches to literature and literary history by affirming this orientation toward practice: “Exclusively preoccupied with its great capitals (Work, Style, Inspiration, World-Vision, Fundamental Options, Genius, Creation, etc.), literary history seems deliberately to ignore writing as practice, as work, as play” (98). Here Perec formulates writing in a way that overlaps considerably with the technical-material model of invention that I developed in Chapter 1. (Furthermore, he sounds much like Paul Kameen, who theorizes invention as “work and play with words” [82].) But more importantly for this chapter, Perec aligns the study of literature with the playful modes of language manipulation that I identified above with an expanded notion of rhetorical criticism known as critical-creative tinkering. In orienting literary study toward textual production (what usually distinguishes composition from literary studies), Perec contributes to the more capacious and flexible view of English studies that I advance here. He also establishes some surprising continuity between the general in(ter)ventional preoccupations of this project and what appears merely a fringe-group in literary studies.

The Oulipo has codified “homosemantic translation,” a set of procedures that translate a source text so that its sense remains while its language changes—what others have labeled “homolinguistic translation,” or in our language, “English-to-English translation.” I have already associated Snodgrass’s de/compositions with such practices: for example, some foreground the substitution of words and phrases for seemingly synonymous ones and thus reveal that although the “sense” may seem to remain, connotation, tone, and effect change. Local substitutions of words and phrases can thus disrupt the poem more globally, in terms of its overall meaning or message. In Snodgrass’s case, then, translation again serves pedagogical and demonstrative ends, underscoring how the language of the original poem works, or how poetic language in general works. Many translations serve similarly pedagogical ends in updating classic texts to assist readers for whom the original (which appears alongside the translation) is unfamiliar and incomprehensible.²⁸ As with de/composition, in these cases, the translation helps direct attention back to the original text, ideally illuminating it, though perhaps in some cases serving merely as an easier substitute for it. Translation here suggests that literature is not inert, something only to read, interpret, and analyze, but generative too. Literature is material that can open outward into additional texts where new blends with old in ways that defy easy “they say”/“I say” distinction.

Translation also appears as an exercise in instructional writing contexts, both in creative writing and in rhetoric and composition. Tom C. Hunley, for example, advocates translation when asking students to rewrite the same story, scene, or idea in as many styles or voices as they can. He offers as models Erasmus’s *De Copia* and Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style* (89-90). Both of these works (the latter by a founding member of the Oulipo) translate one story or

²⁸ See, for example, Danielson’s 2008 prose translation of *Paradise Lost* (which is much like two projects by Lanzara: *Paradise Lost: The Novel* and *John Milton’s Paradise Lost in Plain English: A Simple, Line by Line Paraphrase of the Complicated Masterpiece*), as well as the popular series *No Fear Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare Made Easy*.

statement into numerous contrasting styles—in Queneau’s case, into ninety-nine variations. Translation is thus not only an educational activity but also a potential route to publication, as we see in Steve McCaffery’s *Every Way Oakly*, a translation of Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*. Similarly, Harryette Mullen converts Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 130”²⁹ into the language of modern consumerist culture in her poetry collection *Sleeping with the Dictionary*.³⁰ Mullen relies on substitution to convert Shakespearean poetry into a contemporary prose-poetry paragraph, developing a strong link between the “Dark Lady” sonnet and her “Dim Lady” variation by retaining much of the original syntax and language. Compare, for example, Shakespeare’s first three lines to Mullen’s first three sentences:

Table 1: Mullen's Translation of Shakespeare

Shakespeare	My mistress’s eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips’ red; If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
Mullen	My honeybunch’s peepers are nothing like neon. Today’s special at Red Lobster is redder than her kisser. If Liquid Paper is white, her racks are institutional beige. (20)

Mullen’s treatment of Shakespeare emerges more clearly as reuse than McCaffery’s, for Mullen reuses enough original structure to expose her procedure as one of translation via substitution. In contrast, McCaffery diverges more considerably from his source texts, producing translations that less readily reveal their reliance upon Stein’s originals. A line-by-line comparison like that above would not expose procedural manipulation of the source, but perhaps

²⁹ Other poets have recently experimented with rewriting and translating Shakespeare’s sonnets. See the 2012 collection edited by Sharmila Cohen and Paul Legault called *The Sonnets: Translating and Rewriting Shakespeare*, as well as Paul Hoover’s 2009 book *Sonnet 56*, which offers 56 variations of Shakespeare’s 56th sonnet.

³⁰ Elsewhere in the collection, Mullen experiments with other Oulipian procedures, including homophonic translation and N + 7. Homophonic translation calls for substituting words and phrases in a source text with their homophones, producing sonic “translations” that diverge widely from their sources. N + 7 requires replacing each noun in a source text with the seventh one following it in a chosen dictionary. As this latter example indicates, Oulipian procedures may appear rigid and precise in abstract, but in practice permit some freedom and thus much variation—for instance, the choice of dictionary for N + 7 is open-ended and will greatly affect what results from the procedure.

some influence from Stein.³¹ McCaffery acknowledges this divergence when noting in his introduction that he wishes to “generate contentually new texts” from old (ix). He works quite differently than Snodgrass or Mullen: for McCaffery, “The source texts (Stein’s original pieces) become textual still lives placed under the rigor of translational observation so as to generate their target texts along the lines of allusive reference and connotational structures and possibilities” (ix). McCaffery translates along a more conceptual than material plane, making his work less useful than Mullen’s for this project. He is less self-consciously permuting language than Snodgrass or Mullen, his translation revealing general influence more than material manipulation of the source text. McCaffery’s “translation” demonstrates that one literary text can prompt another, yet it does not provide sufficient material evidence to illuminate procedures of reuse (one aim of this chapter).

The fact that in some contexts (like Hunley’s) translation is mere exercise, helping one to build a repertoire of rhetorical and poetic techniques, while in other contexts (like Mullen’s), it is literary production underscores my argument that language manipulation and textual reconstruction are general, open-ended practices. Such language play has potential value in contexts across the English discipline. These practices are fundamental approaches to writing whose outcomes and eventual uses cannot be predicted even as a consistent set of procedures underlies them. As writers continually rely upon these procedures, their environmental pressures and constraints change, fostering an opportunity perhaps for exercise, perhaps for production.

³¹ Even as McCaffery and Mullen differ in their approaches to homolingual translation, both do use their source texts as starting points for new poems. Legault does something quite different in what he calls an “English-to-English” translation of Emily Dickinson’s entire corpus: he digests each of her poems into a short, pithy take-home message written in contemporary prose, much as the Shakespeare study guides above might. Consider just three of the 1,789 examples: “Just do it” (81); “Zombies are really awkward at tea parties and other social settings” (81); “I’m a paparazzo for God” (98). Legault clearly substitutes his versions for Dickinson’s, yet he does not enact the same kind of procedural substitution that I see in language manipulation. Rather, he summarizes or explicates each poem by condensing it into a modern-day sound-bite, reusing little, if any, of the source language.

Procedures help to generate text but cannot guarantee that it will be useful or inventive. What must supplement procedure is a more open-ended selection process requiring interaction among text(s), context(s), and individual(s), a process that I sketch in the final two sections of this chapter. Even as I emphasize impersonal textual and procedural agencies, I acknowledge that some evaluation must accompany the recursive process of textual production.

III. PREVAILING PROCEDURES FOR TEXT GENERATION

The above sampling of the many contexts in which practices like de/composition show up indicates that these practices are productive, generative, and manifold. They are substantial contributors to the field of writing with sources, characterized by a set of shared procedures that can ground a reconceptualizing of the field beyond its traditional neglect of creative tinkering. I attribute the commonality and consistency in procedures of de/composition to the fact that these same procedures explain not just how one moves from source text to reused text, but also how one moves from anything to something else—that is, how to generate further text, how to make more, how to put things together. At the broadest level, then, these procedures are productive and reliable approaches to generating text. Reuse is not an eccentric form of production, but a practice that illuminates and informs writing and invention in general. However, valuing reuse calls for an expanded notion of “new text,” or text generation. The texts generated via reuse include those that represent through de/composition a reading of another text. These modes of reading also comprise forms of writing: they demonstrate or perform a reading, rather than report it separately. I want to emphasize, then, that such modes entail production and performance, not just repetition through reuse. Reused material can be material that has been assimilated and re-

voiced by the re-user, then presented as part of a performance. Reuse on its own can be productive practice. We recognize its invention more readily when we avoid approaching texts like de/compositions as though they are essays with “too many” quotations and not enough “new” material.

To be more specific, the procedures of reuse underlie, for instance, the movement from model to imitation, from brainstorm to draft, from draft to revision, from writing assignment to response, and from reading material to response or interpretation—in short, movement from preexisting text to new text, whether or not re-appropriation also occurs. I see this continuity between reuse and general invention in some reliable strategies for creative writing that Hazel Smith develops in *The Writing Experiment*. She presents a group of techniques for language manipulation that can assist writers throughout the composing process, from beginning to write to finalizing what has been written (what she calls editing). These techniques largely coincide with those that I have been tracing in examples of reuse. They include rearrangement, substitution, addition, subtraction, amplification, combination, adjustment, refining, and rewriting. Those in this list that differ from my procedures actually contain within them the same procedures that I have identified. Amplifying and refining, for instance, are tasks that involve adding to the pieces that one already has, as well as deleting, substituting, rearranging, and combining them. Smith shows that once a writer has a starting-point, he or she can begin manipulating (i.e., executing these procedures) and thus can generate something else and produce some movement from the initial text. Whether the starting-point is a preexisting text or one newly improvised, the same manipulations can guide further production. Anything made of language can thus be made to produce more language via these self-generating procedures.

These insights may seem obvious when explicitly stated, yet they deviate from a contrary, normative approach to invention: one that begins not with language per se, but with an idea, what Smith calls “running with the referent” (18). However, she rightly recognizes that referential invention rarely happens in isolation: instead, most writing emerges out of some combination of manipulating language and working with referents (19). There is always some feedback between language and ideas, for writing is simultaneously a material and mental process. Furthermore, it is likely that one’s idea for a starting-point will emerge out of some prior interaction with text, making that idea partly mental, partly material.

To concretize my argument, I reproduce in Table 2 a series of examples that Smith uses to demonstrate how amplification and refinement can generate new text. Importantly, Smith builds these selections out of a set of “just-made” textual parts, rather than “ready-mades” as in overt reuse. Though just-made, her starting-points are not, however, original: they include the cliché “matchstick thin arms and legs” (29). I make visible the key procedural moves: italicizing additions, bolding substitutions, underlining combinations, and striking through deletions.

Table 2: Procedures of Reuse in Text Generation

Version 1	She is very thin and her arms and legs are like matchsticks. She opens the fridge door and closes it. She walks away then turns back. She opens the fridge door, takes out a yoghurt, and shuts it again.
Version 2	She is <i>becoming thinner by the day</i> . Her arms and legs are so frail you can see the veins stand out and her face is hollow and creased. She is losing her hair, it sprouts only in tufts. She paces up and down outside the fridge and then opens the door. Inside are rows of plain and fruit-flavoured yoghurt, egg sandwiches and cartons of milk. She closes the fridge door <i>abruptly</i> . She walks away, then turns back <u>and opens it</u> again. She looks around. She takes out a yoghurt, <i>peels off the lid, and quickly swallows a spoonful</i> . Then she shuts the door , <i>feeling acutely anxious and repelled by her behaviour</i> .
Version 3	She is becoming thinner by the day. Her arms and legs are so frail you can see the veins stand out and her face is hollow and creased. She is losing her hair, it sprouts only in tufts. She circles in front of the fridge and then opens the door. Inside are rows of plain and fruit-flavoured yoghurt, egg sandwiches and cartons of milk. She slams the fridge door abruptly. She edges away, then turns back and opens it <i>cautiously</i> again. She glances from side to side . She slides out a yoghurt, peels off

the lid, and quickly swallows a spoonful. Then she lets the door go , feeling acutely anxious and repelled by her behaviour.
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Though rearrangement does not occur in these examples, it easily could. In moving from the third version to a fourth one, I might reposition the final sentence ahead of the first, convert its verbs to past tense, and shift the paragraph from description of present events to reflection upon past events. I thus indicate that the subject felt acutely anxious and repelled by her behavior and then suggest why by listing her actions as Smith does here. I might also incorporate more combination in shaping version 3 into a monologue, perhaps uttered by a character expressing concern for a friend or family member. Combining some of these sentences into one long sentence by inserting several *and*'s and *then*'s would convert this excerpt into the more spontaneous, rambling prose common of speech.

With Smith's examples, I am relying upon the same patterns of language manipulation that I employ in textual reuse, even though Smith is, in theory, generating new, "non-reused" text. The slippage between reuse and "regular" text generation is palpable because the distinction between them is minute. Invention does not occur on a blank page. Instead, it happens amid prefabricated givens, whether they are well-circulated clichés, the just-made kernel phrases like "matchstick thin arms and legs" that Smith helps writers to develop, or the short narratives that R. G. Parker extends into ever-longer paragraphs in an exercise also called "amplification" (40-43). These core procedures—copying, combining, arranging, substituting, adding, and deleting—are so fundamental to invention that they appear throughout the archive of modern English instructional materials, including the textbooks like Parker's that I surveyed in Chapter 1.

IV. DE/COMPOSITION AND ITS ALLIES IN THE ARCHIVES OF ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

As I expand my view of literary reuse, beyond relatively recent textual activities like de/composition and the Oulipo, I find historical precedents in both literary studies and composition, incorporating many versions of the same underlying techniques. Recasting, rewriting, condensing, and expanding literary texts into new derivatives are common, durable, and reliable methods of teaching and learning writing and reading. The dense network of such practices suggests again that reuse and its underlying procedures are not eccentric but fundamental modes of production, generative of new text and/or interpretation of old text.

For instance, although I have provided several recent examples of homolingistic translation, it may nonetheless seem obscure, associated with unusual projects like the Oulipo and Paul Legault's amazingly exhaustive paraphrase of Emily Dickinson's collected works. Yet the larger archive positions such translation work, particularly poetry-to-prose translation, as a widespread, traditional approach to teaching reading and writing, even both at the same time. Here I trace a range of instructional practices relying upon similar translational procedures even while going by different names and pursuing different objectives. At one end of this range are practices that convert poetry to prose while retaining much of the source language. For them key procedures are combination, rearrangement, and repackaging. At the other end of this range are divergent practices that, though known as translation, actually insert and substitute more language than they repeat. I begin with James Buchanan's 1773 prose version of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Since this text shows strikingly well that textual reuse is a procedural practice, I examine it at some length here.

Buchanan's work claims on its title page to have "rendered into grammatical construction" Milton's original poem, retaining all words while merely rearranging them to reflect "natural" rather than "artificial" word order, a prose version to supplement Milton's poetry. Milton's original text appears above Buchanan's reconstruction of it, in a slightly larger font too, so that Buchanan's contribution models a gloss on the original. As with Snodgrass's project, however, this "gloss" offers more than occasional explanation: it mixes explanation with reconstruction, reconstituting Milton's original in a fully-elaborated prose style beneath it. A key move, then, is combining source with translation, just as Snodgrass pairs each de/composition with its source poem. Buchanan's work is necessary, according to the advertisement, because "Milton's stile is more violently inverted than that of any other English poet" (2), making it difficult for youth and others untrained in reading verse to comprehend his epic poem, a classic that they should be reading. Buchanan's endeavor performs a pedagogical service, offering a guide to *Paradise Lost* that anticipates those that Dennis Danielson and Joseph Lanzara have recently published.³²

Buchanan's chief method is transposition: converting inverted or artificial arrangement into natural arrangement, the order Buchanan claims one's mind instinctively follows. This distinction, while tenuous, demystifies the literary work, suggesting that it deviates from ordinary constructions in an easily translatable manner, merely because it is poetic and not because its content is anything readers cannot understand. Thus, Buchanan shows readers how to translate or adapt inverted syntax into natural syntax, rather than just performing the service

³² Whether called updating, translating, imitating, or paraphrasing, reworking *Paradise Lost* is a particularly durable project. See also, for example, John Hopkins's *Milton's Paradise Lost Imitated in Rhyme* (1699); Andrew Jackson's *Paradise Lost: A Poem. Attempted in Rhyme* (1740); George Smith Green's *A New Version of the Paradise Lost: Or, Milton Paraphrased* (1756); and *The Fall of Man, or, Milton's Paradise Lost. In Prose*, attributed to Nicolas-Francois Dupre de Saint-Maur and published around 1765. As I showed above, each of these examples, as well as the modern-day ones by Danielson and Lanzara, justify their appearance and reappearance on the value yet perennial difficulty of Milton's long canonical work.

himself. In fact, he claims to have included only the first six books of *Paradise Lost* because he imagines that by the time they conclude six books, readers will have gained the knowledge and ability to continue the work of rearrangement on their own. Buchanan's edition is a pedagogical text helping readers to understand Milton and to learn syntactical principles, such as ellipsis and transposition (or inversion), that they may later apply to other difficult verse. It teaches techniques of reading and writing simultaneously.³³ "[B]y the time they have read all the six [books]," Buchanan suggests, readers will "be able to read not only the whole poem, but every English classic, whether in prose or verse, with taste and judgment" (15). He goes on to enumerate advantages beyond mere application to additional literary works: "And what immense advantages must accrue to young gentlemen from their being capable of construing and resolving every sentence they read in any English classic? How will this fix their attention and improve their judgment, with respect to a masterly knowledge of the subject, as well as the propriety of the stile? Nay, in time, what judicious critics will they not become?" (15). I see in this suggestion much commonality with Boyd's pronouncement in Chapter 1, on the benefits that can accrue from carefully copying and setting type: becoming a "judicious" reader *and* composer, someone with a sharp understanding of style, syntax, and other details thanks to fastidious attention to the intricacies of sentence-level arrangement. Buchanan's work imagines producing readers *and* writers: readers with the ability not only to read and comprehend but also to tinker.

These benefits emerge out of an explicitly procedural approach to writing, one that looks like an algorithm or mathematical formula, a well-defined, step-by-step procedure that can be applied methodically to a source text. It is a method that explicates how one might approach the

³³ The ambiguity in this sentence is intentional. I mean to suggest that Buchanan's text teaches techniques for reading *and* techniques for writing. But I also want to propose that one can enact Buchanan's procedure *while* reading so as to understand the reading material by rewriting it—that is, by tinkering with it.

exercises in arrangement and rearrangement that I highlighted in Chapter 1. Transposition entails rearranging words just as exercises in rearrangement do (including analogous exercises in Buchanan's earlier text *A Regular English Syntax*, which, having been published in 1767, predates all of the materials in Chapter 1 by at least sixty years). And supplying ellipsis (the other component of Buchanan's approach) is just the opposite of sentence-combining: rather than eliminating redundancy or repetition by eliding or contracting two or more sentences, Buchanan re-inserts what the poetry has elided. Thus, Buchanan's primary syntactical moves are rearrangement and insertion, with combination and repackaging essential to putting the book and its pages together.

Here's how Buchanan summarizes his approach to rearranging an inverted sentence:

Let a sentence be ever so much inverted, read it to the end first, then look for the introductory or inciting word, if any; if none, take the vocative; if no vocative, go directly to the nominative or nominatives, if there be more than one connected by a conjunction; next, to the verb or verbs, if there be more than one, connected by a conjunction; next, to the word governed by the verb in the accusative, with the words connected with it in the same case, if any; take next the genitive case or cases, if there be any, connected by a conjunction; take last, the under parts, being words related to the whole, and governed by prepositions, to the end, supplying the ellipsis throughout, where needful. (10)

These instructions evoke procedure through their presentation alone, with the very long sentence punctuated into numerous clauses by one semi-colon after another, one comma after another. The original format even draws my attention to the punctuation because an extra space separates one semi-colon from another, one clause and one directive from another. The language too

bespeaks a logical, mathematical approach, beginning with “Let,” as in a mathematical proof, and continuing with several clauses exhibiting the “If . . . then” structure associated with logic.

To see Buchanan’s procedure in action, consider Table 3:

Table 3: Example of Transposition in Buchanan's Rendering of *Paradise Lost*

Milton	His spear, to equal which the tallest pine Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast Of some great ammiral, were but a wand, He walk'd with to support uneasy steps Over the burning marle . . .
Buchanan	He walked with his spear, (to equal which, the tallest pine hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast of some great ammiral, were but a wand,) to support uneasy steps over the burning marle . . . (44)

Note that as it originally stands, this line delays the combination of an object (“his spear”) with the verb to which it refers (“walk’d”) by inverting syntax and inserting after “his spear” a long mix of phrases and clauses that modify it. Buchanan clarifies the action of this sentence by transposing “his spear” and “he walk’d with” and by enclosing all the modifying elements in newly inserted parentheses. Both moves (rearrangement of words and insertion of parentheses) have the effect of deemphasizing the mighty spear heading Milton’s sentence. Parentheses mark the modifying elements as a self-contained unit applying altogether to the spear, but at the same time relegate such modification, and thus the further detail and characterization they supply, to a subordinate position. This is a necessary consequence of using parentheses, which by definition subordinate rather than foreground.

Even as Buchanan’s approach appears so ordered and mathematical, an algorithm for writing before the computer age, it leaves room for invention. Buchanan admits to having intervened in the operation of his procedure from time to time. Occasionally he avoids supplying an ellipsis when the meaning behind a sentence is clear without it. He explains, “Therefore, whenever the sense appeared plain after putting the sentence into natural order, I omitted the

ellipsis, that the natural order might not read more flat than needful” (6). Buchanan avoids thoughtlessly applying his procedure without stopping to pause and consider its output. A mechanical procedure need not suggest thoughtlessness or carelessness, an automatic “plug-and-chug” model of composition, for even such an ordered operation does not preclude some degree of open-endedness through deviation and customization. Again, then, while textual and procedural agencies govern textual reuse, they necessarily intermingle with some personal evaluation as well, creating the recursive feedback loop characteristic of invention.

Buchanan’s investment in transposition is not an isolated quirk: it appears in other early works on English grammar, syntax, and composition, such as Noah Webster’s widely circulating contemporaneous text *Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (126-131). Webster treats transposition much like Buchanan does, stressing the importance of proper arrangement in sentences to achieve perspicuity, whether in verse or prose. Like Buchanan, Webster equates transposition with inversion and claims that transposed or inverted sentences diverge from “natural” to “artificial” order, with natural order reflecting the sequence that ideas supposedly follow in the mind and artificial order “render[ing] the sentence harmonious and agreeable to the ear” (126). After explaining the principles of ellipsis and transposition, Webster, like Buchanan in his *Regular English Syntax*,³⁴ dissects and corrects examples of faulty syntax from periodicals and literary texts, offering none for readers to try themselves (in keeping with the style of grammatical texts since Robert Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, of 1762,

³⁴ Webster and Buchanan share some examples, such as this line from Swift: “It is likewise urged that there are, by computation, in this kingdom, above 10,000 parsons, whose revenues, &c.” (Webster 129; Buchanan 174). See also this line from *Spectator* No. 85: “It is the custom of the Mahometans, if they see any printed or written paper upon the *ground*, to take *it* up and lay it aside carefully, as not knowing but it may contain some piece of their Alcoran” (Webster 130; Buchanan 173-174). This overlap suggests that Webster and Buchanan relied upon a common source when compiling their textbooks or that Webster, whose text postdates Buchanan’s, reused portions from Buchanan. Either way, this pairing provides just one example of the heavy exchange among similar instructional texts at this time, an exchange so dense that accurately tracing “they say”/“I say” distinctions would be nearly impossible.

which Webster also cites). I affiliate this reading and correcting of examples with de/composition because Webster and Buchanan, like Snodgrass, intervene in the original sentences, evaluate them (specifically their arrangement), and make changes to them (i.e., improvements). Though Snodgrass pursues the opposite goal—deforming rather than improving—he approaches source texts like these early grammarians: each engages directly with the texts in question, tinkering with them rather than just pondering them.

Buchanan's attention to sentence manipulation for reading comprehension also appears in interesting variations in Francis A. March's nineteenth-century instructional text *Method of Philological Study of the English Language*, which like Buchanan's *Paradise Lost*, combines study of language with study of literature. March reproduces several short excerpts from literary texts like *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* and pairs each one with questions that require students to analyze and parse the sample text grammatically, syntactically, and metrically. With *Paradise Lost*, March asks students not only to dissect and comment on Milton's language but also to experience it and experiment with it. In the spirit of Buchanan, students must intervene and rewrite: first, to translate a verse (32) and later, to apply the meter of *Paradise Lost* to a different text by Milton (33). The latter exercise encourages playing with poetry through metrical variation, just as Snodgrass frequently does in de/composing and re/de/composing from one meter to another. Particularly in such interventions on a syntactical level, we see the fusion of instruction in literature and language, reading and writing, that tinkering makes possible.

Such fusion is evident as well in M. E. Lilienthal and Robert Allyn's 1862 composition textbook *Object Lessons. Things Taught: Systematic Instruction in Composition*,³⁵ which like

³⁵ This text encourages students to begin writing by studying their material surroundings, including the everyday objects and environments they encounter. It suggests that honing skills of observation is a first step toward developing facility in composition, and like other composition books of this period, it focuses more on actual

many others, features exercises in “Transformation of Poetry into Prose.” The compilers acknowledge both reading comprehension and writing skill when describing their objectives: “This Section embraces matter for a large variety of very useful exercises. It will aid the pupil in learning to read, and in remembering what is read, and will give him a more copious vocabulary of words, and a more graceful style” (37). Directions emphasize repetition and substitution: students must recognize figurative language and provide synonyms appropriate for a prose variation, while also learning via repetition and imitation of the model transformations that their teachers provide. This exercise presents translation as something akin to works by Snodgrass and Mullen that stay close to the source material, diverging from it in easily discernible ways.

Other exercises, though similarly described as translation or transformation of poetry into prose, involve more significant deviation from the source text. These are rooted in an ordered procedure like Buchanan’s yet are more open-ended, encouraging substantial customization, rather than just slight syntactical deviations. For example, Parker offers an exercise called “Transposition” but interprets this term more loosely and less methodically than Buchanan does. Instructions state, “The ideas contained in the following poetical extracts may be written in the pupil’s own language in prose” (30). In a sense, this exercise is indeed one of translation: reading to understand the extract, then presenting that understanding by recasting it in new language—whatever language is readily accessible to the student (“the pupil’s own language”). A model demonstrates that more than transposing or rearranging syntax, then, the exercise demands the kind of wholesale substitution that Lilienthal and Allyn recommend: replacing figurative with explanatory language. The model reads as follows:

practice than previous, more theoretical texts did. A related text is Elizabeth Mayo’s *Lessons on Objects*, originally published in London and then evidently arranged anew (by Edward Austin Sheldon) for an American edition in 1863.

Table 4: Parker's Model of Transposition

Model	What is the blooming tincture of the skin, To peace of mind and harmony within?
Same transposed	Of what value is beauty, in comparison with a tranquil mind, and a quiet conscience. [<i>sic</i>]

Note that this “transposition” does not actually transpose in the sense that Buchanan’s does. It maintains the basic syntax of the original, instead substituting the figurative “blooming tincture of the skin” with the more generic “beauty”; “peace of mind” with “a tranquil mind”; and “harmony within” with “a quiet conscience.” Interestingly, however, the entry for *transpose* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates a range of broader definitions (now obscure) that deviate from Buchanan’s sense that transposition means inversion. It could mean “To change (one thing) *to* or *into* another; to transform, transmute, convert” and “To change (a writing or book) *into* another language, style of composition, or mode of expression; to translate; to transfer; to adapt.” (There is a related term, *transprose*, cited for “chiefly humorous” use in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries to mean to turn, translate, or render verse into prose [the opposite of *transverse*].) Resurrecting *transposition* according to this broad definition could reduce some of the difficulty and clunkiness inherent to the label “English-to-English translation.” Some may argue that translation requires movement from one language into another, such as Spanish to English, so introducing *transposition* as an alternative to *translation* might better accommodate the range and quirkiness of projects that feature substantial rewriting in one language.

Even as Parker’s sample maintains its original syntax, it nonetheless transforms poetry into prose by eliminating rhyme, a stricture at work in similar exercises, such as that in Simon Kerl’s textbook of the same period. Kerl directs readers to “[d]estroy the rhymes and measure by change of words and syntax” (88). The model transformation is extensive, rewriting a six-stanza poem into a three-paragraph story via considerable rearrangement, substitution, and insertion. It

incorporates some embellishment, blurring the already indistinct boundaries between translation and amplification. Snodgrass, in contrast, follows the same general directions (eliminating rhyme and adapting meter) without amplifying—that is, while still remaining close to the original text. For example, his de/composition of Louis MacNeice’s poem “The Sunlight on the Garden” into unrhymed iambic trimeter mimics the original by relying predominantly on word-for-word substitutions (142-143).

There is thus overlap between translation or transformation and what Parker calls “Paraphrase, or Explanation.” Note the similarity in his instructions here and Lilienthal and Allyn’s exercise above: “Paraphrase means an explanation, or interpretation. Maxims and proverbs frequently occur, which have something of the nature of figurative language. Many of them are included in a figure which by some writers is called *Allusion*. The object of this lesson is, to accustom the pupil to the use of such expressions, and enable him to explain them” (64). Meanwhile, Lilienthal and Allyn specify that students should “define the figurative words, and give the synonyms for those most important” (37). In both instances, then, we see a concern with substituting explanatory or plain language for figurative and allusive language. Where some translation work stays close to the source, as in Parker’s example above, the related technique paraphrase opens outward, encouraging elaboration. For paraphrase Parker provides a model that explains the maxim “Look before you leap” in sixty-four words. Paraphrase thus appears much like amplification, which earlier I aligned with Smith’s exercises in extending and developing. Interestingly, then, William Williams describes paraphrase in his composition textbook as Parker describes amplification, even relying upon the same models (177-178).

In defining paraphrase (“Reproducing thought with greater fulness of detail or illustration”) and indicating how to do it, Williams invokes reproducing, illustrating, substituting,

arranging, transposing, and “express[ing] freely in your own language” (177). He provides a snapshot of the many interrelated practices and procedures that converge under the range of titles that I have referenced in this section. The slippage among terms like *transposition*, *translation*, *paraphrase*, *amplification*, *explanation*, and *interpretation*, as well as the procedures that they share, speaks more to the generality and ubiquity of these practices than to inconsistencies in these textbooks.³⁶ I see in this history of literary reuse a convergence of allied writing practices in and around a common node: intervention in and reconstruction of reading materials for comprehension, interpretation, and text generation.³⁷ More than simply locating forerunners for recent quirky books, I am arguing that these historical practices point to rewriting as a general, reliable means of production, applicable throughout the parallel processes of reading, writing, and thinking in relation to prior texts. In making this argument, I continue to revalue materials previously dismissed as “current-traditional” and thus irrelevant or even dangerous to composition practices today. As I have shown, these materials can actually enhance our theories and practices of invention, for they offer salient and convincing examples of the inventive potential in critical-creative tinkering.

³⁶ John F. Genung disentangles some of these terms in his rhetorical textbook, published in the late nineteenth century and thus a bit later than some of these examples. He specifies that to translate is “to reproduce the thought in exactly equivalent expression, neither expanded nor abridged, in another language” (315), whereas paraphrase serves a more explanatory purpose, “to bring out the latent sense or significance of a passage, by stating in new terms points that would otherwise be missed or misunderstood” (311). When a paraphrase not only explains but also converts poetry into prose, it is called metaphrase (310). Thus, we can see how paraphrase of poetry easily slides into something like interpretation or explication.

³⁷ For additional examples of exercises in transformation of poetry into prose from this period, see also the textbooks by Weld (30), Waddy (297), and Harvey (73).

V. SELECTION: WHERE EXPERIMENT MEETS ENVIRONMENT

Of course not all language manipulation will be productive. Enacting a procedure will not guarantee invention. Some results will be more promising than others, as a consequence of a combination of factors, such as the source texts used, the procedures enacted (and how many times they are enacted within a source), and the context and exigency framing the results. Considering these factors may help one to achieve a more successful experiment or select the best from among its results. Here I sketch the ways in which these factors may feed into one's decision-making and ultimate text generation.

Raw materials will inflect the results that a procedure yields, as well as the appropriate procedure(s) to undertake. Snodgrass groups his de/compositions according to the poetic features that they work to eliminate. Determining which procedure to enact, and thus which features to diminish, depends for Snodgrass upon the source text and its most salient properties. Identifying those features requires that Snodgrass read and interpret the source texts, too, reminding us that all translation involves some interpretation. A larger set of decisions and circumstances may have also motivated Snodgrass's choice of source texts: his dependence upon predominantly canonized poems rather than more obscure, contemporary, or experimental works. This choice may serve Snodgrass's broadly pedagogical objectives.

The environment that one wishes to enter—perhaps a particular publishing venue or an institutional or a pedagogical context—can influence one's source materials, for some will be more significant and appropriate to that context. Whether a professional, everyday, or literary context, one can ask: Which texts have use value or significance? Which have prestige? Or, conversely, if a compiler has already begun a project yet lacks a well-defined context, he or she

can consider which environment(s) would accommodate or value the source texts (and procedures) already being used.

Because of this relationship to context, in the literary domain many works of textual reuse use canonized works as substrate texts, as I have shown throughout this chapter. These presumably have cultural prestige, significance to their environment, and high use value. Mullen recasts a Shakespearean sonnet (one of the most well-known), and Buchanan and his many predecessors and successors rearrange and rephrase *Paradise Lost*.³⁸ In manipulating a widely circulating text like Shakespeare's "Dark Lady" sonnet, Mullen easily reveals her procedures to readers who will recognize the source. They may discern deviations from the original even when it is not present alongside its transposition (as is the case in Mullen's book). Hence, the Oulipo's reliance upon "precooked" language when demonstrating their procedures: "statements that are familiar to everyone—proverbs, clichés, quotations, historical declarations, book and film titles, etc." (Mathews and Brotchie 215). Easily recognizable language (which varies from one audience or context to another) aids in the transmission of procedures for pedagogical or demonstrative ends. In the handbook-style *Oulipo Compendium*, then, many entries use Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech to exemplify procedural manipulations (Mathews and Brotchie 215). Reuse in the literary domain often offers a pedagogical element in indicating how to enact a procedure on one's own. Such works serve as more than just singular example texts; they help sustain reuse as a practice of writing.

³⁸ *Paradise Lost*, and Milton's oeuvre more broadly, belong to what William St. Clair calls the "old canon." A core set of texts proliferated widely over about a hundred years between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries, as the copyright regime restricted which works were easily available in print. We can thus attribute some of *Paradise Lost*'s high circulation at this time to material factors, although of course its style and subject matter certainly contributed too.

The persistence of new projects taking on Milton's epic poem attests to the continued use, value, and difficulty of the original text. Furthermore, Ronald Johnson's erasure poetry suggests that *Paradise Lost* contains durable and valuable raw material that can be molded into a new work even centuries after its initial publication. *Radi Os* employs only one procedure other than copying—deletion. Johnson has removed much of the original language, letting just bits and pieces remain, to compose a new work from old. He likens his writing process to William Blake's printing process, describing it in an introductory note as etching or cutting away to reveal a new picture (n. pag.). Similar excisions have been made to the poetry of Emily Dickinson (in Janet Holmes's *The Ms of My Kin* [from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*]) and to Shakespeare's sonnets (in Jen Bervin's *Nets* [from *Sonnets*]). Such traditional literary subjects may appear in prominent works of reuse because their contextual prestige promises a certain use value and durability. Taking as one's substrate a work already deemed successful bodes well for the results of any procedures being used. Such texts already have an audience; they are legible to many, whereas procedures like excision are more foreign. Reworking more obscure texts may be a less successful or useful endeavor.

We can see, then, that considerations of audience and context inflect successful procedural writing throughout the composing process, supplementing impersonal text-generation with significant rhetorical awareness. In executing procedures of reuse and sifting through their results, the surrounding contexts (both internal and external to the resulting text) will determine their value, as is the case with source texts. How will these results be used? Who will access them? Which conventions, standards, and expectations likely govern their reception? In what kind of material context will they appear? Which texts will surround them? Whose name(s) will author them? Who else is involved in their production and circulation (e.g., publishers, editors,

teachers, co-authors), and how will those individuals be affected? Such questions, typical of assessing or preparing for any rhetorical situation, may help to tailor works of reuse to a known context and exigency. However, when judging such works generally productive or not, again one may lack foreknowledge of the environments in which they will appear. Alternatively, one may be unsure how to make use of them in a future setting, for as I have shown, language play may initially occur simply to gain tools for generating text, outside any pressing exigency. Thus, I offer some generic procedural questions that composers can consider when reading and revising their developing texts. These questions emerge from the criteria that I have uncovered in judging works of reuse productive or not in this chapter and the previous one. They include: Does my reuse illuminate the source text by diverging from it or reframing it (as, for example, Buchanan's and Snodgrass's rewritings do)? And at the same time, does it preserve enough of the original to retain a clear link to it? Does my reuse produce new meaning, emphasis, function, or effect (such as humor, aesthetics, argument, narrative, or knowledge)? Does my reuse exemplify a procedure that others can try out too?

Since writing is a fluid and recursive process, these questions may emerge at many different points throughout it, not just when concluding a draft or determining a publication venue. These questions can help to identify appropriate and promising source texts, sharpen the procedures being enacted, or clarify the goals being pursued. Where procedural moves govern the technical, often syntactical, manipulation of text, evaluative questions like these direct reuse projects on a more global scale. They require the reflective, interpretive work necessary of writing, reading, and revising. Procedural approaches emphasizing textual agency—the capacity for a given text to generate new text—are supplemented by a more open-ended selection process requiring interaction between text(s), context(s), and individual(s).

Embedded in these evaluative questions are goals associated with particular settings, so that some may be more appropriate than others in a given situation. When the only immediate purpose of language play seems to be experimentation, these questions may help in determining which context(s) will suit the resulting experiment. If it illuminates its source text, for example, then it may have educational value. Yet additional work may be necessary to fully realize this educational value, such as inserting and framing it with the kind of explanatory material that both Snodgrass and Buchanan provide. If reuse produces a new function or effect with use value, such as efficiency and convenience, then it may be suited to a personal or professional context, one where use outweighs aesthetics. In contrast, aesthetic appeal or narrative structure would seem to match a text to a literary context, yet these properties may also be valuable in other situations, such as scholarship or even business settings (where textual appearances may be significant).

Works of reuse can have multiple functions and can fit within multiple environments, particularly because they easily combine creative techniques with critical aims, as in the critical-creative composition that Lethem, Shields, McGann, and Pope all demonstrate and advocate. For instance, in its hybridity and unusual page design, *Reality Hunger* looks like creative writing; at times it may appear quite humorous; and yet, it is making an argument, something associated with critical, often scholarly, writing. The combinatory methods underlying so much reuse support the development of multiple, perhaps competing, functions and affordances out of a “single” text like *Reality Hunger*. The combination of texts (and even the combination of disparate words from one text, as in *Radi Os*) may produce unexpected effects (such as humor or aesthetics) that only experimentation could yield. The above questions may assist in recognizing when such effects have occurred, thereby channeling somewhat unpredictable procedures into productive outcomes.

VI. INTERFERENCE: TEXTUAL REUSE AS AN ORDERED YET OPEN SYSTEM

As I have suggested with regard to Shields, Lethem, and Buchanan, procedures govern textual reuse while leaving room for some disruption or interference. Buchanan admits that he has interrupted his orderly transposition when finding it unnecessary and undesirable to supply some ellipses. Shields and Lethem enact general procedures of copying, combining, and arranging source texts, yet at times diverge from strict adherence to them. Comparing their publications with their cited sources reveals that both authors have made many adjustments, some slight and some substantive. Shields, for example, has deleted (or selectively transcribed) paragraphs, sentences, phrases, words, and punctuation. He has also added or substituted words, phrases, sentences, and punctuation and has combined sentences, clauses, and even words by inserting colons, semi-colons, commas, and contractions. He has rearranged syntax and has systematically converted some verb tenses into others. *Reality Hunger* indicates that the same techniques of reuse show up in a process of further tinkering or customization parallel to the overarching procedural process. These disruptions to mechanical procedure demonstrate first, that procedure need not imply blind, robotic submission to rules and second, that in reuse, as in writing generally, local adjustments occur alongside more global practices of importing and compiling. A degree of personal agency (a compiler's agency) intervenes among textual and procedural agencies not only through the selection processes outlined above but also through customization and further revision of a procedure's results.

Some such revisions may merely reflect a compiler's idiosyncratic inclinations, such as distaste for a particular word or phrase or preference for certain syntax. Hence, the difficulty in offering general guidelines for selecting promising procedural results and manipulating them most productively. For instance, when Smith evaluates the results that her procedures yield, her

terms of evaluation slip easily into the unpredictable terrain of preference: she praises results that are unusual, striking, and surprising, all qualities that rely upon a reader-writer's point of view and prior experiences with texts. (And as readers we cannot see the results that Smith has rejected for lacking such qualities and thus ascertain which special characteristics are missing from them.) Aspiring writers looking for advice in assessing their work are left only with amorphous characteristics. How can one know whether his or her writing will be surprising (perhaps to an anonymous reader)? Such judgments appear too unstable to transfer reliably from one context to another.

In *The Lifespan of a Fact*, John D'Agata offers a provocative behind-the-scenes view of the kind of source manipulation that can supplement procedural writing. D'Agata has written an essay that straddles the blurry boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, leaving fact-checker Jim Fingal with the tremendous task of sorting through the innumerable discrepancies between D'Agata's sources on the one hand and his reporting on the other hand. Though D'Agata's essay is not a collage like Lethem's, it relies considerably upon research, quotation, and statistics and thus proves instructive in explaining deviations from source materials. D'Agata reveals patterns of preference that can aid our understanding of the kinds of disruptions that Shields makes and thus ultimately enhance our own tinkering strategies. For example, D'Agata rationalizes his manipulations based on improved rhythm (39, 83) and sound: "The sentence sounds better as I've reworked it"; "You have to allow for a bit of poetry" (84). Other adjustments simplify (91), add efficiency (25), and "declutter" (77). Some produce an effect through pattern or sequence (17) or heighten the feel of a sentence—its precision, authority, drama, flow, or resonance (20, 33, 53). Others ease the reading experience (29).

These are not transparent admissions of D’Agata’s intents, yet they do point to plausible patterns that may underlie baffling stylistic tinkering like Shields’s. Shields may combine words into contractions, for example, to facilitate reading, to cultivate an informal tone, or to maintain rhythm or flow. He may delete words and phrases (such as “and” and “then”) to condense bulky and rambling prose or to eliminate hesitation through qualification. But at the same time, some changes may occur by accident, without conscious preference, or to comply with conventions and instructions; Shields may insert Oxford commas where they are not originally present because their value has been engrained in him since elementary school or because his publisher’s house style demands them. A minute manipulation such as this one may also occur as a result of environmental pressures: the need to maintain internal consistency throughout *Reality Hunger* or in an excerpt mashing several sources together. While Shields copies, combines, and arranges, he tinkers with the results, shaping them, often in subtle ways, to ensure consistency—a match with the surrounding setting. Perhaps he eliminates extra repetition or avoids introducing a disorienting new frame or character. I imagine Shields as a manager or orchestrator watching over and occasionally sorting and reshuffling the elements that he copies and combines.

In looking closely at a quotation paired with its source, we can better understand inexact appropriation and compilation rather than attribute it entirely to sloppy, lazy writing practices. Consider, then, the following comparison of Shields’s section 38 with its source text, a selection from D’Agata’s editorial commentary in an anthology called *The Next American Essay*. Shields adjusts D’Agata’s text in several ways, but I want to call particular attention to his systematic conversion of present-tense verbs to past-tense verbs. I have underlined key conversions below:

Table 5: How Shields Manipulates a Source

D'Agata	<p>Among those responsible for inspiring Emerson's essays was a con-artist from Germany named Johann Maelzel. [. . .] Emerson at this time <u>is</u> frustrated with writing sermons, with their "cold mechanical preparations for a delivery most decorous—fine things, pretty things, wise things—but no arrows, no axes, no nectar, no growling." He <u>wants</u> to find what he <u>calls</u> "a new literature." This is before <i>Self-Reliance</i>. This is Emerson's transition between eloquence and ecstasy. Imagine him fed up one afternoon with the approaching week's sermon, spontaneously riding into Boston from his Concord home, meeting friends for dinner, then skipping dessert to catch the last show of a contraption that's all the rage—a music box from Germany that can play whole symphonies on its own. Into the South Church Emerson and his friends walk quietly and sit. There in front of them is what looks like an organ without keys. "A panharmonicon," is what its inventor, Johann Maelzel, stands up and calls it. He <u>cranks</u> three times its heavy silver lever, takes three steps off to the side, and then: flutes, drums, trumpets, cymbals, trombones, a triangle, clarinets, violins. The machine <u>spins out</u> a whole orchestra's worth of sound. <i>So many sounds</i>, imagine Emerson thinking; <i>Just one voice!</i> The machine is playing—according to the program—an original composition written especially for it. It's a march that will soon become known as Beethoven's famous "Wellington Victory." If there is a single moment that might mark Emerson's discovery of the essay, this is it. The next day into his journal Emerson pours out the following: "Here everything is admissible—philosophy, ethics, divinity, criticism, poetry, humor, fun, mimicry, anecdotes, jokes, ventriloquism—all the breadth and versatility of the most liberal conversation, highest and lowest personal topics: all are permitted, and all may be combined into one speech." It is the new literature Emerson has been seeking all along. A literature he <u>calls</u> for the time being "a panharmonicon." (251-252)</p>
Shields	<p>In 1830, Emerson <u>was</u> frustrated with sermons, with their "cold, mechanical preparations for a delivery most decorous—fine things, pretty things, wise things—but no arrows, no axes, no nectar, no growling." He <u>wanted</u> to find what he <u>called</u> "a new literature." A German con artist, Johann Maelzel, visited America with a "panharmonicon," an organ without keys. He <u>would crank</u> its heavy silver lever three times and step off to the side, and the machine <u>would spit out</u> an entire orchestra's worth of sound: flutes, drums, trumpets, cymbals, trombones, a triangle, clarinets, violins. After seeing Maelzel's machine perform, Emerson <u>called</u> the new literature he'd been looking for "a panharmonicon. Here everything is admissible—philosophy, ethics, divinity, criticism, poetry, humor, fun, mimicry, anecdote, jokes, ventriloquism—all the breadth and versatility of the most liberal conversation, highest and lowest personal topics: all are permitted, and all may be combined into one speech." (16)</p>

Section 38 appears in Shields's second chapter, which builds a history of mimetic writing practices, starting with "Writing *began* around 3200 b.c." (7; emphasis added). Subsequent sections continue the precedent set here, using past-tense to describe historical events, such as

“Bacchylides *wrote*” and “Plutarch sometimes *bulleted* his essays” (7, 9; emphases added). Shields maintains internal consistency by converting D’Agata’s present-tense to past (while also significantly condensing his account via deletion and combination). Shields may have made a conscious decision to use past-tense throughout historical statements (it may be his preference), or his sources may have established a standard, whether conscious or not for their compiler. Similar changes occur when Shields’s original sources contain markers of time, such as a film designated to open in August; these are eliminated to suit the surrounding textual environment.

Using *Reality Hunger* for an example of post-procedure manipulation underscores the obvious fact that reuse is not always faithful to its sources. Some interference on the compiler’s part is always possible. Yet some versions of reuse call for more interference as a matter of course. For Buchanan, transposition follows a very orderly procedure, allowing for quite mechanical execution yet still leaving openings for subtle intervention. Similarly, some rewriting exercises of the nineteenth century (such as Parker’s rearrangement exercise) have strict instructions asking students to rearrange only the parts provided, adding nothing to them. Acceptable, grammatically correct permutations are limited by the substrate texts made available. (Of course students may ignore directions and invent additional parts to permute, or they may advance grammatically nonsensical combinations that while deviating from the exercise’s objective, nonetheless produce new “meaning.”) Yet as I demonstrated above, other exercises of this period are less constrained and more open-ended, asking students to paraphrase, interpret, or amplify a passage. Here writers need not closely mimic the prompting passage but may instead diverge from it considerably by introducing much new language and structure. They have more freedom to import their own ideas and available language into the textbook situation, making them responsible for more manipulation of given parts. Procedures like erasure poetry

are highly constrained yet highly unpredictable, opening up innumerable possibilities even while limiting the procedures available to deletion and maybe reformatting. While erasure demands that one not stray from the source material, it does not impose a determined structure upon one's treatment of that material: the eraser must still determine which pieces to cut, a process which probably entails considerable reading, interpreting, and experimenting, often all at once. Along the same lines, the procedures that govern found poetry require that one rely upon preexisting texts to build a poem, yet what those texts are and how one combines, arranges, and revises them (again perhaps not copying with complete accuracy) are undetermined by procedure alone. At both ends of a spectrum marking constraint, in both looser and tighter procedures, there is interplay between personal preference and impersonal text-generation. Procedures shape writing into an orderly yet open system.

It is this blend of ordered procedure with interventional opportunity that makes textual reuse so amenable to the kind of critical-creative practice that I align with a rhetorical-poetic tinkering. Reuse is an ideal way to enhance and expand rhetorical criticism beyond its easily segmented steps—reading, noticing, analyzing, and then trying out—into a more integrated model because it enables composers to assimilate *and* deviate from source materials in one textual performance or experiment. In this way, composers can tacitly comment on and play with language, putting into practice the “double orientation” that I value in rhetorical criticism: analysis and reflection combine with play and production. To realize this inventive potential, composers must readily exploit the openings toward intervention, interference, and interpretation that procedures of textual reuse offer. They must learn to tinker with texts, whatever their genres, in pursuit of a relationship characterized by customization and hybridization.

3. TINKERING IN/WITH ENGLISH

Tinkering traditionally denotes clumsy, trivial, and aimless work. Nothing of much consequence, or of much good, seems to come from it, according to the array of contextual examples provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which identifies the verb to *tinker* as “[i]n all senses usually depreciative.” As a noun, *tinker* does not fare much better. It describes “[a] craftsman (usually itinerant) who mends pots, kettles, and other metal household utensils,” a definition followed by this unflattering explanatory note: “The low repute in which these, esp. the itinerant sort, were held in former times is shown by the expressions *to swear like a tinker*, *a tinker’s curse* or *damn, as drunk* or *as quarrelsome as a tinker*, etc., and the use of ‘tinker’ as synonymous with ‘vagrant,’ ‘gipsy.’”

Tinkering is, however, a durable practice that entails more than just patching up kitchen utensils. In fact, it has recently gained prominence amid new technologies and collaborations. Several schools, institutes, and workspaces have repurposed this lowly term to describe a practice of invention rooted in hands-on, experimental learning. After all, clumsy imperfection characterizes a process of learning, trying, or exploring. The Tinkering School in California, for example, practices a do-it-yourself rather than consumerist pedagogy: children learn physics and engineering not by reading textbooks but by building structures together. Universities such as Stanford, MIT, and Carnegie Mellon house similar institutes for students and faculty, and

workshops unaffiliated with schools, sometimes called *hackerspaces*, help people share technology, tools, and ideas in pursuit of new inventions.³⁹

Unifying these disparate examples is a distinct ethos characterized by an emphasis on making, an invitation to explore and meander, and a commitment to working outside the norms of curricula, disciplinarity, authority, and the consumerist economy. Tinkering depends upon sharing, not only with one's fellow tinkerers but also with preexisting materials. Individuals often collaborate with one another, exchanging ideas and sharing rather than owning common tools, yet they also collaborate with parts of past inventions. Tinkerers resist the authority that a supposedly completed invention represents and view it instead as something without boundaries, still open to further modification and fine-tuning, even by someone more amateur than professional. Inventions are not things to use as directed, to consume, but to break open, study, repurpose, and reinvent. Tinkerers explore and experiment, making both immediate and long-term gains. Tinkering may repair or improve upon damaged or deficient devices: one tinkers to achieve greater effectiveness. And tinkering may be a less purposeful pursuit, serving instead as playful exploration: one learns about a device in the process of taking it apart, examining its components, and reassembling it. Both approaches position prior inventions as opportunities for further development, refinement, or combination, much like Robert Weber's heuristics, which use existing tools as fodder for new ones.⁴⁰

³⁹ In a 2009 *Wall Street Journal* article, Justin Lahart identifies such workspaces as evidence of a renewed investment in tinkering, instigated in part by the economic downturn and the new availability of low-cost digital tools. See Foege for an extended overview of the Tinkering School, founded by Gever Tulley. Similar programs include John Ratzenberger's Nuts, Bolts, and Thingamajigs Program and Mike Petrich's PIE (Play Invent Explore) Institute Exploratorium. In 2008 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching held a symposium on "Tinkering as a Mode of Knowledge Production in a Digital Age," to which many educators and tinkerers contributed thoughts on incorporating tinkering more widely into public schools.

⁴⁰ Katherine Bagley's instructions in *Popular Science* for how to "Invent Your Own Anything" similarly recommend joining disparate ideas, just on a larger scale. She advises, "The most original projects combine two or more disciplines. Look to mash them up" (43).

Scholarship both in scientific and humanistic fields can make new contributions by tinkering with prior work. Preexisting methods, arguments, and results serve as starting places for new experiments and investigations, which build upon received knowledge while advancing it even just slightly. Scholars who occupy traditional academic positions may operate in less subversive arenas than tinkerers, yet approach previous work with the same disruptive energy typical of tinkering; they examine, interrogate, and then modify others' contributions. I recognize knowledge-making as a practice of shaping and reshaping a terrain of data or practices.

Tinkering has also emerged as a composing practice across the Internet—in pieces of music, video, visual art, and writing that use prior materials as sources of invention.⁴¹ As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, Internet culture thrives on the pleasure and popularity of texts and artifacts that tinker with prior texts and artifacts in humorous, surprising, and compelling ways. Examples multiply rapidly and include mash-ups, remixes, memes, parodies, and compilations that reproduce and distort items from politics, current events, popular culture, or simply the animal world (especially cats).

In the realm of composition, I identify all tinkering with moves of combining, cutting, substituting, rearranging, and reformatting preexisting parts, whether these are pixels, sounds, words, phrases, or sentences. Here tinkering evokes the same experimental ethos as it does in material production: an investment in building and rebuilding with whatever is at hand. Online artifacts become forever unfinished, always open to further manipulation via photo-, audio-, and video-editing software or via rewriting and recirculating. Much like the bricolage, assemblage, and collage art made popular during the 1950s and 60s (Dezeuze 35), tinkering today captures a do-it-yourself, amateur spirit suggesting that anyone can learn and invent from his or her

⁴¹ Ridolfo and DeVoss's work on rhetorical velocity is especially relevant here because it accounts for the ways in which texts can be manipulated and recomposed as they are appropriated across the Internet.

surroundings. The inclusivity, accessibility, and resourcefulness that characterize tinkering align with composition studies' fundamental commitment to everyday production—writing by students and other amateurs rather than strictly published authorities. As in technical invention, textual and artistic tinkering collapse the barriers that restrict access to and transformation of seemingly authoritative finished pieces. Tinkering is a subversive yet widespread, valued practice that when applied to writing specifically, can enhance old texts and invent new ones. It is a reliable means of text generation.

I. TINKERING AS A GENERAL WRITING PRACTICE

Tinkering is a general writing practice with far-ranging applications both inside and outside the academy. We can find it across the Internet, used for purposes such as parody, critique, convenience, and play. Consider two divergent examples. One, an elaborate rewrite of one recent celebrity obituary for another, generated by the irreverent news site *Gawker*. In striking some words and phrases and inserting others, author A. J. Daulerio humorously converts an obituary for Mike Wallace into one for Dick Clark, an exercise that comments not only on the lives of these two figures but also on the conventions and quirks of the celebrity obituary genre. Another example comes from the *New York Times*, which abridged President Obama's 2013 inauguration speech into an excerpt that retains the dominant themes of the original. Abridgment can rely upon tinkering at both the sentence level and the paragraph and page levels; here, the primary procedures include deleting and rearranging paragraphs and sentences.

Patchwriting might seem closely related to tinkering, yet important distinctions set them apart. As it is traditionally defined in academic settings, patchwriting concerns sentence-level

manipulations exclusively. The most often quoted definition specifies “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one synonym for another” (Howard xvii). In compilation the same material procedures of deleting, arranging, inserting, substituting, and reformatting occur at multiple levels of discourse. The moves of tinkering comprise general textual procedures applicable both within and beyond the sentence-level adjustments that characterize patchwriting; thus, *tinkering* denotes a more expansive practice. Tinkering and patchwriting, however, must be decoupled, for the latter perpetuates the deference to authority that the former challenges: patchwriting marks an intermediate stage for writers aspiring to summarize rather than rewrite or revise source texts.

Note that Howard’s stipulation, in the above definition, that substitutions in patchwriting entail synonymy restricts how much manipulation can happen in a sentence while it still qualifies as patchwriting. For example, substitutions in the *Gawker* piece cited earlier diverge considerably from the original Mike Wallace obituary when it is transformed into Dick Clark’s obituary; the article resembles a Mad-Lib that has been filled in twice using different nouns and verbs, while by necessity keeping the prefabricated structure. Consider this sample sentence: “At the age of ~~36~~ 47—by which time ~~Walter Cronkite~~ Don Cornelius had already apprenticed under ~~Edward R. Murrow~~ and was ~~hosting~~ still hosting his own ~~CBS News show~~ *Soul Train*—~~Myron~~ Dick Clay was ~~starring as Samuel Ellis in Harry Kurnitz's art world comedy~~ *Reclining Figure* on ~~Broadway~~—emceeding sanitized New Year's Eve countdown shows” (n. pag.). Patchwriting happens here, but so does something else, something more inventive—further manipulation and further tinkering as two distinct sentences emerge from one syntactic template. Patchwriting involves less textual intervention than examples like this one demonstrate, so one way of distinguishing patchwriting from more inventive tinkering is by the degree or amount of

intervention evident in a work of reuse. The products of tinkering feature greater deviation from their starting points, their source texts; they move meanings and effects in new directions, whereas patchwriting maintains the initial status quo.

Tinkering contributes as well to abridgments not confined to the Internet, such as those that appear in encyclopedias and other reference works. It is endemic to professional writing contexts, particularly those that rely upon boilerplate documents for contracts and correspondence. These provide blanks that writers fill in much as they would were they patchwriting in the conventional manner that Howard invokes with the idea of “plugging in” or substituting one word or formulation for another. Boilerplates facilitate ready-made patchwriting, as do many templates, including those that provide a design or format rather than language. As Chris M. Anson has shown, tinkering regularly populates documents outside academic realms, including those used in the military, in business settings, and even for administrative purposes in universities (where patchwriting and plagiarism are discouraged among students but not among administrators and instructors preparing institutional and pedagogical texts) (“Fraudulent”).⁴² In all these situations, manipulating preexisting writing can save time, offer convenience, and improve efficiency and consistency, all textual values usually recognized beyond but not within the classroom.⁴³ Again, the term *tinkering* better accommodates these troublesome textual values

⁴² Margaret Price confirms this blur between academic and workplace writing in noting that instructors often share and tinker with prior course documents with a flexibility and willingness that they would not extend to their (more exclusive) scholarly writing (101). Anson attributes this double standard to the divergent textual values that govern the production of mundane professional documents like syllabus policies (which have more communal value) and the development of original scholarly contributions (which have more individual value) (“Fraudulent”).

⁴³ In a 2007 *Washington Post* editorial, Jason Johnson affirms that composing via cut-and-paste is accepted and valued in many business environments, a realization that he made upon moving from an educational to a corporate workplace. The writing practice that he describes is a form of tinkering, building something new by inventively assembling parts contributed by others: “synthesize content from multiple sources, put structure around it and edit it into a coherent, single-voiced whole” (n. pag.).

than does *patchwriting*, for tinkering signifies a worldly practice of repairing and experimenting, not a diagnosis of deficiency.

A tinkering akin to patchwriting is fundamental to text generation more generally, as it contributes to many tasks of rewriting and revising one's own writing. Both students and professionals tinker with previous versions of their own texts when expanding, contracting, and revising, especially in multiple documents representing the same project or subject matter. One may, for example, reuse sentences from a proposal in the introduction to an essay. The proposal serves as a convenient starting-place for a new document, one that begins not on a blank page as some might assume, but with prefabricated materials in the form of sentences ready for copying and manipulating further. Even when invention seems not to rely upon outside sources, but only upon one's own ideas, it nonetheless involves writing with preexisting materials. Starting from prior texts can prompt new insights and new writing while also facilitating consistency and convenience.⁴⁴

II. TINKERING IN ENGLISH STUDIES

I contend that tinkering is a critical-creative endeavor that merits a prominent place in the teaching of reading and writing. It intersects easily with writing and other acts of making at the present moment. Because tinkering works simultaneously to develop immediate goals and long-term payoff, activities in tinkering help writers to modify specific texts while also enhancing

⁴⁴ Scholarly discourse communities, especially in the sciences, acknowledge the value and prevalence of tinkering with one's own writing with the concept of self-plagiarism, which typically occurs when a writer reuses bits from a previous publication or dataset without citing the earlier contexts in which they have appeared. Self-plagiarism thus becomes a special risk when working with one's earlier writing in some formal environments. See Bretag and Mahmud; Robinson; Roig; and Scanlon.

their general familiarity with language and even the pleasure and play they associate with it. In labeling these practices *tinkering*, I mean above all to convey an interactive orientation toward language and preexisting texts; tinkering signifies more of a habit or stance than a single exercise. One who repeatedly tinkers with language approaches texts with skepticism and even rebelliousness, viewing them not as finished objects whose use is restricted to reading and analysis, but as opportunities for modification and invention. Tinkerers express curiosity and restlessness, an inquisitive attitude toward every textual encounter. Their relationships to texts are open-ended because they do not prioritize rules and norms but favor subversive, unpredictable production. Developing this long-term engagement with texts requires regular exercises in tinkering throughout the duration of a course or curriculum.

Tinkering furthers visions of writing as a social practice advanced by scholars such as Karen Burke LeFevre and Joseph Harris, to name just two, but prompts a greater depth of dwelling in texts than affiliated exercises do. To tinker means to collaborate with prior texts and their authors, making it a social rather than autonomous practice even when the tinkerer physically works alone. Yet tinkering goes beyond the turns of thought that characterize writing as a social practice toward *material* procedures of reuse. In *Rewriting*, for example, Harris treats academic writing as inherently responsive to prior contributions and offers general approaches to building one's own ideas out of others'. He writes that "[Intellectuals'] creativity thus has its roots in the work of others—in response, reuse, and rewriting" (2). *Rewriting* develops rich models for writing *alongside* other texts but not *within* them. Tinkering by contrast involves working inside texts, modifying their parts, and thereby redirecting them. Tinkerers use old texts to build new ones, creatively blurring the boundaries between original and reused texts (what we might think of as the "they" and "I" of "they say"/"I say") as response alone does not.

Tinkering is a disposition that various textual practices in English studies could support, though currently they seem only on the fringes of the field. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, exercises that involve transforming prior texts for critical and creative benefit have a long history in the teaching of English, appearing in textbooks of rhetoric, composition, grammar, and literature of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. More recent affiliates include critical reading strategies such as Michel de Certeau's poaching and Jerome McGann's deformative criticism (in *Radiant Textuality*). De Certeau encourages reading with an eye toward appropriation, while McGann develops creative means of interpreting texts by first deforming them.⁴⁵

In its attention to words, phrases, and sentences, tinkering is also affiliated with sentence-level editing and stylistic concerns. Several scholars invested in style and sentence pedagogies wish to reintroduce sentence-level invention and combination into our teaching and toward that end, have outlined lessons in rhetorical grammar, figurative language, and sentence combining, among others.⁴⁶ Much of this scholarship affirms a generative relationship between style and invention. It avoids focusing exclusively on sentences by exploiting the interplay between composing at lower levels of discourse and inventing at higher levels. This interplay is fundamental to tinkering, yet tinkering is distinct from stylistic work in its relationship to prior writing. Tinkering requires working within preexisting texts and therefore may not occur when just incorporating stylistic resources like figurative language into composition classes.

⁴⁵ Stephen Sutherland describes another critical reading strategy aligned with deformation: "generative quotation," a practice of tinkering with texts in order to advance students' reading. Among the methods of tinkering he outlines are adding sentences around quotations, modifying quotations with square brackets and italics that add emphasis, de- and re-contextualizing quotations, and deleting passages from quotations (75-76).

⁴⁶ See Butler 2008, Carillo 2010, Connors 2000, Delli Carpini and Zerbe 2010, Johnson and Pace 2005, MacDonald 2007, and Myers 2003. Despite the renewed interest in style that these authors support, writing with *sources* at the sentence level has recently received more attention in applied linguistics (see, for example, Keck and Shi) than in composition studies.

Still, tinkering exists in productive relation to style pedagogies, particularly those known as “alternate styles.” A subversive, playful ethos underlies both tinkering and alternate style, a concept first developed by Winston Weathers in 1976 that Patrick Bizarro cogently captures as follows: “alternate style intentionally asks students to subvert the standard practices most young writers are taught to employ” (295). The techniques that contribute to alternate style are playful and unconventional (e.g., fragments, lists, discontinuity, simultaneity, and language variegation [Weathers]), yet not just peripheral games to try out once. They are ways of rethinking writing altogether. In fact, Weathers attributes his interest in style to a view of writing that invokes the language of tinkering. In an interview with Wendy Bishop, he remarked,

Have always thought of composition (whatever kind) as construction work. How do we put the bricks together? Can we find new building materials? What does the final product look like? *I’ve always enjoyed taking a piece of writing apart (in the laboratory, that is) to see what makes it “tick,” “hold together.”* I see “writings” much as I see “buildings.” What is the architecture? What is the style? (Bishop, “Alternate” 4; emphasis added)

Weathers identifies textual activity—creating, observing, and thinking through texts—with the technical, material practice of building, and positions himself much as a tinkerer. And importantly, with alternate style—even that label—he marks tinkering as a contrary practice, a means of deforming rather than maintaining the status quo. In forwarding the ethos of alternate style, tinkering contributes to writing that doesn’t just play with language, but plays with it in unconventional and unexpected ways.

In its procedural nuts and bolts, tinkering also resembles patchwriting. The most positive treatment of patchwriting decouples it from plagiarism and defines it instead as a developmental

writing strategy that helps students gain language appropriate to unfamiliar discourse communities. Tinkering by contrast is a more durable, long-term practice that entails dwelling inside texts, engaging actively in their (re)composition rather than extracting choice bits from them. Tinkering often subverts its sources, whereas patchwriting may do so only incidentally, not as a means of endorsement. Even when characterized as an acceptable transitional practice, patchwriting is still incorrect or improper, positioned against correct models like summary and paraphrase. Tinkering opens more possibilities for source use.

Tinkering may be at home already in creative writing classes and curricula, which often incorporate writing exercises and experiments. Jeffrey Walker identifies a resemblance between today's creative writing curricula and classical rhetorical education in that both feature a sequence of exercises and imitations, known as the *progymnasmata* in classical settings. These sequences develop students' linguistic and rhetorical abilities by training them to produce multiple component forms, which they can later combine and revise into longer texts via further tinkering (Walker, *The Genuine* 290). Much creative writing pedagogy acknowledges the value, and perhaps inevitability, of imitation, and affirms the power of authorial influence and the possibility of transforming a text or idea through reuse. (See Hunley, who traces imitation as a pedagogy in the rhetorical and poetic traditions, and Donnelly, who includes mimetic pedagogy among the major creative writing pedagogies in *Establishing Creative Writing Studies as an Academic Discipline*.)

Recent attempts to reintroduce the progymnasmata into writing curricula (Delli Carpini and Zerbe; Fleming; Ray, "A Progymnasmata") align with the renewed attention to language and form that tinkering promises. Unlike the progymnasmata, however, tinkering does not offer readymade forms or follow a predetermined sequence of activities. Tinkering features reuse of

language, not generic forms. But the progymnasmata is a rich affiliate because it supports textual reuse more generally in encouraging the accumulation of samples that can feed into future writing, as is also true of commonplacing.

Finally, tinkering is essential to much emerging digital pedagogy. Where the term has already arisen in composition studies, it has been used in relation to digital media and as a synonym for hacking (see Sayers; Vee). Students learn how to use new software by playing around with it, experimenting in an inquisitive, open-ended manner before committing to a larger project. Rather than teach a given procedure via step-by-step directions, instructors encourage students to figure it out themselves (often collaboratively), an approach through which users may unexpectedly stumble upon new tools and insights too.⁴⁷

Connecting these affiliated pedagogies and exercises with the term *tinkering* reinforces that they promote critical insight *and* creative production. Where McGann fiddles with texts to reveal new meanings and Snodgrass degrades poems to help readers understand and appreciate them, tinkering produces writing as its immediate payoff. Furthermore, tinkering offers strategies that can help students revise texts for short-term gain while developing a longer-term generative relationship to source texts. In this way, tinkering elevates sentence-level exercises above preparation for more substantive assignments, indicating that they can constitute a critical, creative activity with value in itself. (With the term *creative*, I mean to convey a constructive and generative process rather than the novelty or originality typically associated with creative or

⁴⁷ Jentery Sayers has advocated for what he calls a “tinker-centric pedagogy” in English language and literature classes in order to introduce into print domains questions and concerns of the digital humanities. He has imported concepts from computational and hypertext environments—such as change logs and non-sequential organization—into his English classes to foster collaboration, experimentation, and trial and error in students’ literacy activities.

imaginative writing.⁴⁸) Finally, introducing *tinkering* into our pedagogical vocabulary helps to connect some of the disparate practices already in use across curricula. It is in advancing an inventive stance that tinkering could most benefit the teaching of English, bridging its disparate concerns through an investment in experimenting with language. Widely implementing tinkering could gradually foster a new emphasis in the discipline.

III. NOT JUST TRIFLING: TINKERING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE SENTENCE

Snodgrass's methods of de/composition support the dynamic interplay between sentence-level adjustments and higher-level invention that is central to tinkering. This interplay marks a practice that has inventive potential beyond trivial adjustments. Snodgrass offers several specific techniques for tinkering, organized into five sections in his book, each focused on the poetic qualities he sought to diminish. These techniques include converting abstract language into concrete, and vice versa; removing signs of a poet's "singular voice"; disrupting rhythm, rhyme scheme, meter, and arrangement; explicating subtext; and restructuring in order to reveal a climax more quickly. Executing these techniques involves combining, substituting, deleting, inserting, and rearranging, often just with words and phrases. Yet as the references to arrangement, subtext, and structure imply, these procedures operate on poems at a higher level too. Furthermore, tinkerers can supplement these procedures with self-selected interferences, making de/composition more than a "plug-and-chug" mechanical activity.

⁴⁸ I find Raymond Williams's excavation of *creative* useful here, which traces it to the Latin for *make* or *produce* (82).

In practicing de/composition, one intervenes in source materials, yet not haphazardly. Productive interventions result from sustained dwelling within the original text, a sort of deep play bolstered by careful reading. I see de/composition thus turning close reading into an inventive activity that moves beyond reception and analysis toward production. It blends the teaching of reading and writing in a way that appeals broadly to the teaching of English and composition. As the following student examples demonstrate, tinkering with texts need not be the trifling activity traditionally associated with its early mechanical manifestations.

In my introductory writing-intensive literature course, I extended Snodgrass's approach in *De/Compositions* beyond his concern for recognizing what makes fine poems fine; I used his models to facilitate critical reading and creative reconstruction of poems. Actually enacting his methods by deforming original poems entails not observing differences between a pair of poems but *making* those differences. This creative work requires careful attention to the original poem's features. So, students first used Snodgrass's de/compositions to practice close reading and gain familiarity with poetry. They then moved from observing Snodgrass's methods to experimenting with them in an assignment mixing critical with creative thinking and close reading with inventive rewriting. Students critically examined their chosen poems, typically foregrounding one possible interpretation in their de/compositions, as Snodgrass does. But they also performed creative work in generating "new" poems from old; many students reflected that the exercise taught them something about writing poetry, including its difficulty. De/composition facilitates writing practice as it aids interpretation and understanding, primary goals of literature courses as well as English curricula more generally.⁴⁹ While I engage with student writing from a literature

⁴⁹ Here de/composition diverges from a pedagogical strategy like Bridget Draxler's, which otherwise shares my investment in interacting with course readings. Draxler highlights the interpretive potential in assigning adaptation projects to literature students, but ignores their productive value in favor of examining the social, cultural, and

class here, de/composition and tinkering need not be tied to literary study. I posit that one can de/compose any substantive text to facilitate close reading and composition.

First, I present a student de/composition that is typical of Snodgrass’s approach because it simplifies its source by paraphrasing what it seems to mean. When commenting generally on de/composition as a practice, students often identify it as a form of summary, explanation, or simplification.⁵⁰

Table 6: Sample Student De/Composition -- Jesse

When You Are Old – W. B. Yeats	Mourn Me – Jesse’s De/composition
<p>When you are old and grey and full of sleep, And nodding by the fire, take down this book, And slowly read, and dream of the soft look Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;</p>	<p>When you are old and grey and tired, And falling asleep by the fire, read this poem, And read slowly, and remember the younger look Your eyes once had;</p>
<p>How many loved your moments of glad grace, And loved your beauty with love false or true, But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you, And loved the sorrows of your changing face;</p>	<p>How many men liked you in times of happiness, And liked your beauty, But I loved you for you, And loved you no matter what;</p>
<p>And bending down beside the glowing bars, Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled And paced upon the mountains overhead And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.</p>	<p>And sitting beside the fire, Mourn because I am no longer alive.</p>

De/composition has condensed Yeats’s poem, shortening its lines as well as its total length (from twelve lines to ten). The first line, for example, employs exactly the procedures that define patchwriting: Jesse has retained the original line, just substituting the more concise synonym

historical lessons that they inculcate. Draxler rightly argues that adaptation equips students to better interpret and appreciate the texts they are studying; in emphasizing only the way in which such creative work feeds back into students’ thinking, she misses an opportunity, however, to account for their writing experience as well, and thus to theorize a writing pedagogy as I do here.

⁵⁰ Each student whose work I reproduce gave me permission to quote his or her de/composition. I thank them for making insightful contributions to this project. All student writing that I quote appears in the bibliography under the writer’s first name only. All original poems are available via *Poets.org*; for poems that have not passed into the public domain, I have reproduced only their first four lines.

“tired” for the phrase “full of sleep.” The next line does the opposite, again inserting a synonym, but adding rather than eliminating length: “And nodding by the fire” becomes “And falling asleep by the fire”—not a substantive change, but again one congruent with patchwriting. Yet in the second half of this same line, Jesse deviates from the norms of patchwriting in pursuit of a somewhat creative, interpretive gesture. In converting “take down this book” into “read this poem,” the de/composition becomes more explicitly self-reflexive than the original poem, labeling itself as the very document immortalizing its speaker’s voice as something retrievable after his death.

Subsequent lines predominantly abridge the poem by cutting qualifying phrases and supplementary description. These lines mimic much paraphrase, patchwriting, and quotation, for each of these variations on source use requires selection; none dictates that a whole sentence or text be excerpted. Jesse retains some original text in lines four through nine, keeping the first words of each line, like “How many,” “And,” “But,” and “And,” to preserve some original structure. As Jesse acknowledged in his reflection on this exercise, the resulting de/composition simplifies, eliminating Yeats’s imagery and subtext altogether. The procedures of substitution and deletion affiliate this example with patchwriting and its entirely syntactic concerns, but importantly, Jesse does not work exclusively on the sentence level. Instead, he foregrounds a particular line of thinking in the original (the idea of mourning), using it to unify the de/composition by rewriting the title accordingly. Snodgrass regularly supplies new titles for his de/compositions, so students followed his lead as a matter of course. But this seemingly trivial move actually directs attention away from individual lines and stanzas, toward the poem as a whole, contributing to the sense that students read and write on multiple levels when practicing de/composition.

Encouraging students to maintain this dual attention seems essential when adapting tinkering to other exercises and texts beyond poetry. It is in this way that tinkering extends beyond sentence-level manipulation as an endeavor with inventive potential not easily dismissed as patchwriting. Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigue worry that when students patchwrite exclusively at the sentence level, instructors cannot be sure that the students read and comprehended whole sources (186). But as we see here, tinkering in contrast to patchwriting demonstrates engagement with source texts at both the sentence- and whole-text- levels. With its necessary pairing of texts, de/composition makes visible to an extent the work happening in between reading and rewriting—though of course instructors cannot know exactly what students do and think as they read and write.

The next de/composition demonstrates increased attention to concerns beyond the sentence level, even while it too patchwrites specific lines from the original.

Table 7: Sample Student De/Composition -- Kirsten

<p>Vacation – Rita Dove</p> <p>I love the hour before takeoff, that stretch of no time, no home but the gray vinyl seats linked like unfolding paper dolls. [. . .]</p>	<p>Patience – Kirsten’s De/composition</p> <p>I enjoy the moments before departure, that feeling of time slowing down. Sitting in dull, plastic adjoined seats, almost like rooms in a house.</p> <p>Any minute now we will approach the gate, with people looking at their rows; tickets checked. I look around at these ordinary families talking, in hopes to pass the time.</p> <p>A bachelorette in heels seems to be- blocking out the noise of a crying baby, while the crying baby’s mom waits in anticipation to be called.</p> <p>I look to my left only to see an athlete, fast asleep on his carry on luggage. Any second now he will be called, and will perch up like a dog when summoned.</p>
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	<p>A businessman is another one in sight, looking like he has worked all summer. His pad of paper and briefcase in hand, ready to take on another journey.</p> <p>He'll go out to eat, she'll sleep in, they'll let the sun come shining through. Everyone is patient, waiting and waiting before their flight is called to board Flight 828.</p>
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Here Kirsten patchwrites a bit, substituting and deleting words and phrases as in line one. “I love the hour before takeoff” becomes “I enjoy the moments before departure,” a line that mimics its original precisely, merely substituting one synonym for another. Later, rather than eliminate imagery as Jesse does (and as Snodgrass often does), Kirsten replaces it with a different image, one she has invented on her own. “[T]he gray vinyl seats linked like / unfolding paper dolls” becomes “dull, plastic adjoined seats, / almost like rooms in a house.” One may call this transformation patchwriting, for surely rearrangement and substitution occur (“linked” becomes “adjoined,” “dull” replaces “gray”), but it entails more invention than the established definition of patchwriting would allow. Here tinkering emerges as the productive practice it is, one that promotes creative work by exploiting the capacity to generate alternative expressions. In relying upon substitution and synonymy, patchwriters must offer alternatives for the language that they seek to replace. This practice can lead to near-identical “paraphrase” (i.e., patchwriting), as when “love” becomes “enjoy.” But it may also prompt tinkerers to develop interesting alternatives, those like Kirsten’s image of “rooms in a house” that bespeak text generation rather than simple repetition—a sort of repetition with a difference. In that sense, tinkering can help writers develop copious expression.

Kirsten also manipulates the structure of her de/composition, introducing invention above the sentence level by creating distinct stanzas out of Dove's long block of uninterrupted text. In this way, Kirsten interferes in her de/composition by moving beyond the procedures required for its completion (copying, deleting, substituting, and inserting). She redirects the poem by reformatting it, reorganizing the stanzas, and inserting white space and new line breaks. In doing so, Kirsten intervenes further in her original poem than Jesse does his, putting into practice our class conversations about the relationship between form and meaning. In her reflection on this exercise, Kirsten posits that her stanzas (and added punctuation) create a choppy rhythm that ultimately mimics "a ticking clock." She writes, "In contrast with the original and the way the words flow, I made the de/composed version sound as if it were like a ticking clock. Each stanza represents a 'tick' or 'tock', further emphasizing the idea of time and patience." Like Jesse, Kirsten indicates that she has considered the text as a whole, not just its individual sentences. Her de/composition demonstrates critical insight and creative intervention into multiple discursive levels. In prompting new text, de/composition can both build upon and contribute to one's understanding of poetic concepts. Short poems are particularly well-equipped for exercises in tinkering because as readers attend to individual lines and sentences, they can simultaneously construct larger units like stanzas. De/composition, as Snodgrass enacts it, facilitates this kind of extra interference into what may otherwise appear a limited procedural endeavor: as syntactic manipulations take effect, they influence the poem as a whole, often prompting (de)composers to rethink higher-level properties such as structure, arrangement, and subtext.

In critical-creative tinkering, this kind of interference is a prime contributor to invention. The writer moves past prescribed procedures and creates a more customized textual product that

responds to certain demands of its environment, both external and internal to the text.⁵¹ Valorizing this kind of interference requires recognizing some personal agency at work in a version of composition that otherwise depends upon preexisting texts for raw material, defying single authorship. In de/composition the original necessarily blends with the de/composed, and it is difficult to delineate which portions of the source text the (de)composer actually retains in his or her transformation. “Flight 828” seems, for example, obviously traceable to Dove’s original poem—something Kirsten retains precisely. But the concept of “gate,” a term that both original and de/composition include, does not necessarily evince copying; it is a term likely familiar and perhaps traceable to both composers. Both de/composer (Kirsten) and composer (Dove) may be present in a single word. Authorship and personality seem inappropriate to this context, for source language and tinkering are so fully interconnected. Yet it is a different kind of personal agency that I ascribe to Kirsten’s higher-level manipulations in particular. These manipulations, while self-motivated, are nonetheless procedural, applying moves like insertion, arrangement, and reformatting to a fixed text, where such moves necessarily intersect with already existing internal properties. Attending to preexisting internal properties—maintaining their consistency, for example—requires a wholesale consideration of that text, analyzing and manipulating the cumulative effect of sentence upon sentence, manipulation upon manipulation. Even as it clearly involves playing with bits of language like words and phrases, this work demands interaction with textual chunks larger than sentences.

I turn now to a third student text to demonstrate how de/composition can simplify its source while also generating complexity. In this final example, I challenge the assumption that

⁵¹ Casey Keck has contended that more acceptable and effective paraphrase requires revision at a higher level than the word or sentence: rather than just substituting words yet maintaining exact grammatical structure, commendable paraphrase involves revision of clauses and even clause creation (216). Keck confirms that feedback between lower and higher levels (i.e., between phrase and clause or between line and stanza) confers greater invention.

derivative writing is opposed to complexity and illuminate another way in which de/composition uses procedures toward inventive ends.

Table 8: Sample Student De/Composition -- Amanda

<p>Where the Sidewalk Ends – Shel Silverstein</p> <p>There is a place where the sidewalk ends And before the street begins, And there the grass grows soft and white, And there the sun burns crimson bright, [. . .]</p>	<p>A Bright and Joyful Destination – Amanda’s de/composition</p> <p>There is a mystical place Between two places that are right next to each other, And the grass is perfect, And the sun is perfect, And a weary-soul can finally rest In the most refreshing of circumstance.</p> <p>An escape from the real world And the depressing grip of reality. Away from all the good people trapped in bad circumstance. No need to rush, we will get there soon enough We will follow the directions of the children To a mystical place.</p> <p>Of course there is no need to rush; we will get there soon enough We will follow the directions of the children Because the children will tell us and they are the only ones that know This mystical place.</p>
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Amanda relies upon the staple moves of patchwriting: copying, deleting, and substituting. These procedures are most evident in the first stanza, where she immediately replaces “a place where the sidewalk ends” with her conception of it as “a mystical place.” She retains much of the original stanza’s structure, including its repetition of “And” at the start of several lines and its references to grass, sun, and resting, while deleting much of its imagery. Soon Amanda’s translations evolve from fairly precise grammatical substitutions into more interpretive work. In the second stanza, for example, Amanda replaces Silverstein’s physical and natural images with blunt complaints about vague hardships like “the real world” and “the depressing grip of reality.”

Here and in the final stanza, she reimagines audience, converting it from children (and perhaps adults too) to adults more exclusively. Amanda achieves this transformation by repositioning readers with regard to the children referenced in the original: her poem's addressees are not children themselves, for they are following the children. Even if the resultant de/composition does not actually appeal to adults, it revises audience by first implicitly calling attention to the original's language, imagery, and tone. Amanda's poem simplifies Silverstein's, diminishing its intriguing effects via procedures of deletion and substitution while nonetheless accomplishing a fairly sophisticated rhetorical move.

The presence of interventions that are at once procedural yet customized, simplified yet sophisticated, clarifies that derivative, and in some ways mechanical, exercises in reuse can foster invention and complexity. De/composition challenges the hierarchy that subordinates patchwriting and paraphrase to summary and all reuse (these three varieties included) to original composition. Researchers have identified summary with higher learning because it requires the kind of generalization from source materials and creation of new sentences that patchwriting and paraphrase typically do not involve (see Brown and Day, ctd. in Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue 178). Still, students need not leave behind other approaches to source use as they grow more competent with summary. I contend that syntactic manipulation and related acts of tinkering should not be eliminated from the store of inventive strategies for more advanced writers. These practices should be valued independently as reliable resources, not only as intermediate steps on the way to more complex thinking.

Even scholarship affirming the value of derivative writing practices tends to subordinate them to other strategies, in a kind of positive yet not too positive appraisal. While defending anthologies, for example, Jeffrey J. Williams reinforces the textual hierarchy that I wish to upset

when he defines paraphrase as merely a stepping-stone to interpretation; although he recognizes some value in it, paraphrase is still positioned as a bridge to a greater textual practice rather than a legitimate activity that performs its own work. A similar dismissal is evident in the sort of compromise made toward patchwriting in composition scholarship. Characterizing it as a developmental writing strategy helping students to enter unfamiliar discourse communities treats patchwriting as a temporary solution to difficulty, something on the verge of becoming more legitimate writing, rather than a practice capable of achieving intellectual and creative work.

IV. INVENTION: THE INTERPLAY OF CONSTRAINTS, PROCEDURES, AND SELF-SELECTED INTERFERENCES

My classroom experiment and analysis of the above student examples has led me to identify invention as rooted in material procedures yet dependent upon a complex of contextual factors. I envision four interconnected spheres of influence, each feeding back into another: 1) the demands and constraints associated with the school environment in which students' manipulations occurred; 2) the poems chosen for de/composition, which constitute specific textual environments with features that inflect procedural invention; 3) students' individual goals, preferences, and abilities; and 4) the available textual procedures.

Demands and constraints associated with our class and university environment included expectations about grading, guidelines I provided for the assignment, and preparation for the assignment via discussions and readings. Students' developing knowledge of poetry and de/composition inflected the procedures that they enacted as well as their personal goals and abilities. In class, students had referred to some features in Snodgrass's work more frequently

than others: language and imagery were among the topics most discussed, while meter, musicality, and arrangement occupied less class time and received less attention from students. When it came time to experiment with de/composition, procedures most accessible to students included eliminating imagery and exchanging concrete and abstract details (types of substitution and deletion). Jesse's de/composition shows the influence of our class discussions in that it reduces the original poem through simplification, the primary way students described Snodgrass's work. Adopting this approach shaped which procedures Jesse used—substitution and considerable deletion—yet the brevity and relative accessibility of his source poem also facilitated these moves.

Indeed, students' de/compositions were generally affected by their choice of text, which could depend upon their access to and familiarity with poetry. Chosen poems have internal properties that direct and constrain the work that composers achieve through de/composition. In selecting their source poems, students made key decisions regarding textual output, whether deliberately or not. Some poems yield more sophisticated or divergent de/compositions than others, based on textual characteristics such as the density and obscurity of their language and imagery and the intricacy of their syntax, rhythm, and meter.⁵² We can see the interplay between these kinds of attributes and procedural invention in Kirsten's de/composition. Dove's original poem is a vivid list of characters whose descriptions provide many opportunities for substitution. Its form, 27 lines assembled into one dense block, makes available the option of dividing it into stanzas and transforming its arrangement. In executing this procedure, Kirsten acknowledges

⁵² Another student de/composed Lewis Carroll's "The Jabberwocky" by exchanging its nonsense language for the generally accepted interpretations of it that he discovered through research. His choice of poem facilitated a unique approach to de/composition that would not be as readily available had he selected a different poem.

formal effects, drawing on prior class conversations about white space and arrangement and thus her larger writing environment.

As in Amanda's de/composition, many students chose familiar poems, often written for children. This group of eighteen de/compositions included another poem by Shel Silverstein, "Fifteen, Maybe Sixteen Things to Worry About" by Judith Viorst (another for youth), and familiar texts typical of high school reading lists: "Nothing Gold Can Stay," "The Road Not Taken," "Annabel Lee," and excerpts from *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Familiarity with one's source demonstrates the interconnectedness of the four contextual spheres. Many students felt uncomfortable manipulating familiar and enjoyable poems for fear of defacing them, thus limiting how extensively they would incorporate procedural changes. Students' attitudes toward source texts, the common deference to authority that they project toward literary texts in particular, can hinder productive tinkering. At the same time, however, manipulations are always inflected by the source text itself, whose preexisting properties allow for some changes over others. And even as students resisted some manipulations, they nonetheless felt pressured by the school environment, aspired to a favorable grade, and therefore had to noticeably transform the source text.

In Amanda's case, familiarity with the source poem worked in her favor, making accessible a sophisticated approach to de/composition. Because "Where the Sidewalk Ends" was one of her favorite poems, she had already read and contemplated it at length, acknowledging in her reflective writing that its message had evolved for her from childhood to adulthood. Thus, she recast it to address an audience of adults, an approach that Snodgrass does not adopt, but one that incorporates his techniques. This example indicates how personal goals and experiences can inflect textual manipulations and source use, yet do not override altogether the procedures

expected of de/composition: Amanda still accommodates constraints imposed by the class and its assignments, even as she pursues a divergent method of decomposing. Amanda's de/composition demonstrates dynamic interplay among all four spheres outlined above: as each sphere impinges upon others, textual reuse is neither decontextualized nor determined entirely by formulaic procedures. Instead, it involves a complex network of interactions.

V. PROCEDURE, REFLECTION, EVALUATION

Invention can occur in experiments in tinkering when syntactic manipulations creatively feedback into higher-level operations. Evaluating these experiments requires recognizing a dynamic interplay between procedure and interference: invention often accompanies interference beyond required sentence-level procedures. Privileging interference means valuing tinkering more generally for its experimental, trial-and-error orientation. ("What happens if I add this word here, or delete that one there?") In many learning contexts, interference should be a primary goal, for more intervention promises more opportunities for invention, more risk-taking, more engagement with sources, and more facility with language, texts, and their manipulation. Such contexts include courses in composition, rhetoric, professional writing, creative writing, and literature, where understanding and practicing different styles and structures of discourse are major objectives.

At the same time, to resist the aimlessness that can deprecate tinkering, students should not only practice tinkering but also evaluate its results. They should learn to analyze the effects of their manipulations and then to interfere further to create different effects. Successful tinkering results in a pair of texts that demonstrate a material relationship yet can be

distinguished from each other in productive ways. “Productive” here must be judged in relation to the goals of a course or an assignment. For instance, had Jesse continually revised his de/composition to reflect further intervention, he might have produced a poem that for readers would be untraceable to Yeats’s original, one that failed to create any kind of textual relationship and thus not meeting the aims of the assignment. To test students’ evaluative abilities, instructors might assign a series of tasks requiring students to play with their texts to greater and greater extents while assessing the outputs. At the least, students should be able to discern distinctions between an original text and a deformed version, to enter into conversation about the products of their tinkering, not just the process.

Regularly assessing one’s developing text may prevent over-tinkering, a potential danger when one tinkers to achieve a particular goal—in Jesse’s case, a de/composition with some relationship to Yeats’s original poem. A tinkerer is restless, never content with what already exists and always bent on disrupting and improving existing inventions. These characteristics can drive change and innovation, yet not necessarily with positive lasting effects.⁵³ The same danger exists when one seeks to revise an earlier piece of writing to strengthen it: attempting to perfect one’s writing may deprive it of an initially valuable quality or move it in an unproductive direction. Students often fear revision because they feel unable to assess whether their changes are beneficial; thus, it is worthwhile to integrate reflective checkpoints into the writing process and to foster strictly exploratory experiments in tinkering, which help students to recognize the rhetorical effects that result from low-stakes textual manipulations.

⁵³ Alec Foege posits that excessive tinkering with derivatives helped precipitate the financial crises beginning in 2008 (110). The drive toward developing ever newer, riskier, and more profitable investments went unchecked, as “tinkering continued well after the benefits had tapered off” (Foege 118).

Evaluative or reflective writing can also clarify how students have produced and interpreted their experiments with reuse. In the context of tinkering, where procedure and interference coexist and interact, such supplementary, “original” writing need not direct attention away from reuse. The dyad of de/composition (or collage, or remix) and explanation (or reflection) just exposes on a larger scale the interplay between impersonal, procedural elements and personal adjustments that we have seen. That is, students’ reflective and explanatory writing are further interferences in examples of procedural reuse, for moments of customization always intermingle with moments of reuse. So, on the one hand, de/composition and other modes of reuse may seem mechanical and uninventive, executing procedures one after the other, yet also leave room for interventions, sometimes subtle and sometimes radical, that resist, redirect, or supplement procedures. On the other hand, reflection seems by definition personal and original because it reveals a student-writer’s thought process, yet it too can manifest mechanical procedure: it can be generic, announcing what the student thinks the instructor expects. In that sense, reflection writing becomes unoriginal anyway, barely customizing or interfering at all.⁵⁴

An activity in reuse becomes, then, a system, consisting of an array of texts that exist in relation to one another. These texts appear together along the same plane, blending components original and unoriginal, personal and procedural, and thus challenging the distinctions we as readers seek between new and old, explanation and quotation. In making this blur so central, de/composition forces us to consider the source material students import into an assignment as much as we consider the text added to supplement such importation: we cannot ignore or privilege one or the other. Selection can be a source of invention. De/composition thus promotes rereading all writing as a necessarily heterogeneous mix of sources, agencies, and interferences.

⁵⁴ See Patricia Suzanne Sullivan for an analysis of this and other concerns associated with assigning reflections as supplements to experimental writing, a category that could include exercises in tinkering.

It puts into practice the resistance to myths of single authorship that have been commonplace in composition studies' theories but not so much its pedagogies.⁵⁵ In this way, tinkering engages with preexisting texts not to reinforce single authorship by valorizing standard quotation and citation, but rather, to expand students' notions and practices of authorship, to expose them to the complexities of writing and language. More than discussing and debating the gray areas in theories of authorship and policies on plagiarism (as Price and Anson suggest), we must practice within such gray areas, experiencing the blend of voices and presences by actually tinkering among them.

VI. PROMOTING TINKERING: FROM THE WORKBENCH TO THE CLASSROOM

I have shown that translating tinkering from technical settings into writing and reading environments carries critical and creative benefits that would strengthen and redirect the teaching of English. Several factors that nurture tinkering among technical inventors may be effectively introduced into textual activity.

First, tinkerers require plenty of material to play and experiment with, whether these are car parts, electronics, or bits of wood. They need appropriate tools with which to manipulate these spare parts, and collaborative workspaces can facilitate the availability of such tools by making them more affordable via sharing. Each tinkerer is not responsible for generating all the odds and ends that contribute to his or her project; these may be found, donated, shared, or newly created. Likewise, textual tinkerers need not produce all of their own raw materials but can reuse

⁵⁵ Several scholars writing about authorship and plagiarism, including Anson (in "Fraudulent"), Howard, Moskowitz, and Price, have identified a gap between theory and practice on this front.

parts that have originated elsewhere: in published works or in their classmates' and teachers' contributions to a course (e.g., classmates' posts on collaborative discussion boards or blogs and instructors' handouts and comments). Tinkering endorses distribution and sharing of labor and resources and challenges ownership altogether. In fostering interaction with sources, tinkering encourages readers to regard all texts as sites open to manipulation; sites of reading become sites of writing, blurring the boundaries between reading materials that belong to another individual and writing occasions that allow for personal intervention. As a tinkerer begins changing a text, its authorship becomes multiple and indeterminate. Incorporating tinkering into the classroom opens spaces for examining complex issues of ownership and intellectual property, which have taken on new relevance with the development of digital writing. It furthermore foregrounds collaborative approaches to writing so that classroom practices and methods of evaluation could shift away from the current focus on individual accomplishments.

One can tinker with just about any text, just as one can tinker with any device or structure that permits disassembly; tinkering is a general practice. In his examination of tinkering throughout American history, Alec Foege stresses the value of a generalist approach to learning and inventing, in spite of the specialized orientation of much higher education. One who has a broad familiarity with engineering, for instance, may open more possibilities via tinkering than would a specialist confined to a more limited set of tools and concepts. A generalist might combine disparate parts or fuse ideas from distinct disciplines in creative and unexpected ways. He or she synthesizes knowledge and displays a wide facility with design and technology. Tinkering grows more productive when a variety of parts and tools are made available, not just a large quantity of them.

In English, opening a variety of texts to tinkering invites a wider, more long-term engagement with language. Making all texts susceptible to manipulation and rearrangement, not just those sanctioned by academic integrity policies,⁵⁶ promotes more interactive textual activity. Encouraging students to manipulate a range of texts—collaborative, personal, imaginative, expository, poetic, mundane—cultivates tinkering as more of a habit than an occasional exercise. This broader goal supports efforts to diminish the boundaries that divide many English departments according to genres or modes of discourse—into separate branches like professional writing, creative writing, composition, and literature.⁵⁷ Students who tinker among diverse genres can develop more textual experience and more strategies for future writing occasions. A course in composition invested in tinkering would invite students to tinker with literary texts such as the poems I included above, despite the continuing trend toward distinguishing composition and literature as separate disciplines (evidenced by the growth in writing majors and independent departments of writing).

Tinkering with others' texts challenges practices and values commonly associated with reading and writing in the academy. It disputes the notion that texts can or should have individual authors with the authority to own and control them. Yet as digital and collaborative writing practices have expanded over the last several decades, many scholars have advocated for a less rigid, more fluid conception of authorship,⁵⁸ and tinkering supports such revisionary efforts. Tinkering exposes texts to many hands, opening them to revision and deformation rather

⁵⁶ Such policies may limit the amount of input that students can receive from their peers when purporting to produce a single-authored work. Thus, instructors may be hesitant to encourage explicit tinkering with classmates' writing, even though students may actually find it easier or more comfortable to fiddle with writing that they did not originate themselves.

⁵⁷ Brooks, Zhao, and Braniger and Mayers have argued for increased integration within English departments, including a stronger relationship between consumption (which literature classes typically emphasize) and production (which creative writing and composition classes typically emphasize). Mayers proposes that creative writing and composition join forces, a move that would broaden the writing genres that typically populate writing courses.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Ede and Lunsford, Howard, Johnson-Eilola and Selber, and Stillinger.

than the deference to their authority common in much student writing. Tinkering opposes deference altogether: a tinkerer does not just cite a source but instead, grapples with it, learns from it, and tries on its ideas and language by lingering inside it. In this way, tinkering is analogous to quotation as Harris and Sutherland envision it—as a complex site of reader-text interaction. Tinkering helps students see that they can draw on texts in a number of different ways and for many different purposes. It is an activity that allows them to experience rather than just discuss the blend of voices and agencies that regularly populate our writing. Tinkering productively disrupts institutional values by presenting an opportunity to engage students in practical and intellectual inquiry into what constitutes appropriate textual reuse and what constitutes plagiarism. Such inquiry can prompt illuminating conversation about the distinct textual values underlying reuse in disparate discourse communities, exposing students to textual worlds beyond the academy. A more relaxed yet informed attitude toward authorship fosters the rich and instructive practice that tinkering can be.

Developing this openness toward authorship in a college class is challenging because it departs significantly from norms of writing instruction. In spite of the influence of Internet culture and its endless memes and parodies, students in my experience often express surprisingly conservative views on originality and plagiarism. To them, the appeal of “unoriginality” is not as self-evident as it may seem given the remixes, adaptations, and remakes that pervade popular culture. Students have responded with some resistance and confusion to my invitations to try writing without citing and to manipulate authors’ words. This response owes much to the plagiarism policing that has dominated many students’ prior writing classes, which may have required submitting papers through plagiarism detection services like TurnItIn.com and avoiding teamwork on projects and lab reports that would benefit from collaboration.

Consider, for example, the disciplined way in which one student, Alyssa, described her discomfort with my asking her to write in an “unoriginal” style imitating *Reality Hunger*:

As a student for over fifteen years I have been told over and over again about doing my own work and not using others. It has been stressed as the most important thing to do in literature. You never want to use another author’s piece of work without citing because it is seen as plagiarizing. You never want to work with someone else on a project if the project is supposed to be done on your own. We are told rule after rule on what not to do while writing essays, which in the end can be very limiting if you’re not an expressive person. We are taught this to develop our thinking and thought processes through writing. (6)

Alyssa has explained a mainstream stance toward plagiarism in a way that strikes me as a recitation of rules, with its listing of strictures that students must follow according to repetitive sentence structures (“You never...” “We are told...” “We are taught...”). She appears to have internalized this stance even as she registers some resistance to it in her suggestion that rules “can be very limiting if you’re not an expressive person.”

Alyssa struggled with the assignment and with reading *Reality Hunger*, expressing more skepticism than most students in the class. I would not characterize her response as stubborn, yet perhaps unintentionally close-minded, unconsciously echoing the schooling she had received “for over fifteen years.” For her essay she chose to illustrate the varieties of plagiarism by manipulating a single passage from *Reality Hunger* in several different ways, and she concluded by admitting:

Taking a paragraph from an author and showing all these errors was somewhat difficult. This is a very new technique to me. My stance on originality has always

been that, this is the only way to write. The only reason why I feel like this is because the amount of pressure put on students to make sure they do not plagiarize. I have never experienced writing by completely taking someone else's work. I have never pulled different pieces from it and made my own collage. (8)

It is noteworthy that Alyssa initially identifies her stance on originality as her own (“My stance on originality”) yet immediately traces it to the teachers and educational system that have demanded she avoid plagiarism. She realizes that her view is not actually her own, but one that she has absorbed from her surroundings. Internalizing and practicing this view have made it appear self-evident, natural, and unquestionable.

Alyssa was ultimately less taken by this unit than other students, but her response was not unusual. Erin, who embraced the concept of unoriginal, reused writing much more fully (and even remarked that it was her favorite unit of the class), identified a similar discomfort:

I was trying to express how at first many people, myself and many of my classmates included, were uncomfortable and possibly a bit offended by David Shields' attempt to steal famous peoples' work and use it as his own. As time went on and class discussions got deeper we became more comfortable with the new concept of “nothing is original//everything is original,” and came to appreciate the time, effort, and brilliance that went into the creation of *Reality Hunger*. (6)

Despite having admitted to a personal investment in reusing writing through tattoos, Erin reflected, “It [writing her essay] was uncomfortable initially because I felt like I really was not supposed to be literally copying and pasting chunks of text into an essay that had my name on it. The only thing I was comfortable with was making the works cited because that's what I have

been taught to do for my whole life” (7-8). Out of all the writing and reading instruction students have experienced when they arrive in our classes (perhaps even including exercises that resemble tinkering), what may stick with them most is the importance of correctly documenting their sources. This possibility should remind instructors that successfully introducing tinkering and related collaborative projects into our courses requires more change and flexibility than we might assume. Openly defining and discussing concepts like plagiarism, attribution, and originality in class can help students overcome some anxieties about reusing texts. Examples like remixes, collage art, or even press releases (which news sources copy without attribution) can introduce these concepts via materials already familiar to and accepted by many students. Finally, projects in reuse may be best assigned gradually, according to careful sequencing.

In addition to a collaborative spirit, an unstructured, open-ended, somewhat leisurely atmosphere pervades the tinkerer’s workspace. While rooted in technical expertise, tinkering remains an uncertain, experimental pursuit whose end goal cannot be predicted. Tinkering proceeds at times by trial and error, making failure, or at least occasional setbacks, inevitable. Supporting tinkering requires lowering the stakes for assigned writing and introducing open-ended activities instead. When allowed to experiment, students see that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to tinker. These low stakes nurture tinkering as more of a general practice than a fixed assignment and thus encourage students to rely upon it as a tool with value beyond individual classes. Tinkering deemphasizes the premium we often place on focus, coherence, and clarity in student writing by allowing instead messy, unpredictable play. Such play need not represent the final product in tinkering, however; it may prompt ideas that can then be developed

and refined through further assignments.⁵⁹ Reflecting on the experience of experimenting, for example, can help students extract critical insights from what may have initially seemed to them a singular exercise in play.

The leisurely, playful stance that tinkering supports subverts many expectations for classes in writing and reading. Such classes are often required composition courses or other elements of general education curricula, such as introductory literature courses like mine, that inspire in students many feelings other than play and enjoyment. They may remember English courses from high school as especially concerned with writing rules, essay formulas, and plagiarism policies and thus approach college English hesitant to experiment or break many rules, as Alyssa and Erin have suggested. T. R. Johnson has argued compellingly that an emphasis on play and even pleasure represents a large shift in general thinking about reading and writing. Incorporating tinkering into English classes may therefore depart considerably from well-entrenched values and modes of thinking; it will not be an easy task in many situations. Most of all, tinkering provokes a different kind of engagement with sources and with writing than is conventional; it may feel unfamiliar and strange to approach reading and writing tasks with a leisurely, experimental ethos. Some careful recalibration via thoughtful introduction and sequencing of tinkering assignments may help students adjust to the idea of exploring linguistic possibilities with no predictable outcomes in mind.

⁵⁹ For this reason, in his contribution to the Carnegie Foundation's symposium on tinkering, Jamie Cortez, an artist, performer, and teacher, recommends that educators shift the vocabulary of "failing and succeeding" to one of "research and development," which better conveys that learning by tinkering is a process.

VII. SEQUENCING TINKERING IN THE ENGLISH COURSE

In the class that produced the above de/compositions, students had prepared for their experiments by first examining Snodgrass's examples and extracting their dominant procedures. Studying *De/Compositions* helped them develop acuity in close reading and knowledge of poetic concepts early in the semester. The de/composition exercise preceded the first essay assignment, which asked students to closely read one of Snodgrass's de/compositions alongside its original poem, marking the differences and determining their effects. Requiring students to first try their hands at de/composition produces different outcomes than the essay assignment might yield on its own. Practicing de/composition provokes insights into reading and writing poetry more generally, directing students' attention outward from the specific pair of poems under examination, toward larger literacy practices. For example, after spending several weeks with Snodgrass's de/compositions, many students remarked that they realized how difficult and even "ingenious" his work is. Engaging in de/composition leads students to recognize and often appreciate the complexity of derivative writing practices.

In general, practicing de/composition prepares students for future writing assignments like the essay because trying out the practice under study (de/composition or poetry) makes them more informed respondents and critics of it. The same rationale underlies many imitation exercises in courses like Seminar in Composition. Writing in the lyrical collage style of Susan Griffin, for example, lets students see her writing from a new angle, from inside her methods. Students dwell inside her writing and emerge with greater insight into how it works—how her words, sentences, paragraphs, and ideas come together. At the same time, imitation offers students additional tools for writing, which seems the purpose of most writing exercises. Because they provide some extra or supplementary skill, exercises can, however, be detached from the

bulk of a course, entering the classroom only when there is a break in the sequence, a lull in course materials to be covered, or some extra time that needs to be filled.

Making exercises more central requires integrating them into each sequence of assignments, designating them reliable tools for further exploring concepts and readings and for both launching and revising writing assignments. As T. R. Johnson has argued in support of play, instructors must treat exercises as sources of invention with generative power, “not simply as an expedient, temporary reprieve from the tedium of real schoolwork, not just as an aimless amusement for the immature, but rather as a process of serious absorption in an activity that, in its purest form, takes as its primary goal only the endless continuation of the activity itself” (32). When regularly integrated, exercises have a greater chance of developing into habits of mind that students can transfer to future writing occasions. The most significant outcomes for tinkering—inculcating a long-term, interactive relationship to texts—require fostering a stance or attitude rather than performing an isolated task. Extending tinkering into English as a critical-creative strategy demands that it be embraced as a practice.

To develop tinkering as more than an occasional exercise, I want to stress its flexibility and elaborate a range of possibilities for integrating it into English courses. Revision offers one of the most readily available occasions for tinkering because tinkerers are concerned with improving existing inventions with modifications. Richard Lanham’s book *Revising Prose*, for example, outlines a method of tinkering designed to help writers condense their prose according to specific procedures. This so-called “paramedic method” involves analyzing a long, garbled sentence for its primary subjects and verbs, isolating prepositional phrases and forms of *to be*, and then consolidating these components into a simpler, more straightforward, and more concise sentence. The paramedic method features the textual procedures that characterize tinkering

(substitution, deletion, insertion, and rearrangement) and advances the goal of repairing or enhancing existing texts. Introducing it into a class during a first round of revisions provides students with tangible ways of strengthening the padded sentences characteristic of much academic writing. Once introduced, this method can be continually incorporated as students generate subsequent revisions and perform additional writing tasks.

However, unlike Foege, who traces the payoffs of tinkering, I do not see it as only a reparative practice whose improvements deserve attention. I want to retain as well the sense of a more open-ended, exploratory, and even aimless activity. Exercises in tinkering need not result in an improved text but just a different text. That different text can be productive even if it cannot stand on its own as an effective piece of writing; what is important is that it creates a compelling dialectic with the original text. Producing a pair of texts in relation to one another cultivates writing experience, contributes to a tinkerer's habits of mind, and generates ideas for further text. Tinkering foregrounds a question that Ann E. Berthoff ties to a revisionary practice called "interpretive paraphrase." She argues that rather than asking "What are you trying to say?" students should consider the question "How does it change your meaning if you put it this way?" (81). Though this question is oriented toward revision, particularly toward locating errors in sentence construction, it is noteworthy for its experimental, deliberative characterization of writing and rewriting. The tinkerer can repurpose this question, deemphasizing the "you" that signifies ownership and control and asking instead, "What happens if I (or we) put it this way?" This question not only propels the composition of paired texts but also offers one way of opening conversation about the results.

To encourage this kind of deliberation, instructors might first assign explicit exercises in tinkering and even foreground a form of Berthoff's question. Students can then explore the

alternative possibilities that come from manipulating their developing texts, whether these are drafts or even notes. Pursuing the critical potential of tinkering requires active reflection on such exercises: using them not to check students' understanding of concepts like sentence construction or poetic meter but to generate deliberative discussion. T. R. Johnson frames the study of style as deliberative by describing it as an open-ended, exploratory practice akin to tinkering: he posits "style as the milieu through which one forever reinterprets words in search of words that feel more felicitous; style as that which resists finalized descriptions and prescriptions that would dominate and totalize in the name of absolute mastery" (97). This description, though limited to "style" and thus perhaps not encompassing tinkering at all discursive levels,⁶⁰ embraces writing as a form of serious play, an experimental practice of constant manipulation and reflection.

With repeated exercise, students may internalize a form of deliberative thinking and thus explore more possibilities when writing and experience revision as a path to truly new texts and ideas. I had such goals in mind when assigning a "remix" in my Writing for the Public class. Students had produced fact sheets about the research topics that they had chosen for a semester-long project. These documents addressed specific audiences and sought to communicate well-defined arguments. In "remixing" their fact sheets, students could tinker as much or as little as they liked, reflecting on their choices along the way. They explored changes in medium, language, target audience, formatting, and visual elements. This exercise helped some students refine their initial fact sheets and their plans for the project as a whole. But it also taught them

⁶⁰ Style theorists, including Butler and Myers, have suggested that sentence-level patterns may not be translatable to higher discursive levels like paragraphs. Butler indicates that attempts to extrapolate moves from the sentence have been unsuccessful; however, the same compositional procedures that underlie tinkering in general (i.e., combination, substitution, deletion, addition, rearrangement, and reformatting) can be applied to multiple discursive levels. I have intentionally characterized these procedures broadly in order to allow for this multi-level generality.

more about persuasion, audience awareness, and the impact of textual choices in general as they explored alternative possibilities and their effects.

In some cases, then, my rationale for assigning the remix clashed with students' expectations and goals. Students wished to enhance their arguments and research to advance toward a well-defined end goal—the final project (a complex document persuading an audience to take action regarding a social issue). I hoped the exercise would generate discussion and enhance students' general facility with linguistic, textual, and design choices, rather than lead them to a specific stage in the course sequence. When tightly sequencing assignments, so that each builds on another and units culminate in final projects, exercises may appear extraneous and out of place because the sequence establishes an expectation for linear, chronological learning, each assignment preparing for another. While tinkering should not be incorporated haphazardly into a course curriculum and rather, should have a relationship to the assignments that precede and follow it, it remains a practice whose benefits and effects cannot always be traced directly to later assignments. Instructors might articulate to students, then, that an exercise in tinkering should have consequences for their writing and thinking generally, rather than serving as a checkpoint on the way to additional assignments. Tinkering introduces a second strand into course planning. It is a practice that supplements the dominant concerns of the course by enhancing assignments overall. It may exist on a plane parallel to that of the course's major concerns—its assigned texts, its sequence of writing tasks—overlapping with and ultimately enhancing those concerns at various points throughout the curriculum.

When tinkering in a course like Writing for the Public, in which rhetorical strategies are a central focus, questions about the effects of textual and linguistic manipulations are ready at hand. Students become accustomed to considering how their language and design choices may

affect their target audience's reception of the text. Tinkering thus becomes a reflective practice, one that can bolster other projects in critical revision. After completing an exercise like de/composition, students can apply variations on the same textual procedures to a larger-scale revision such as an essay and then comment on the impact of their changes. In this way, students can see how revision involves manipulating surface features like syntax and word choice while generating changes at higher discursive levels too, such as reorganizing paragraphs and refining key concepts. Instructors often wish to avoid emphasizing sentence-level revision, often referred to simply as "editing," for fear of sacrificing larger, conceptual concerns by focusing on minute details. However, some emphasis on sentence-level revision supplements more comprehensive revision plans as students compose at multiple levels while writing. Furthermore, assessing how small changes affect a document on a larger scale can help students grow more familiar and confident with revision and less unsure of the effects that their changes might introduce.

To showcase how writers work on several levels in analogous ways and to develop tinkering into a widespread practice, a course could also organize a series of exercises according to a graduated approach. An early exercise would feature a practice like de/composition or the paramedic method, both of which involve dwelling within sentences and phrases in prose or poetry. A later exercise would involve tinkering in the manner that Weber's heuristics suggest: combining larger chunks of text (paragraphs, stanzas, pages) to build whole documents, such as poems, essays, or letters, via compilation. A further exercise would provide a prefabricated form, such as a template, into which students would place new writing. An alternative exercise at this level would require students to tinker with the form of an existing text, changing its genre or format while retaining some language and ideas and condensing or expanding the original text according to the conventions of its new form. Finally, students might tinker with texts as material

objects, rebuilding or imagining rebuilding them according to alternative modes of packaging and delivery. This approach lends itself to studying textual circulation and reception and thus would enhance courses concerned with the contextual study of literary and historical materials and with issues of publication, delivery, and media.

Once students become familiar with tinkering as a general practice, they can perform their own versions of it in upcoming assignments. Toward the end of the semester in which students created de/compositions, I invited them to tinker again, yet in a more open-ended essay assignment requiring them to reuse one or more past texts in any way they liked. In this way, the course revisited and furthered students' developing responses to derivative writing practices, using de/composition as the initial foundation for a wider investigation. Some students continued to explore de/composition, applying its procedures to new poems and songs. Others adopted a more compilational approach, mimicking the collage structure of *Reality Hunger*. Students creatively translated the concepts of de/composition and reuse into different forms of writing, often in ways that I had not foreseen.

The ease of incorporating tinkering in various ways into a single course demonstrates its utility and relevance across a range of textual activities. It develops students' skills in writing at several different levels and offers them compositional tools that apply to sentences as well as to larger units like paragraphs. Regular yet distinct exercises with tinkering dispel the erroneous assumption that such exercises are atomistic means of drilling linguistic and syntactic concepts into students' minds. Tinkering does develop skills, but it is chiefly a practice that correlates with a stance or attitude rather than a store of knowledge. In this way, a course devoted to tinkering is distinct from one focused entirely on style and sentence-level writing, such as one that Dominic F. Delli Carpini and Michael J. Zerby describe. In seeking to reestablish the importance of style

and memory in composition, Delli Carpini and Zerbe have designed a course around stylistic devices like figures and tropes. Students collect examples of these devices, analyze them, and experiment with them, in both shorter and longer pieces of writing that the authors hope will help them commit the devices to memory. However, their suggestion that “memory holds the bits of discourse—the schemes, tropes, and techniques that not only make up the stylistic repertoire of effective writers but which connect style to occasion” (183) sounds too much like a rationale for repetitive drills. Tinkering as a habit of mind does not hold in the memory specific schemes or combinations of words but shapes a general attitude toward textual activity; it inculcates a way of productively approaching texts, not formulae for creating them.

VIII. PROMOTING TINKERING AT THE CURRICULAR LEVEL

English curricula, given their general investment in reading and writing, to some extent already support an interactive, generative orientation toward texts. They encourage students to read actively and to write in response to reading materials, often under the generic goal of developing critical thinking skills. Tinkering thus extends an already tacit goal of majors in writing and literature, one that I suggest should become more central. This generative orientation is characterized by a productive stance that moves beyond critical thinking. Tinkerers are writers who are open to invention and engaged with sources, rewriting and dwelling among them rather than consuming them.

Tinkering can be instituted immediately throughout existing English curricula, in general education classes and in disparate majors and concentrations including literature, writing studies, and creative writing. Because of this accessibility across the discipline, implementing tinkering

locally could slowly initiate more global disciplinary changes. Most broadly, tinkering supports diversity in the genres that students examine and manipulate and serves as a general language practice that could be the basis for more coherence in English. With ample implementation, tinkering could draw attention to the inadequacy of current disciplinary divisions and offer a new node around which to organize departments and sub-fields. Widely implementing tinkering does not mean prescribing preset exercises, however. Tinkering requires embracing an open-ended disposition that cannot be predicted by or confined to specific practices.

Newly developed majors in writing studies and independent departments of writing offer fertile environments for strengthening language instruction because they aim to develop general writing skills and they attract students with interests in language, writing, and creativity. In contrast, generic English majors and those explicitly devoted to literary study certainly require writing yet focus on a specialized version of it: academic criticism of literary texts. The growth in writing majors provides an opportune moment for integrating practices such as tinkering into curricula that have tended to ignore or devalue language and sentence-level exercises over the last few decades. Delli Carpini and Zerbe suggest that writing majors offer more occasions for instilling in students a playful approach to language use and for offering explicit instruction in style and memory. These curricula incorporate many writing genres and techniques, making them amenable to experimental exercises oriented toward general language facility.

Writing studies may involve instruction in numerous genres, including professional and technical writing, journalism, expository writing, and creative writing. Tinkering can develop students' genre knowledge, which would serve such broad writing studies curricula. And because tinkering is a writing practice with applications beyond the classroom, it enhances writing majors' focus on equipping students for writing in many environments beyond the academy,

including the Internet. In fact, neglecting tinkering as a legitimate and valued practice would deprive students of necessary training in writing for the workplace and for Internet audiences. As Anson and Jason Johnson have each argued, practices of synthesizing and patching together bits of preexisting writing support much writing in the workplace and online. Achieving a cohesive synthesis of disparate texts and ideas requires skills in reading and manipulating language that tinkering can help develop. In this way, tinkering can also support general education courses in technical and professional writing. The collaborative writing common in professional environments requires writers to collect, combine, and synthesize several strands of writing into well-organized wholes.

Adapting tinkering to writing studies need not require neglecting literature. Writing studies majors may be distinct from literature majors within an integrated English department, or they may stand on their own in independent departments of writing; in either case, these programs may seek to establish their difference from traditional English curricula by focusing exclusively on writing distinct from that practiced in literary courses. In avoiding the interpretive analyses typical of literature courses, writing studies may abandon literature altogether and miss out on many opportunities for expanding students' reading skills and developing their repertoire of writing strategies. Literary texts offer rich opportunities for the experimentation central to tinkering because they themselves are often experimental. They use language in unfamiliar ways and thus challenge students to read and understand them but also to imitate their moves. Texts identified as "literary" add diversity to the texts available for tinkering, so removing them deprives students of potentially useful raw materials. Tinkering requires fostering a rich textual environment, one marked by quality, quantity, and diversity of texts and thus resistant to strict textual divisions according to genre.

Of course designations like *literary* and *non-literary* are variable and arbitrary in nature, often growing out of institutional locations and uses rather than textual properties that might distinguish them. As Raymond Williams has illustrated, the term *literature* originally referred merely to polite learning, a category that might encompass many “non-literary” texts today—those more expository or journalistic than poetic or fictional. Williams demonstrates the imprecision that has always affected the term, noting that even when *literature* refers specifically to imaginative or creative writing, no further precision is achieved. Rhetorical, essayistic, and nonfiction prose may be imaginative and creative too; for instance, Anne Surma characterizes public and professional discourse as inherently imaginative, even while also rhetorical, because its successful composition requires imagining the audience and context to which it will eventually be delivered. And as Shields highlights in *Reality Hunger*, the growth of creative nonfiction and mixed genres like memoir naturally blurs textual boundaries by blending “truth” with “fiction,” reporting with imagining and embellishing. Such texts populate courses labeled “composition,” “literature,” and “creative writing,” indicating that reading materials need not belong to the rigid categories suggested by increasingly outdated departmental divisions. Furthermore, embracing reuse means embracing hybridity more generally, for all works of reuse, all instances of tinkering, feature a mix of old and new, past and present. Often such texts also mix genres, as in many anthologies, miscellanies, and collages. The project of incorporating tinkering into curricula encourages a movement away from policing disciplinary boundaries toward a much more open, hybrid conception of English studies making critical-creative thinking central.

In literature curricula and in integrated English majors, the primary challenge to tinkering is a longstanding emphasis on consumption over production of texts. While it is difficult to

extract a major textual practice from literary curricula altogether, they chiefly promote writing as an analytical and interpretive activity. Literature classes involve reading texts closely, observing their linguistic and textual characteristics, finding patterns, investigating their contextual frames, and then writing interpretive or analytical essays. Production certainly occurs here—and literature courses may focus on developing students' writing skills—but that production gets directed back to the object of study, framing writing as a less deliberative or future-oriented practice. Tinkering can enhance the reading that is already central to literature coursework while strengthening the connection between reading and writing and the overall goal that English majors should become adept critical writers.

Tinkering challenges literary studies to better integrate performative, creative approaches to analysis, like those that Snodgrass and McGann offer. One way to transition from typical literary practice toward these more inventive alternatives would be to cultivate an enhanced form of annotation that moves from marking up a text to recreating it. Existing annotation assignments often ask students to define unfamiliar terms and perform cultural-historical research, tasks that require going into the text but not rewriting it. Sutherland's annotation exercise, for example, requires students to interact with reading material by marking it up and charting their understanding. In this way, Sutherland shows students that interpreting involves producing as much as consuming a text. James Berlin has argued too that all interpretation is production. Yet neither Sutherland nor Berlin moves from interpreting to rewriting. Even Berlin's call for students to produce genres other than the typical rhetorical or expository ones—for example, advertisements and poetry (121)—does not envision textual interaction through manipulation of prior materials. In an enhanced annotation, students would rewrite the original text using the

research and responses they have gathered, perhaps creating an alternative critical version or a new version designed for a different audience, time period, or context.

Adding this productive dimension would elevate an already critical and exploratory activity into something creative as well. Berthoff's question ("How does it change your meaning if you put it this way?"), much like McGann's ("How do we release or expose the poem's possibilities of meaning?" [*Radiant* 108]), offers a compelling way of incrementally launching from annotation into tinkering, from understanding to reimagining through rewriting. These questions encourage a way of thinking, an inquiry into possibilities that repeated exercises in tinkering, whatever form they take, help to inculcate.

In its dual emphasis on critical thinking and creative work, tinkering appeals as well to the teaching of creative writing. As Mayers has argued, composition and creative writing share common goals that could form the foundation for a stronger alliance between them that might reduce the power imbalance in many English departments (xv): interpretation of literature is made superior to and more prevalent than the production of texts. Both of these branches of writing instruction promote facility with language and experimentation with writing resources and teach students how to effectively read and critique their own work as well as others'. Tinkering supports these goals and has served for me as a heuristic for identifying the overlap between composition and creative writing curricula. This overlap has fueled the establishment of several departments of writing that combine writing studies with creative writing.⁶¹ More importantly, however, because productive tinkering requires a range of source materials, incorporating it into English curricula could gradually help disperse "creative" work across divided departments; through tinkering, students can write in genres like poetry, narrative, and

⁶¹ See, for example, Georgia Southern University, Grand Valley State University, Rowan University, and Western Connecticut State University.

lyric essay in classes other than those designated as “creative writing.” Many composition classes, including Seminar in Composition, already feature some “creative writing” activities in the form of exercises that supplement reading and essay-writing.⁶²

Creative writing classes seem especially amenable to tinkering due to their investment in imitations and exercises. Yet the concomitant emphasis upon ownership and single authorship among publishing writers may discourage deep integration of tinkering into creative curricula. Students may enhance their syntactic skills, expand their vocabularies, and gain inventive strategies via tinkering with preexisting texts, but will such exercises produce pieces that they can ultimately call their own through publication? The growth in English-to-English translations, collage poetry and essays, and Oulipian-like manipulations and transpositions suggests that conditions in at least some publishing arenas favor the production of new, publishable writing out of old. But even as the number of such examples increases, they remain interesting in part because they are somewhat exceptional. Perhaps only when individual authorship is more widely dismissed—in the publishing world outside the academy—will budding writers feel confident pursuing publication with the results of their tinkering.⁶³ Students, whether of creative writing or some other kind of writing, may themselves lead the way in enacting the desired sea change regarding authorship. Encouraging them to think beyond textual ownership requires not only engaging with theory but also experiencing the authorial interplay that tinkering makes visible. Integrating tinkering across curricula would expose many students to this interplay and could

⁶² See Bishop’s 1994 article “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing” for more ways in which composition instructors have borrowed teaching techniques from creative writing workshops. Bishop makes a convincing case for crossing the boundaries that separate creative writing classes from composition classes.

⁶³ Given the ubiquity of remix projects in print, digital, and material forms, as well as academic commentary on them, it is tempting to proclaim the individual author finally dead and reuse widely accepted. Yet notions like genius and individuality remain appealing in many mainstream contexts. Consider, for example, Simon Reynolds’s 2012 response on *Slate* to a group of works including *Reality Hunger* and “The Ecstasy of Influence,” which laments in its title, “Why Doesn’t Anyone Believe in Genius Anymore?”

gradually contribute to more relaxed yet informed attitudes toward intellectual property that students could apply throughout their textual activity. Thus, tinkering could gradually advance a new attitude toward texts not only in academia, but perhaps more importantly within extramural writing spheres too.

4. CREATIVITY AND CONSTRAINT: TINKERING WITH PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Professional writing produced on the job or in pursuit of employment stands in stark contrast to other forms of writing commonly taught in English departments. Key values associated with workplace writing include efficiency, utility, convention, and accuracy. There seems little room in it for the experimentation and creativity that I have advocated in literary and student writing. And while there are certainly models for writing poems, stories, and essays, they take on special significance in professional domains, where templates, boilerplate, and copy-and-paste functions are prominent. Forms may be prescribed by a superior, representative of a valued company tradition or convention, or necessary for one's hiring or advancement. Neglecting these forms, or deviating too radically from them, can jeopardize time management, profit, and job prospects.

Consequently, the teaching of professional writing often emphasizes form and genre conventions, with textbooks, general how-to guides, and syllabi organized according to genre and focused on structure and correctness. Templates and sample documents illustrate correct formats and provide appropriate language that writers can mimic to achieve convincing simulacra of real-world writing. Teaching professional writing seems to entail teaching conventions, rules, and formulas, much in contrast to the exploratory and unconventional thinking and writing that courses in composition, creative writing, and literature often support.

Perhaps indicating their distaste for a too-schematic approach to writing pedagogy, teachers and scholars of English have sought to revise this common perception of professional

writing. Anne Surma, for instance, combats a skills-based emphasis that ignores the social, economic, and ethical concerns tied to professional writing. She laments that “there is a pressure to ‘just do it’: to prepare students for employment, or to exploit professional writers’ ability to write expediently, rather than to enable them to think about the complex processes involved in the practice of professional writing” (20). The problem with this approach, she continues, is that it inaccurately represents writing as a set of “separable techniques that can be taught and then simply applied” (20). Kate Ronald expresses similar anxieties in noting that teaching professional writing requires forwarding the corporate world’s vision of effective, efficient writing, rather than what the field of composition actually values. She worries that her students may learn to write in professional styles without thinking critically about the issues they are examining or the professions they are entering. She encapsulates common concerns about teaching professional writing by articulating a tension between teaching students to be *effective* and teaching them to be *perceptive*.

As this brief sampling of commentary suggests, prior work seeking a rapprochement between workplace values and English pedagogies hinges on enhancing students’ critical thinking while developing their facility with different writing genres. Surma, for instance, characterizes public and professional writing as an ethical, imaginative, and rhetorical praxis in order to prove inadequate typical labels like “mundane,” “impersonal,” and “formulaic.” She elaborately theorizes professional writing as a difficult process of imagining one’s readers, negotiating meanings, and dwelling in uncertainties. Success requires care and creativity, much in contrast to the speedy and efficient writing that how-to guides have promised for centuries.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ In sampling guides to professional writing from the eighteenth century to today, I found a consistent emphasis on efficiency and utility. The compiler of one of many books called *The Complete Letter-Writer* (1778) sums up a dominant purpose of these books: he has amassed a variety of letters “so that, on most occasions, no person can be at

Surma thus contributes to elevating professional writing as a sub-discipline of English on par with creative writing, which she contends is considered “more glamorous and sophisticated” at least in her home country of Australia (18). The project of better integrating professional writing into English is a laudable and complex endeavor, given that even in writing studies curricula, professional courses often seem out of place because of their practical focus. However, Surma’s concern centers on how we *think* about professional writing rather than on how we *practice* it. Avoiding routine production, for example, means for Surma “learning to *imagine* ourselves as part of a highly elaborate nexus or communicative social and public network” (21; emphasis added). I am intrigued yet frustrated by her label *imaginative*, for despite its promising association with creativity, here *imaginative* seems to characterize a cerebral approach rather than an experimental one. This final sample excerpt epitomizes Surma’s preoccupation with theorizing:

To emphasize the imaginative dimension is, moreover, to differentiate this genre of writing, as an academic and professional discipline, from its traditional associations with conventions, formulae, templates and products. Rather, it is to *look at* the seminal issue of writing and reading processes as contingent, provisional and unstable, and therefore as the negotiable exchange of meanings and values within specific communities. (29; emphasis added)

a loss for a pattern to direct him” (iii). Many guides today stress ease, efficiency, and seamless application in their titles alone. There is, for instance, John A. Carey’s *Business Letters for Busy People: Time Saving, Ready-to-Use Letters for Any Occasion*, as well as Tom Gorman’s seemingly foolproof *The Complete Idiot’s Almanac of Business Letters and Memos*. Kelly James-Enger offers templates specifically to freelance writers in an article titled “Save Time with 7 Writing Templates: By Tweaking Proven Formulas for Regular Correspondence, You’ll Work More Efficiently.” For more general correspondence, personal and professional, there are books like Debra Hart May and Regina McAloney’s *Everyday Letters for Busy People: Hundreds of Sample Letters You Can Copy or Adapt at a Minute’s Notice* and Dianna Booher’s *Great Personal Letters for Busy People: 501 Ready-to-Use Letters for Every Occasion*.

Like Surma, I wish to soften the boundaries between professional writing and experimentation, or what we might call “creative” writing, yet our methods for achieving this rapprochement differ considerably. Where Surma theorizes professional writing “as a creative, critical and dialogic process” in order to present it as a subject worth interrogating (17), I examine even formulaic professional discourse as writing open to creative intervention. In the previous three chapters, I have worked to represent writing in English studies as a continuum of practices rather than a set of distinct activities. This continuum ranges from more standardized forms (i.e., many professional genres) to more unpredictable, experimental, or “literary” forms, but throughout, there exist opportunities for play. In this chapter, I use this continuum to think professional writing into the same playful arena in which I have placed literary writing and composition.⁶⁵ I identify openings for experimentation and nuance in standardized genres like job applications and thus contribute to diminishing the boundaries that rigidly differentiate “practical” from “creative” writing. Conventionally, practical workplace writing is constrained, straightforward, dry rhetoric, easily distinguishable from open-ended, experimental, playful poetics. I aim to upset this dichotomy.⁶⁶

The greatest payoff in establishing professional writing as more creative or nuanced is inspiring more interest and excitement among both students and teachers. Teaching students to tinker with forms and templates promotes an exploratory, experimental practice of building and

⁶⁵ Composition’s relationship to “creativity” is more unstable within the larger field of composition studies. Some versions of college writing characterize academic writing as experimental, with ties to creative nonfiction. Others emphasize logical arguments and scholarly research. I reorient the shifting place of creativity in composition by arguing that even in composing more traditional forms, such as academic and professional discourse, there is room for play and experimentation through tinkering.

⁶⁶ Robert Bly encapsulates this dichotomy by expressly opposing formula-driven professional writing with originality and creativity: “You may be a creative person and an original thinker. But when it comes to routine correspondence, why reinvent the wheel?” (10). He promises “quick—and painless—writing” with the help of his sample documents, suggesting that creativity is not only unnecessary in professional discourse but also potentially a waste of time (10).

manipulating over a dry, rote process of filling out. It encourages students to shape their documents more actively than they would when relying upon prefabricated forms that ignore opportunities for intervention. What results, I hope, is more compelling writing, as well as occasions for instructors to pursue productive questions about playing with vocabulary, syntax, and punctuation—questions central to the teaching of all reading and writing.

Connecting professional writing with other forms of writing in the academy furthermore promotes greater coherence in English departments and writing across the curriculum programs. Jennifer Bay has argued for allying professional writing more strongly with composition to elevate the status of rhetoric and writing in the university, where courses in professional writing may have greater clout for imparting practical benefits over less tangible outcomes such as critical thinking (30). She proposes that we reconsider professional writing and composition as “part of a network of productive processes” (35) somewhat like the continuum that drives the connections I wish to forge. Bay offers “creative thinking” as one node around which to unify these disciplinary branches, arguing that “If our students are entering this economy [the creative economy] and if this economy values the interconnection of all aspects of creativity, then our own distinctions and separations between types of writing and thinking (academic versus professional, for example) are out of sync with the creative ethos” (39). I suggest that tinkering cultivates a form of creativity that Bay fails to articulate but which describes the array of writing practices currently dispersed across departmental divisions.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Kathryn Rentz, Mary Beth Debs, and Lisa Meloncon also identify connections among professional writing and other branches of English that can foster compatibility between professional writing programs and their home departments. They find new common ground between literary studies and professional writing, with the former now more amenable to cultural studies and the latter supporting a more sophisticated, less instrumental view of discourse. These connections concern subject matter rather than common practices like tinkering. However, the authors consider practice more when describing the benefits of incorporating literature into professional writing classes: for example, strengthening students’ reading, exposing them to varied languages and audiences, and enhancing their sensitivity to creativity and craft (293).

I. TEXTUAL REUSE IN THE DOMAIN OF PROFESSIONAL WRITING

In her quest to complicate and thereby elevate professional writing beyond a fixation on form, Surma unduly disavows the very real constraints that guide much workplace writing. Ignoring templates altogether in the professional writing classroom promotes an unrealistic view of the writing students will likely encounter outside the academy. I argue that we can reconcile a focus on form with a more robust intellectual agenda by exploiting the interconnectedness of reusing forms and language on the one hand and tinkering with them on the other hand. A pedagogy that acknowledges standardized forms but encourages intervening among them need not be dismissed as formalist and thus misguided.⁶⁸ Workplace writing regularly requires working creatively with prefabricated givens, whether these are bits of material that must be reused (e.g., specific language or a template) or more abstract conventions and norms (e.g., guidelines about the expected length and tone of a document).

In general, professional writers may follow given forms and adhere to certain language in order to protect or advance special interests, whether personal or institutional. Perhaps prescribed language has already been authorized legally and socially for one's audience; likewise, a given form may be widely approved, understood, and expected within one's environment. Changing that form and deviating from custom may unnecessarily confuse, annoy, and delay readers. Reuse promotes consistency, convenience, and efficiency and may save writers time and effort by preventing them from "reinventing the wheel." But writing with constraints like approved language can also demand that writers perform careful rhetorical acrobatics—writing cautiously

⁶⁸ Amy Lynch-Binieck denounces formalism in a critique of *They Say/I Say*, where she defines *formalism* as "instruction grounded in fixed forms, set schema and particular 'academic' turns of phrase" (n. pag.). She uses the term to invoke strongly negative feelings yet repeatedly concedes that it is only problematic when "allowed to dominate composition teaching." This chapter demonstrates how instructors can inventively revise coursework invested in form, while not rejecting conventions altogether.

yet creatively to satisfy requirements. Reuse in professional realms does not necessitate mechanical composition.

Valuing convenience and efficiency seems out of place in English departments, where courses in composition, literature, and creative writing all encourage students to spend time with reading and writing. Reading slowly and closely and revising multiple times are key strategies for teaching reading and writing. Writing is imagined as difficult and time-consuming. Any shortcuts that make it easier or faster—such as relying upon a template or reusing previous writing in a new context—are suspect.

However, values like speed and ease legitimately put pressure on writers composing in extramural settings where “time is money” and employees must work efficiently. For example, in his interviews with a military officer, Chris M. Anson illustrates that time management and efficiency drive much reuse in the military. Anson’s informant, Sheldon, explains, “In general, we are expected to do so much in the Army that anything we can ‘plagiarize’ to make life easier is not only useful, but often encouraged. A general motto is ‘work smarter, not harder.’ . . . All that leaders care about is whether or not the product is effective and can reduce time-consuming work. Time is a precious and inexhaustible resource” (“Fraudulent” 37).⁶⁹ Anson shows the benefits of reuse in commercial environments too—for instance, reusing a product description to market a camera or vacation package in a new context (32). The original description is effective, reusing it bears no negative consequences, and rewriting it instead would occupy time, effort, and money better directed elsewhere. Furthermore, in some cases, reuse facilitates consistency and accuracy by retaining details that may get lost or grow inaccurate through rewriting. In

⁶⁹ Note how Sheldon draws attention to the word *plagiarism* with quotation marks that register its contingency. What he describes in this article resembles plagiarism because it reuses prior writing, often without attribution. Yet it is not actually plagiarism because it does not involve deception, nor is it unacceptable within this environment.

particular, technical workplaces, such as scientific, engineering, or financial institutions, may rely upon cut-and-paste to ensure precision and accuracy when working with large, sensitive datasets.

In some work environments, composing involves advanced consideration of how current writing will facilitate quicker future writing. Writers may, for instance, produce distinct modules, blocks that can stand on their own or be easily integrated into several different contexts. Composition here entails writing new material and then resourcefully building multiple documents out of it through careful combination and rearrangement of parts. Some genres are especially amenable to modular development because they can be easily segmented into discrete parts—elements in a glossary or user manual and general policies and procedures, for example (Kostur). When writers know they must eventually translate the same subject matter into multiple formats, perhaps for different audiences and occasions, they can plan ahead by drafting modular, easily reusable writing. As James A. Mann and John B. Ketchum have shown, modifying these parts may require adjusting tone and angle to satisfy different audiences, rearranging the presentation of information to highlight different emphases, adding or removing explanations to match readers' knowledge, or excerpting selected information according to importance. Preparing accessible, reconfigurable parts that can be easily adapted according to these procedures proves more efficient than assigning each eventual document as an entirely independent project to be written seemingly from scratch.

Reused language circulates in the workplace as buzzwords, clichés, and other kinds of formulaic language too. Reusing such language helps writers accurately and consistently address a given community, context, or field of expertise. Here reuse may entail repeating principles and values that one's workplace wishes to support, that help characterize the company or

organization uniformly, and that contribute to its overall self-image or brand. Individuals employ the same strategy when sending job applications that strategically integrate keywords from the job ad to which they are responding or from the target company's website. Reuse here is goal-oriented and originates either materially from a specific document or more abstractly from a general sense of the discourse community one wishes to enter.⁷⁰

Company and industry standards and policies may also guide language and form, so that stakeholders other than oneself exert some control over a project's presentation. In professional environments subject to the work-made-for-hire doctrine, the company rather than the individual ultimately owns its products anyway; so even mundane correspondence falls within a domain of muddled agency and multiple origins. Likewise, much workplace writing is collaborative and requires selecting, cutting, pasting, and synthesizing contributions from a number of sources, which may include coworkers, previous documents, and research. (See Jason Johnson; Cross; Rivers; Paré; Debs; Surma.) Working together and combining different ideas and ways of thinking may yield richer, more comprehensive results but requires careful tinkering, in addition to joining, in order to approximate a unified, consistent point of view.

Individuals may produce this point of view to simulate a coherent group consensus, one voice devised from many. Often it represents a corporate author, a reliable brand cobbled together from many participants' contributions to a writing project. I suggest that the work of cobbling together requires dwelling within existing texts (notes, previous drafts, correspondence) and playing with their components; it is an act of tinkering. Mary Beth Debs has found that a

⁷⁰ Application materials depend so much on keywords that guides like Alan Bond and Nancy Schuman's *300+ Successful Letters for All Occasions* offer lists of keywords for use on résumés and cover letters, arranged according to different fields. And as Nicole Amare and Alan Manning have shown, employers' widespread practice of screening candidates' résumés for keywords may encourage applicants to pad their application materials with desired keywords that do not actually reflect their experience and expertise.

collective “we” undergirds much business writing and can be discerned in writers’ discussions of their work and in company documents themselves. She notes that “The role of the organization may be taken on so well by individual writers that we find the corporation to be the only author visible in many documents today that address a consumer audience,” such as annual reports, collection letters, and advertisements (Debs 163). How do disparate individuals achieve unity and sustain a collective ethos in these documents? Debs approaches this question from more of a social perspective than a textual one: she argues that institutionalized interactions and rhetorical practices facilitate individuals’ inculcation into company values and norms. Rhetorical practices involving “[d]ocument cycling, review privileges, central data bases, and boilerplate material” ensure that individuals interact with other employees who screen their developing writing as appropriate to the organization’s ethos (Debs 167). What Debs does not consider is how these interacting participants shape the documents they modify and review into cohesive wholes—an endeavor in which tinkering must be central. On such occasions I would expect to see specific strategies for textual manipulation: for example, substituting language to produce an appropriate and unified tone and register and to rely upon consistent terminology; adding language to clarify, explain, or fill gaps; deleting superfluous language; and reformatting fonts, spacing, margins, indentation, and alignment to ensure a cohesive appearance that represents the collective ethos that one’s workplace supports.

As the examples in this section have shown, professional writing can feature heavy reuse, which necessitates the common textual procedures that I have previously enumerated. There is continuity between this more standardized domain and the looser, more unpredictable ones that have preceded it; similar practices drive reuse and variation. These include rearranging and manipulating words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to adjust tone or modify emphasis or

sequence; building new texts from previous parts via combination; and translating a document for a new occasion. Translating may involve condensing or expanding, changing form or genre, or adjusting tone or vocabulary. At the very least, reusing templates and basic forms always requires some adding and substituting of general information—the date, a company or employee’s name, a reason for writing. Such basic procedures mark a minimal, required level of intervention, while further intervention, and even deviation from a standard, signifies greater invention and exposes the playful, creative potential in composing even routine correspondence. Creativity intermingles with the many constraints and occasions for textual reuse that characterize professional writing. Writing that emerges from a form or template can be inventive, just as writing that does not model a form or template can be formulaic (for instance, expressing obvious or repetitive ideas and sentiments).

II. INTERVENTION AND DEVIATION: PRODUCING INVENTIVE JOB APPLICATIONS

Tinkering with prefabricated professional documents can achieve several goals. At the most basic level, tinkering can convert hypothetical or inaccurate examples into factual and appropriate content that matches a real-world situation. Moreover, tinkering can merge disparate voices. These include, for example, the author(s) of the earlier document with which one begins (it may have been composed by a coworker or the author of a guide), the persona that one’s workplace (organization or company) supports, and the “individual” voice or identity that one wishes to cultivate. More successful and inventive reuse might then be characterized by smoothness and cohesion among the constituent parts of a document—its paragraphs, sentences,

phrases, and words. A work of successful reuse in the workplace does not betray its multiple origins; it does not include any inaccuracies or inconsistencies in voice, tone, vocabulary, or format. Writers might aim for what in Chapter 1 I called tighter joins, which can support the illusion of a fully unified writing persona, one that has not actually arisen out of manipulating a template, model, or prior document. Establishing this unified persona through tinkering helps present an appropriate, consistent company ethos—an accurate and flattering representation of the company itself, as well as professionalism more broadly. Looser joins and the juxtaposition that creates them seem more suited to an artistic or literary context where readers expect to expend some time and energy understanding a text. In contrast, professional settings value efficiency and clarity. Uniformity, whether real or artificial, supports these values because it subordinates discord and multiplicity in foregrounding a neat, singular perspective.

Additionally, tinkering in professional realms, especially when pushed to inventive extremes, can help writers stand out and attract attention, a desirable goal when seeking employment or soliciting for funds. More than intervening into an already existing document, writers in these situations may wish to deviate from a document, form, or set of conventions. Writers may deviate from the language or tone that a model or template presents in order to express a distinctive personality, or they may design a new form to convey the same information and thus demonstrate ingenuity and differentiate themselves from others.

To distinguish between inventive intervention and more provocative deviation, I present several takes on the common cover letter. First, I highlight how writers use sample letters to guide the invention of their own conventional letters, reusing language and form yet intervening in them to achieve a new goal. This work involves copying, applying basic procedures like substitution, and intervening in more open-ended, inventive ways. Then, I examine how writers

deviate from sample documents and their conventions, sometimes with beneficial results and sometimes not. I move from conventional yet still inventive writing, toward more inventive, overtly “creative,” and potentially subversive writing, as determined by the degree of deviation from a sample or form.

Here is a sample cover letter from *Writing that Works*, a widely used professional writing textbook that I have adopted in some of my classes.

Dear Ms. Crandall:

I have learned from your Web site that you are hiring undergraduates for summer internships. Such an internship appeals to me because Abel’s buyer-training program impressed me as I researched the industry.

The professional and analytical qualities that my attached résumé describe match the job description on your Web site. My experiences with the Alumni Relations Program and the University Center Committee have enhanced my communication and persuasive abilities and my understanding of compromise and negotiation. For example, in the alumni program, I persuaded both uninvolved and active alumni to become more engaged with the direction of the university. On the University Center Committee, I balanced the students’ demands with the financial and structural constraints of the administration. With these skills, I can ably assist the members of your department with their summer projects and successfully juggle multiple responsibilities.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your summer internship further. If you have questions or would like to speak with me, please contact me at (412) 863-2289 after 3 p.m. or you can e-mail me at <msparker@ubi.edu>. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Martha S. Parker (Oliu, Brusaw, and Aldred 606)

The basic structure of this sample reflects convention and builds on guidelines that precede it in the textbook. It includes a short introductory paragraph naming the position in question and describing its appeal; a longer body paragraph enumerating key work experiences that prepare the writer for the position; and a short concluding paragraph planning next steps in the hiring process, providing contact information, and restating interest.

When teaching professional writing, I have been struck by the extent to which students incorporate specific phrases from sample cover letters like this one. I often see lines like “I have learned from your website . . .” and “Such a position appeals to me because . . .” in the introductory paragraph, and it is not uncommon for me to encounter a line like the one that begins the second paragraph here: “The professional and analytical qualities that my attached résumé describe match the job description on your Web site.” Students’ concluding paragraphs also often mimic this model quite closely. It is the middle paragraph(s) that requires the most customization as students must fill it with factual, relevant information about their prior experiences, including details that may be difficult to remember and articulate. Students often struggle with this paragraph, which is the most essential in differentiating job candidates.

Note how one student, Sam, mimicked the model offered above while also elaborating very specific work experiences in his two body paragraphs (2 and 3).

Dear SAP Representative:

Through your website, I have discovered that SAP is looking to hire a software development intern at the Alpharetta, Georgia office. SAP is a leader in business solutions software and I am eager to be a part of its innovative development team. I believe my strong development skills, ability to learn quickly, and efficient communication skills make me an ideal candidate for the position.

I was able to practice and develop these skills during two co-op rotations at IQ Inc. In my first rotation, I worked independently to develop part of a software application that assists in the code review process. My responsibilities to create the requirement and design documents taught me important skills in writing detailed technical documentation; while writing a recursive algorithm in C# exposed me to learning a new language quickly.

In my second rotation, I worked in a team that tested a software application used in the medical device industry. I was also asked to develop a prototype application for the Android and iOS operating systems. Even though no one in the office had any mobile application development knowledge, including myself, I was happy to take on the challenge. Throughout the process I taught myself some objective C, and was able to create both prototypes in just over one month.

While I am not a local resident—I am very interested in the position and I am happy to relocate. I would appreciate the opportunity to be interviewed for this position to describe my qualifications further. Feel free to contact me via phone at (610) 555-1234, or email me at <sam@gmail.com>. Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

Sam -----

There are traces of a sample letter in Sam's body paragraphs. He begins with a description of his development skills, communication skills, and ability to learn quickly and then elaborates on these abstract qualities with specific examples from his co-op experience, including his responsibilities and accomplishments. Though they reflect a different professional field, Sam's examples match the fictional writer's examples in spirit: both letters emphasize gaining exposure to work environments, learning on one's own, and accomplishing goals. Both writers cultivate an eager, confident yet humble ethos. Sam has achieved this match by filling in Marsha S. Parker's letter with details about his experiences and the position he seeks (a basic procedure), while intervening in the sample to create a new yet similar narrative of growth and development (a more inventive move). Invention requires recalling previous projects and his contributions to them and accounting for the skills he gained and the personality traits that he exhibited in completing these projects. The sample shows that letters should include specific achievements and models how to describe them, but students must still invent (discover and articulate) these accomplishments themselves. This more open-ended inventive task is difficult because one must imagine a desirable and apt persona and recall, not make up, significant past

experiences. Ultimately, Sam deviates from the sample only slightly, in constructing two body paragraphs instead of one—a superficial mechanical adjustment that does not draw attention to itself.

Deviating more widely from the standards that how-to guides and other instructional materials disseminate can lead to inventive and surprising writing—but writing that is not necessarily productive or successful in the workplace. In 2012 a cover letter that an NYU student named Mark sent to JP Morgan gained much attention and circulated widely on the Internet. The letter met with ridicule on websites including the *Huffington Post*, *Gawker*, and *Business Insider*. Here is an exemplary excerpt from it:

I am an ambitious undergraduate at NYU triple majoring in Mathematics, Economics, and Computer Science. I am a punctual, personable, and shrewd individual, yet I have a quality which I pride myself on more than any of these.

I am unequivocally the most unflaggingly hard worker I know, and I love self-improvement. I have always felt that my time should be spent wisely, so I continuously challenge myself; I left Villanova because the work was too easy. Once I realized I could achieve a perfect GPA while holding a part-time job at NYU, I decided to redouble my effort by placing out of two classes, taking two honors classes, and holding two part-time jobs. That semester I achieved a 3.93, and in the same time I managed to bench double my bodyweight and do 35 pull-ups. (Marcus, n. pag.)

This letter deviates from the norms of a typical cover letter like Marsha S. Parker's in its excessive length, cocky tone, and irrelevant, inappropriate content. Its tone is pompous and over-

the-top, with standout sentences including this unforgettable line weighed down by hyperbolic adverbs: “I am unequivocally the most unflaggingly hard worker I know, and I love self-improvement.” In another description of his work ethic, Mark combines words inventively, but in a way that is memorable for sounding ridiculous: he claims to “perform basic office functions with *terrifying efficiency*” (emphasis added). Finally, one of the most memorable lines of the letter stands out because it again unexpectedly combines ideas and language, in a way that elicits laughs and disbelief for diverging so noticeably from standard expectations when applying for a serious investment banking position. Mark writes, “That semester I achieved a 3.93, and in the same time I managed to bench double my bodyweight and do 35 pull-ups.” Mark has generated an inventive and surprising letter by diverging from the more polite, modest, and concise standards that guide the genre, but not to his benefit. The letter gains value in the popular online context where it was recirculated, however, because it is funny and invites a kind of satisfying ridicule. Changing the letter’s context changes its effects and thus its value.

This awful cover letter is enjoyable to read because it humorously flouts protocols and sounds preposterously arrogant. In the realm of ostensibly creative and humorous writing, authors have experimented in similar ways: diverging from a standard business or instructional genre to create a joke or narrative. David Shields and Matthew Vollmer collected such writing in their 2012 anthology *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, “Found” Texts (and Other Fraudulent Artifacts)*. The collection includes pieces resembling, yet deviating from, common professional genres, including a disclaimer, a response to a complaint letter, instructional writing, a contract, and an email. Shields and Vollmer include an introduction that instructs readers in “how to fake it” and offers an overview of what genres are and how they structure our writing. They write that as a result of the codification of genre norms,

We find ourselves held against our will, hostages to five-paragraph essays, medical forms, reports, and worksheets. Thwarted by instructions, story problems, and analyses, we are bound by credit card contracts, rental agreements, liens, loans, and wills. We sign on the dotted line without reading the fine print. We agree, in our impatience to click ever forward, to terms and conditions with which we may or may not agree. (12)

The editors paint these everyday writing forms as especially constrained, yet so mundane and tightly regulated that we as readers expect nothing else and approach them robotically, hardly noticing their details, let alone their conventions (which as Anthony Paré acknowledges, have become invisible in the process of becoming norms). Yet these forms contain within them comedic and creative potential.

The challenge that Shields and Vollmer undertake is to rebel against constraints and reenergize “even the most lifeless of genres” (12). They propose,

What if, in addition to relaying information, the language within one of these forms swerved, digressed, became elevated, and began to do something spectacular? What if the language within these forms enacted a giddy and imaginative revenge? What if, as we read through an index, catalog, disclaimer, or personal ad, we suddenly awoke to the story it was telling? Would not the thing—the artifact—come alive in a new and exciting way? (12)

The rest of their introduction is a short how-to guide on experimenting with this generic “swerving”: choose a form/genre, identify the conventions, study page design and layout, bend and/or break the rules, and create a voice. In short, learn about the genre’s conventions, then

diverge from them, while still maintaining enough generic integrity so that one's document is recognizable as emerging out of its particular genre.

Fakes is an entertaining collection with contributions by well-established literary authors such as George Saunders, Lorrie Moore, Amy Hempel, Donald Barthelme, Lydia Davis, and J. G. Ballard. It is labeled "literature" on its back cover, and its selections are meant to amuse. It borrows from the conventions of professional writing in order to produce intentionally absurd and creative pieces. The volume's stunts would serve little purpose in a realm of professional writing driven more by efficiency, utility, concision, and convention. Yet with *Fakes* at one extreme (no longer part of professional writing) and the above awful cover letter at another (recognizable as professional writing but deviating so much that it attracts the wrong kind of attention), there has to be some middle ground in which controlled deviation from norms is accepted and even rewarded in professional domains. Approaching that middle ground requires experimenting and taking risks, using the responses one receives (or does not receive) as feedback about how much deviation is acceptable.

Another subversive cover letter gained wide circulation on the Internet in 2013 but this time for positive reasons. This one appeared on *Business Insider* under the title "Kid Sends Perfectly Blunt Cover Letter for Wall Street Internship, and Now Tons of People Are Trying to Hire Him" (La Roche and Weisenthal). It begins by following a recommended approach to drafting letters of inquiry—with an introduction explaining how the letter writer knows the recipient. The second paragraph also echoes cover letter conventions with the formulaic sentence "I am writing to inquire about a possible summer internship in your office." What follows diverges from the standard by injecting modesty and sincerity with statements like, "I have no qualms about fetching coffee, shining shoes or picking up laundry, and will work for next to

nothing. In all honesty, I just want to be around professionals in the industry and gain as much knowledge as I can.” The third paragraph also deviates from convention by criticizing common strategies for boosting job prospects and writing with a blunt rather than affected voice. The letter writer remarks, “I won’t waste your time inflating my credentials, throwing around exaggerated job titles, or feeding you a line of crapp [sic] about how my past experiences and skill set align perfectly for an investment banking internship.” The final item in this series again registers resistance to typical advice for writing effective applications, even while a couple sentences later, the author indeed includes past experiences much like those that textbooks encourage (“I’ve interned for Merrill Lynch in the Wealth Management Division and taken an investment banking class”). This sentence ends, however, with a paradigmatic jab at convention—“for whatever that is worth”—that reinforces the letter’s deviation from norms. Whereas Mark received negative attention for his experimental cover letter, this author received praise from several readers whose responses appeared alongside the letter on *Business Insider*. The letter deviates inventively and productively, standing out from those that adhere more strictly to a template or model. It chooses one extreme over the other—modesty over arrogance—and thus displays a more cautious riskiness.⁷¹

Given that inventive professional writing requires intervention and even abides some deviation, it seems to invite play and experimentation, despite the emphasis on precision and tradition ostensibly underlying so much of it. Although these values seem opposed to playing and trying out, professional writing actually fosters experimentation because writers receive real

⁷¹ Interestingly, Bly’s *Encyclopedia of Business Letters, Fax Memos, and E-mail* provides a “nontraditional” cover letter from a recent college graduate. This sample breaks, rather than illustrates, convention. Bly prefaces it by writing, “This kind of letter is risky—it may turn some people off, but if it works, it can make you stand out clearly from the crowd. (The person who wrote this letter got the interview)” (31). As this example is offered as one for readers to imitate, then even nontraditional approaches can become formulated and disseminated as conventional specimens of unconventional writing.

responses from their addressees, in the form of correspondence, face-to-face interactions, and performance reviews from supervisors. Literary authors in contrast often do not receive much direct feedback on their publications (except in reviews and comments from colleagues and friends) and do not hear from many of their readers, who remain largely anonymous (although social media have closed this gap by facilitating more interactions between readers and writers). In the workplace, writers must constantly try out a form or approach, only to receive feedback that encourages them to maintain or recalibrate their writing practices. Readers in the workplace can put heavy demands on writers who must adapt or else lose a position or opportunity.

An inconsistency arises in adapting tinkering to textual rather than mechanical worlds, in that those who tinker with devices can check their progress and receive feedback in ways that writers cannot. In repairing or modifying a device, the tinkerer can periodically test it to see if changes cause the machine to respond differently (or at all) (Vee). Texts do not respond in this way; the tinkerer can only “test” his or her product on a reader—real or imagined—by considering the different effects that the text causes others to experience. This kind of imagined testing is not very reliable and depends upon a writer’s rhetorical and aesthetic understanding. Occasionally, however, texts do undergo usability testing, such as when a film or commercial is screened by a focus group that provides feedback on what is and is not interesting. In professional writing this kind of feedback seems more likely and more possible than in domains such as literary or student writing where texts may be judged more subjectively. Since professional texts operate in practical environments, whether they “work” means whether they produce a given effect (e.g., receiving an interview), rather than achieve a vague sense of “success” by meeting intangible goals. The Internet too provides a testing ground where viewers from various backgrounds can weigh in on whether certain writing techniques would attract

favorable attention. Some online forums even allow writers to upload sample documents, such as graduate school application materials, and receive feedback on their success. It seems employees at JP Morgan and other workplaces have taken such activity into their own hands by choosing to share notable applications in an online environment that takes easily to recirculating and critiquing outlandish materials.

III. DISCOVERING NUANCE BY EXPERIMENTING WITH PROFESSIONAL WRITING

The final cover letter included above received more positive responses than the infamous JP Morgan letter, but it too deviated from norms and thus risked credibility. Likewise, when I searched Google for “creative cover letters,” I found plenty of what we might call conventional signs of creativity in sample cover letters with colors, design elements, graphs, charts, and other stand-out features. These might attract attention but perhaps for the wrong reasons.⁷² In the search for employment, such risk may be worth the payoff, or it may be appropriate after one has found little success sending countless conventional applications. But deviating drastically from conventional forms may cause one’s work to be thrown out before anyone ever reads it. Introducing creativity into the teaching of professional writing should not require ignoring convention and expectation altogether, nor should it feature writing in professional genres purely

⁷² Traditional advice on the job search warns against using creative gimmicks to stand out. John L. Munschauer calls out one memorable stunt to dissuade readers from trying something like it. He recalls, “One piece of mail contained a walnut and a note that read, ‘Every business has a tough nut to crack. If you have a tough nut to crack and need someone to do it, crack this nut.’ Inside the nut, all wadded up, was a résumé.” Then he affirms, “Cute tricks and cleverness don’t work at the General Mammoth Corporation” (309). In fact, smaller, up-and-coming businesses may be more receptive to creative applications.

for entertainment purposes, as was the case with contributors to *Fakes*. How can we teach both conformity to expectations and appropriate creative variation? Where in typical professional genres are there opportunities for a more subtle, more nuanced, and more effective version of creativity? Which creative openings in professional writing genres do templates and how-to guides fail to acknowledge? In this section I will investigate and experiment with several sample texts to pursue these questions and demonstrate ways of approaching them with students.

Experiment #1: A Personal Intervention into Veterinary Discharge Instructions

First, I present an example of a highly constrained, standardized genre that nonetheless requires intervention and even permits some personality: medical discharge instructions. I received medical discharge instructions when my cat, Zoey, was unable to receive her scheduled dose of chemotherapy because her white blood cell count had been deemed too low and she received antibiotics instead (Erfourth). These instructions show that there is room for controlled creativity even in strictly standardized genres and importantly, that such creativity can pay off.

The document contains many discrete sections or modules that veterinary professionals fill in via computer during and after a medical exam. These include, for instance, history, diagnosis, prognosis, and diagnostics. Even though each version of the document must be customized to each individual patient, it will still contain standard sections, most of which provide routine information that writers must simply fill in. For instance, completing the physical exam and diagnostics sections requires inputting all measurements and blood test results gathered during the exam. Sections such as history, diagnosis, and prognosis may remain the same from one veterinary visit to another; for example, Zoey's history reuses much of the language on her discharge instructions from several weeks earlier because it relates background information already established.

This document reuses language from previous versions of it and relies upon a prefabricated format consisting of several conventional sections. Additionally, much of its language sounds standardized and can probably be found across other examples of the genre. For instance, the last paragraph seems a conventional way of closing a document such as this one, pertaining to health and thus likely to prompt questions and concerns. This paragraph reads, “Please contact us with any questions. If you require medication refills, please provide a minimum of 48 hours notice. If you have an emergency after business hours please contact the emergency service at 412-366-3400” (n. pag.). This paragraph even stands out slightly because its font size is larger than that used in the preceding paragraphs, suggesting that it is a separate module customary on all discharge instructions. Formulaic, impersonal language appears as well in statements such as “Please continue to monitor Zoey for any signs of illness...” and “Please remember that Zoey should not have any vaccines while on chemotherapy...” These reminders are not relevant to *all* patients and thus are more customized than the final paragraph, but they nonetheless apply to many patients undergoing the same or similar treatment and so can be reused. Polite, professional, and standardized language reappears in multiple instances of “please” and “you may.” The writing is generally impersonal, up until the section marked “Additional Information.” Here, the writer’s voice and perspective change significantly, with a shift to first-person, more colloquial writing, which signals that an actual person examined the patient and reported his observations. The doctor has written,

Zoey looks very good today, however, her white count was too low for chemo. I definitely see some cats who need as much as 5 weeks between CCNU treatments instead of the standard 3 weeks. I would advise we recheck her bloodwork within the next 2 weeks (ideally about a week) to see if her counts are back enough for

the second treatment. In the future we'll then treat every 4-5 weeks instead of every 3. (Erfourth, n. pag.)

Immediately after this paragraph the discourse returns to a standard, professional register.

This shift signifies the kind of looser join and accompanying break in cohesion that I earlier suggested professional writing typically avoids in order to present a uniform professional ethos, often appropriate to corporate entities. The doctor's personal perspective and colloquial tone shift the document from a more detached official discourse (polite and concerned, yet not so personal) to a more personal commentary. Note the colloquial "chemo" substituted for the more professional and exact "chemotherapy"; the contraction in "we'll then treat..."; the parenthetical phrase "ideally about a week"; and the everyday, non-clinical statement, "I *definitely* see some cats who need as much as..." (emphasis added). These shifts force the "Additional Information" module to stand out from the rest, betraying any guise of uniformity and indicating that the document has multiple origins—that is, multiple sources of information, including prior documents, standardized templates, and individualized commentary. This example exhibits the kind of collaborative writing that characterizes many workplace documents and demonstrates that there is in fact some room for personality via intervention into even standardized templates. Though this intervention may cause the document to fail tests for uniformity, it actually works in favor of its authors and their institution. The document conveys straightforward instructions and explanation in a friendly tone and adds a doctor's authentic perspective, which in fact served as the only communication between him and me during this visit. This intervention reflects well on the veterinary center altogether because it shows that its doctors put time into personalizing discharge instructions even when they cannot meet face-to-face with clients; the institution is

concerned with efficiency and thus relies upon a template, but is not willing to sacrifice accuracy of information, trust, and quality of interactions.

Tinkering with the language in this section exposes alternative formulations and their likely effects. Here I rewrite the doctor's intervention to better match the surrounding language:

Zoey appears very good today. However, she presented with a white blood cell count that is too low for chemotherapy. Please be advised that some cats require as much as 5 weeks in between CCNU treatments instead of the standard 3 weeks. Please schedule an oncology appointment in the next 2 weeks (ideally about 1 week) to recheck her cbc and determine if it is high enough for a second treatment. In the future please schedule oncology appointments every 4-5 weeks instead of every 3.

I have mimicked the more clinical language in the earlier history section, with statements like “*she presented with a white blood cell count*” and “*determine if it is high enough,*” and I have integrated the detached yet polite “Please” statements that appear throughout the document (emphases added). Additionally, I have removed the first-person, colloquial language, so that overall, the paragraph matches its surroundings and lacks the personality that the original version presents. While playing with the possibilities here, I noticed additional occasions for depersonalizing the writing with the introduction of more passive voice. I considered rewriting the second sentence as something like, “However, it was determined that her white blood cell count was too low for chemotherapy.” Tinkering turned up other possible formulations, and as I reflected, I realized that passive voice in this instance would produce stronger detachment, as though no particular doctor or medical professional were making these determinations. An exercise in rewriting such as the one I performed here helps writers identify variations and their

effects, as well as work on the difficult but sometimes necessary task of matching one's writing with its surroundings. The main "slot" or "opening" (opportunity for intervention) that this exercise identifies is the possibility of integrating personalized, colloquial language among even highly constrained and standardized writing. It indicates that sometimes deviating from the norms (such as the norm dictating that professional writing be uniform) can bolster one's ethos rather than diminish it.

Analyzing and experimenting with this document demonstrates the inventive potential of rewriting prose at the sentence level. I argue, then, that exercises focused on vocabulary, sentence structure, and voice can effectively supplement the study of conventional forms in professional writing courses. Such exercises expose writers to unexpected avenues for inserting greater nuance into what may initially appear mechanical writing that requires merely following a recommended outline. Tinkering with language adds a "creative" dimension to professional writing that could provide a fruitful alternative to the theoretical work that instructors often use to elevate their courses above the rote and mechanical. Tinkering requires interactive engagement with texts and fuels reflection on the uses and effects of language; it can therefore generate the intellectual content that instructors seek in preparing courses that go beyond modeling generic writing. Tinkering requires students to read models closely, in search of unexplored "slots" that when manipulated, produce interesting new effects. In my next experiment, I tinker with a typical model cover letter to identify which slots go unacknowledged by instructional materials.

Experiment #2: Exploring Options in a Standard Job Letter

The chapter on producing job applications in *Writing that Works* focuses mainly on organization and content. It advises readers about what to include in cover letters and résumés

and prescribes organizational strategies. Cover letters should show rather than tell, using examples as evidence and limiting each body paragraph to just one example. A form is given, and readers are instructed in how to fill it. As for language, writers should write concisely, avoid “I” in their résumés, and favor action verbs and keywords appropriate to the position in question. What does such advice leave out? To what else in sample documents should we direct our attention? Writers who examine standard workplace genres and templates or samples may learn where such documents favor customization, ranging from basic and mundane slots (insert your name or company name here) to more substantive ones (add a description of your specific product or announcement here). But actually playing with the language in sample documents (whether they come from a book, a classmate, or one’s own writing) sensitizes writers to other aspects of the writing that permit variation; recognizing and then manipulating these slots can produce more nuanced, inventive writing in professional and other contexts.⁷³

I tinkered with the language in a brief, dry, and conventional cover letter provided by Alan Bond and Nancy Schuman in *300+ Successful Business Letters for All Occasions* in order to expose unacknowledged slots. Here is the original text:

Dear Name:

As you may know, my present company, Taylor Baker Inc., has recently merged with the Chatfield HiTec Corporation in Boston. As a result of this merger my position as a senior-level controller will be phased out in the very near future. For that reason, this

⁷³ Some manipulations serve what we might call “bad” writing like bureaucratese. Rearranging a sentence, for instance, may facilitate the use of passive voice so as to shift responsibility for an accident or problem. Even when such writing approaches sketchy ethical boundaries, it nonetheless demonstrates tactical manipulation that produces nuance.

letter and attached résumé is my application for a position in your company's financial department.

As a senior-level controller, I am an active participant in the development and implementation of Taylor Baker's financial strategies, combining creativity and experience to provide advice and guidance on both a divisional level and to corporate management. Focusing on overall profit-and-loss goals and objectives, my responsibilities include developing asset management programs, interfacing with engineering program management, and coordinating with the technology group for ongoing systems development consistent with business needs.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the possibility of working for your company.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Signature (Bond and Schuman 171)

Beginning with the first sentence, I experimented with word order and noticed that rearrangement created different emphases and changed how the writer characterized his or her circumstances. For example, I rewrote the first sentence in two ways: "As you may know, Chatfield HiTec Corporation in Boston has recently merged with my present company, Taylor Baker Inc." and "As you may know, my present company, Taylor Baker Inc., has recently been combined with Chatfield HiTec Corporation in Boston." Where the model's original first sentence attributes the action of merging to Taylor Baker Inc., both of my alternatives

deemphasize Taylor Baker's role in the merger. The first alternative attributes the action to Chatfield HiTec, and the second uses passive voice to obscure whose agency was responsible for the merger. Both alternatives could present the merger in a less favorable light by shifting responsibility away from the writer's company toward an outside entity: perhaps the merger happened suddenly and for reasons unknown to the writer. I also noticed that removing the introductory clause "As you may know" would shift the letter's tone from the start, deemphasizing any common knowledge the writer and reader share and beginning instead with a blunter statement like "My present company has recently merged..."

With the second sentence, I used substitution to further modify how the writer characterizes his or her situation. The original uses passive voice to displace blame for the impending loss of the writer's position. He or she writes diplomatically that it "will be phased out." My alternatives eliminate passive voice to emphasize that the writer will lose his or her position. I played with different verb tenses to evoke more and less urgency. My alternatives include: 1) "As a result of this merger I will lose my position as a senior-level controller in the very near future"; 2) "As a result of this merger I will lose my position as a senior-level controller very soon"; and 3) "As a result of this merger I am losing my position as a senior-level controller very soon." All three variations describe a more dire situation than the original, with #3 presenting the most urgent case with the verb phrase "I *am* losing." Substituting "very soon" for "in the very near future" could also evoke greater urgency in eliminating extra verbiage to get straight to the point (i.e., "I need a job now"). This substitution also highlights that professional discourse can grow long-winded in order to obscure emotion; the phrase "in the very near future" sounds detached because it exemplifies formal discourse rather than everyday language.

Finally, with the third sentence, I used addition and substitution to continue playing with the tone that the writer produces in explaining why he or she is inquiring about a new position. The original sentence elides the obvious point that due to the company merger and eventual phase-out of the writer's job, he or she must find a new position and is therefore submitting an application. I shifted this sentence away from its original enthymematic structure toward a more straightforward declaration with these two variations: "For that reason, I am seeking a new position. This letter and attached résumé is my application for a position in your company's financial department" and "For that reason, I must seek a new position. Please accept this letter and the attached résumé as my application for a position in your company's financial department." Both variations come right out and state the need for a new position in a short, declarative sentence that could attract attention for both its pathos and sentence structure (so far, it is the shortest sentence). The second variation presents greater urgency with the verb phrase "*must seek*" and therefore may command attention and even evoke sympathy from readers. In a third variation, I intervened further in the original sentence to deviate widely from its original sentiments (and those of my other variations), with this revision: "This merger has provided me an opportunity to seek a new and challenging position with your company's financial department." This sentence characterizes the writer's circumstances in the most positive light, with the previous possibilities portraying the situation either neutrally or slightly negatively.

Tinkering with just this first paragraph, painstaking as it may seem, reveals a significant opening for invention when constructing job application letters. Describing one's reason for searching for employment (as well as the occasion for writing more generally) calls for creative consideration of tone, ethos, and pathos. Accounting for something like a merger or one's failure to advance in a previous position requires some careful rhetorical thinking. One might feel

annoyed, anxious, or optimistic, and the feelings one chooses to represent in writing affect how readers respond. Cultivating an appropriate tone in this situation requires one not just to consider content—the focus of most textbook advice on situations such as this one—but also to fiddle with phrasing. In tinkering with verb tenses, passive and active voice, and sentence structure, I realized how subtle changes in language could recast this letter as more and less optimistic. My tinkering revealed openings for intervention, and even the development of some personality through pathos, while sensitizing me to the subtle ways in which small-scale grammatical manipulations contribute to larger-scale rhetorical effects.

Tinkering with the second paragraph of this sample cover letter revealed additional openings. For instance, I considered small variations, such as converting present-tense verbs as in “I am an active participant” into the past tense. Casting the letter in the past might characterize the writer as less active and ready to work a new position because his or her previous position has ended; though experienced, he or she is not a current contributor to the field. I also drew attention to some bulky, complex phrases, which I associate with corporate or bureaucratic language that seems opaque to me but would probably match some of the keywords that hiring agents expect to see. Phrases like “overall profit-and-loss goals and objectives,” “asset management programs,” and “ongoing systems development” might be substituted for more concise, down-to-earth language that while unexpected, could convey information more clearly and crisply, injecting nuance into an otherwise dry and jargon-laden document. I also stripped sentences down to their basic subjects and verbs, again to eliminate bulky phrases and to emphasize actions rather than topics. What results is perhaps too simplistic and lacks description:

As a senior controller, I develop and implement Baker’s financial plans. I combine my creativity and experience to guide corporate managers and

colleagues in my division. I develop asset management programs, communicate with the engineers, and coordinate with the technology group to develop systems for our business.

Manipulating language through reduction might reveal to applicants openings for enhancing and elaborating. Since this stripped-down version repeats “I” several times, an alternative strategy that it unearths is beginning sentences without “I” or choosing subjects other than oneself in this traditionally self-descriptive genre.

Finally, tinkering with the first sentence of the final paragraph revealed to me options for adding signs of confidence or uncertainty into this genre. The original sentence strikes me as clunky because it contains so many prepositional phrases, and it also hedges slightly with the phrase “the *possibility* of working for your company.” One alternative reduces uncertainty and even approaches presumptuousness by concisely declaring, “I look forward to discussing a new position with your company.” This sentence assumes that following receipt of this letter, the writer will be invited to interview. Furthermore, the phrase “a new position” could suggest that the company will create an entirely new job to suit this applicant, although initially I meant for the position to be new only to the applicant (i.e., he or she needs a new position). An alternative revision adds rather than reduces uncertainty. In this possibility, the writer risks appearing unconfident in an attempt to sound polite and not to assume anything: “I look forward to *possibly* gaining a position with your company, *if* one becomes available.”

Tinkering with samples seems most fruitful when enacted materially, as a tangible practice of writing, rather than more hypothetically during a discussion. Students can imagine and then articulate alternative phrasings during the in-class workshops typical of composition pedagogies. However, actually getting into a text and writing or typing out separate possibilities

is a generative practice that often fuels additional possibilities, manipulation spurring intervention and then further invention. In the final example above, for instance, I did not envision the concluding “if” clause until I had already written out the initial clause and noticed how it hedges. Really getting inside a text requires working with it materially through rewriting. Tinkering must remain indeterminate, as we cannot predict what individual attempts will produce, but it is a generally productive practice that exposes tinkerers to new, or as yet unrealized, variations in language and syntax.

Experiment #3: Gathering Creative Resources for Intervening in Professional Writing

Examining templates and sample letters drew my attention to additional “creative” openings,⁷⁴ which I could then look for in other genres of writing. In this way, tinkering with specific genres like cover letters need not confine one’s discoveries to particular kinds of texts. Because tinkering reveals general options for language play, findings can apply to quite different future encounters with language. Tinkering develops general verbal capabilities, a goal that accords with English curricula broadly and thus contributes to forging productive continuity between professional writing classes and departmental values.

So, as I elaborate the additional openings available to writers of cover letters in particular, I want to acknowledge that they appear in other genres too, “professional” and not. I found that general variations available when constructing sentences include replacing subjects and verbs; rearranging syntax; converting verb tenses; condensing or expanding sentence length; and revising sentence type (e.g., declarative, imperative, interrogative; simple, complex, compound). Replacing typical “I” subjects in a cover letter like the one above might shift emphasis from the writer’s personal experiences toward subject matter relevant to the position. In this way, the

⁷⁴ The primary guides I consulted here were Bond and Schuman, Tepper, and May and McAloney.

writer demonstrates or performs his or her expertise rather than recounting past experiences that required such expertise. When implemented broadly, this variation could shift the cover letter genre from more biographical and narrative to more expository and deliberative (i.e., something like a proposal, offering ideas that the applicant would contribute to the position). Rearranging syntax, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, chiefly shifts emphasis, but as shown above, also reassigns responsibility, particularly when combined with passive voice. Sentence variation in general often improves the rhythm of a text, potentially helping it to stand out (if read). But short, crisp declarative sentences can draw favorable attention in particular because they deviate from the lengthy, complex, and obscure sentences standard to formal written discourse.

Rearrangement may be productive beyond the sentence level too. Instructional guides largely ignore this opening because they focus so much on conventional organization. One of their major goals is to show readers how to format traditional documents. Rearranging paragraphs in a typical cover letter may help one to stand out: rather than beginning with a rote customary introduction, the writer might describe his or her background first, altering the expected sequence and thus gaining attention. Altering sequence in résumés is appropriate when one wishes to stress specific kinds of experience rather than a linear chronology of employment. Exploring rearrangement with students might facilitate worthwhile discussion of variation in professional genres. Acknowledging that résumés permit some variation in sequence but that cover letters appear more rigid encourages a critical examination of these genres and perhaps some subversive thinking about how to change them. Tinkering need not limit class content to sentence-level analysis; it can provide a bridge to broader discussion of topics like genre conventions and reader expectations. Similarly, focusing on a dry, grammatical principle like

passive voice can lead to productive conversation about obfuscation in professional discourse, both its ethical implications and rhetorical features.

Word choice too offers a considerable opening when composing professional discourse. Writers may deem much vocabulary prescribed because models include repetitive examples of appropriate language, and job ads and field-specific jargon provide keywords and buzzwords. Applicants want to demonstrate up-to-date knowledge and an ability to “talk the talk”—to cultivate a polite, professional ethos and show their expertise. However, writers need not limit themselves to the tried and trite combinations that textbooks offer, nor to the buzzwords that most other applicants are using. More surprising and unusual language can attract favorable attention because it avoids sounding stale (though as the JP Morgan cover letter indicates, there are limits to how unusual and hyperbolic such language should be). I noticed this opening when reviewing a sample pair of sentences designated for use in reference letters: “I can recommend Ms. Jean Weinman, without any hesitation, for the position of assistant director of human resources in your organization. She is intelligent, accurate, personable, and discrete” (Bond and Schuman 212). Are the four adjectives that conclude this sample descriptive and arresting enough to convince readers of Ms. Weinman’s actual capabilities? Or will they sound rote and reused because they are so common in reference letters? Which related words might capture these characteristics in a more interesting or complex way? Such questions might occupy class discussions. This slot provides significant opportunities for injecting personality into one’s writing and for intriguing readers, but is much more open-ended than other opportunities for variation simply due to the incredible range of language available to us.

The general types of manipulation that I have elaborated here do not require diverging entirely from a prescribed form. Tinkering can productively supplement instruction in

conventional forms and can help writers add nuance to texts that otherwise adhere fairly faithfully to norms and expectations. In this way, instructors can introduce creativity into professional writing without sacrificing students' (and perhaps administrators') priorities—that they learn expected forms that will help them succeed. However, tinkering also reveals more subversive means of variation, which while keeping to the *spirit* of conventional documents, alter the frame or form guiding them. I propose a professional version of de/composition or deformation, a type of tinkering that creatively revises traditional job application genres while adhering to what I see as their largest constraint: convincing readers that you, the applicant, have the requisite skills, knowledge, and professionalism.

IV. DE/COMPOSING THE JOB APPLICATION

De/composition, as a mode of deformation, diverges from conventional literary analysis and interpretation in that it *performs* its insights, rather than just reporting on them. It *demonstrates* one's reading of a text by transforming it. Reading a de/composition requires that one infer an analysis or interpretation (unless given an accompanying reflection or explanation); the reader must ask, "What is the de/composer trying to *show* me?" In a job application generated via de/composition, the applicant would *perform* his or her skills, knowledge, and professionalism instead of reporting on them. This performance requires more than just showing over telling because it transforms some aspect of the writing in order to represent one's qualifications. The applicant seeks to persuade through demonstration, not reporting, so rhetorically, the writing may resemble epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric over judicial rhetoric proving success through past experiences. Instead of analyzing oneself and then recounting the results of that analysis as

in a conventional cover letter or résumé, the job seeker performs through composing. What results is writing with energy, writing that *does* something. A de/composed job application will diverge more from a standard application than a de/composed poem commonly diverges from its original.

Textbooks acknowledge that successful job applicants must perform *professionalism* in their job applications. They stress neat, polished, and polite writing that diverges in tone and register from colloquial speech, as well as clean documents printed on high-quality paper reserved for professional purposes.⁷⁵ Readers may regard the attention to detail demonstrated in a job application as evidence of how likely the applicant is to perform a job with necessary fastidiousness. When Larry Beason tested business professionals' responses to written errors, he found that some respondents, particularly those working in banking and investment, "saw errors as indicative of someone who struggles with details" (53). Importantly, they also extrapolated struggling with syntactic details to struggling with numerical details. One respondent, a vice-president at a brokerage firm, reflected that "It's somewhat bothersome because if someone makes an error in writing a word, are they going to make an error in typing a number? In our business, we work with money, and a small error with a digit can make a big difference to a client" (53).⁷⁶ So, particularly for jobs in finance, engineering, the sciences, research, writing, and editing, where attention to detail is essential, applicants can perform qualifications other than general professionalism by submitting polished and exact materials. They can also show their

⁷⁵ In this way, the teaching of professional writing can emphasize surface-level details that composition instructors often downplay in courses devoted to developing complex critical thinking. This emphasis marks another way in which professional writing courses can diverge considerably from other English courses.

⁷⁶ Similarly, when I worked with biology students as a writing tutor, their professor stressed correctness in grammar, spelling, and punctuation because she believed that students who disregard "rules" for writing might do the same with rules for working in the lab.

attention to detail by making keen observations, perhaps proposing how a target company might improve profit or reduce expenditures.

Making observations and proposing solutions in a cover letter can demonstrate one's knowledge too. The cover letter becomes an occasion for discussing the substance or subject matter involved in a position, rather than describing oneself. To reform the cover letter in this way, sentence structure must shift away from typical "I" statements. The letter may still adhere to its traditional form while limiting its biographical content, so that the applicant shows the thinking that he or she will contribute to the position, as in an interview. Many fields already require applicants to show their expertise in portfolios and writing samples that supplement general applications. However, like cover letters, these are often oriented toward the past, illustrating the thinking that one has already done, whereas a reformative cover letter would orient itself more toward the future. Furthermore, beginning an application with substance over biography can attract attention before readers even broach supplementary materials.


For jobs in healthcare, counseling, and service industries, a reformative application might perform sensitivity and the ability to work well with others. Cultivating appropriate pathos and a serious, sympathetic, and understanding tone would transform the writing into something more like a helpful conversation between individuals. To convey his or her qualifications, the writer would avoid a detached presentation of background information and instead use writing to project the inquisitive, understanding, and confident persona of a caretaker or counselor. He or she might rely upon an audio or video format instead of written text in order to accentuate this persona.

In creative and communication industries, a reformative application would perform language skills and fresh thinking. The applicant might employ nuanced, unexpected language,

avoiding hackneyed expressions and perhaps conventional organization. He or she might show off concise writing (particularly for jobs in journalism or advertising), compose in a distinctive voice, highlight a wide vocabulary, or demonstrate foreign language skills with a multilingual application. For positions oriented more toward design (print or digital), applicants could show their design knowledge and skill by constructing original, provocative formats or presenting required information in an unusual form.

Consider Jordan Fowler's creative approach to securing a job in marketing and public relations. Figure 4 is a partial screenshot of his unconventional document. Alongside a traditional application, Fowler submitted an entertaining, humorous yet still informative description of his experiences and interests via a fake *Facebook* profile. The profile combines elements of a résumé (contact information, educational background, objective) with the descriptions of past experiences typical of a cover letter. Jordan includes authentic work experiences, such as consultations, video production, and business development, alongside silly messages that express his personality and sense of humor. While certainly creative, this application risks seeming too goofy. Still, it accomplishes the goal of deformation: displaying one's abilities rather than assuring readers of them. Because Jordan sought a job in marketing and social media, demonstrating his skills with *Facebook* and Photoshop (which he used to tinker with a screenshot of a traditional *Facebook* profile) would be very persuasive (and he comments on a blog post that he did secure a job using this document). Jordan effectively customized every aspect of the profile through humor and inventive rewriting of traditional *Facebook* elements, even the ads and events (not pictured in Figure 4). He performs skills, creative thinking, and personality traits commensurate with the position in question. In creative fields in particular, this more deviant approach to the job application could attract favorable attention.






facebook 1 2 Search



Wall

- Info
- Photos (49)
- Notes
- Friends

Friends (1084)


-  Justin Bieber
-  Barbara
-  Dick Cheney
-  The Cadbury Gorilla
-  Martin Aggett

Jordan Fowler

📍 Fog Cutter. Headace Eliminator. Value Amplifier.
 Leadership Studies at Southwestern Seminary 🏠 Lives in Fort Worth, Texas 🏠
 From Dallas, Texas 📅 Born on July 1 📧 jordanpfowler@gmail.com | 817.889.1487

Education and Work


Employers



Make It Rain 4 U
 Creative Communications Director, Brownie Provider
 Fort Worth, Texas


Currently seeking a job in marketing, business development or communications and PR related field. Experienced background as Creative Communications Director at a 3,000 member organization.

Grad School




Southwestern Seminary
 Class of 1995 · Master's Degree · Leadership Studies · New Testament, Just in case you ever need ancient Greek translated


College





Stephen F. Austin State University



Jordan Fowler
 Found out results of my John O'Connor Research Aptitude Tests. Good news: 95th percentile in inductive and analytical logic, and creative idea generation. Bad news: Bottom 5th percentile in fine motor finger dexterity meaning that if you get locked into one of those bathrooms that requires the micro-screwdriver to open, you are messed over.
 Like · Comment ·




Jordan Fowler
 Took brownies to my staff meeting. Everyone got large pieces but the high performers got M&M ones with a dollop of cool whip. Man, I like that word 'dollop.' I need to somehow use it in an ad campaign.

Wall Pictures

Like · Comment ·



Jordan Fowler
 Doing a clarity consult with the good folk at Dr. J's Exemplary Medicine in Southlake Texas. As a bonus, got a free Organic Chicken Pox Vaccine update Now much less afraid of preschool aged children.

Figure 4: Jordan Fowler's De/Composed Job Application

Fowler's inventive new take on job application genres lacks subtlety and diverges considerably from tradition. In fact, his satirical *Facebook* profile would fit in comfortably with some of the examples in *Fakes*. Yet reinventing form does not require deviating from an ethos appropriate to one's field; Fowler's energetic, wacky, yet inventive performance meets expectations in many creative fields. Rachel Kaufman, author of *Cover Letters for Creative People*, encourages job seekers to craft nontraditional cover letters and in a blog post lists several examples that resulted in interviews. She argues, "A nontraditional cover letter can take the form of a list of quotes, a table or chart or an infographic. It doesn't even have to be a letter at all, if it succeeds in getting a hiring manager's attention" (n. pag.). Each of these forms could serve de/composition by encapsulating an applicant's skills and knowledge. In a list, one could display skills in finding and compiling information, an activity required of many jobs that entail research, for example. And one might build a table, chart, or infographic to demonstrate conceptual, analytical thinking; attention to detail; organizational aptitude; design skills; and the ability to summarize material sharply and in a small, easy-to-read space. Kaufman includes examples of effective charts, as well as a strategy she calls "eating the company's dog food"—creatively incorporating its products or services into one's application. As an example, she notes that in seeking a job with a company that makes presentation software, one candidate successfully submitted a cover letter composed nontraditionally as a presentation. Showing skill with company products offers another way of performing one's interest and expertise.

Deformative applications can thus range from more conventional to more subversive. Typically the mode of discourse will change, from something more narrative and oriented toward the past to something more expository or deliberative, oriented toward the present and future. Additionally, tone, ethos, and pathos often shift, at least subtly. In more technical and design-

oriented fields, de/composition encourages significant changes to organization and format. I envision this kind of deformative production intermingling form and content, so that one's approach conveys one's qualifications more directly than in a conventional application. Form helps communicate one's message, with "form" signifying more than just the global layout or organization; it describes production at a local level too, at the level of sentences, phrases, and even words. Through de/composition, form transforms from something relatively invisible, taken for granted because it is so standardized, to something more variable, with more potential for creative intervention—sometimes more subtle and sometimes more extreme.

As we saw with Jordan Fowler, applicants can downplay the risk involved in deforming their applications by submitting them alongside conventional writing. The creative materials attract initial attention, while the traditional ones provide some security and show readers that the applicant can abide rules and convention. Even while diminishing risk, producing multiple versions remains faithful to the spirit of tinkering, for the applicant is essentially trying out different possibilities, experimenting with the genre and reflecting on strategies for achieving the best results. What Mann and Ketchum describe as a management tool—multi-use, or the creation of several different documents from one—becomes instead a creative tool for the proliferation of versions. I envision creativity here as *resourcefulness*, an ability to make something interesting or unexpected of the materials at hand. Tinkerers manipulate available resources to try out different possibilities in search of the best use of those resources.

V. TEACHING INVENTIVE SELF-CREATION

The deformative practice that I have theorized may apply more easily to some fields than others; in its most demonstrative forms, it offers opportunities for writers to show off technical, design, and creative skills that may be less appropriate when applying for more cerebral or routine positions. Yet I argue that deformation could effectively supplement traditional job application assignments in professional writing courses. It promotes a form of tinkering that encourages students to experiment with language and form, and it requires that they grasp the norms of these genres, to an extent, before deforming them. Experimental assignments can reinforce conventions, with creative outcomes existing in a productive dialectic with the traditional documents from which they diverge. Recall that the introductory instructions in *Fakes* advise writers to study the patterns and conventions in their chosen genres before distorting them. Writers have to know what they are deviating from if they wish to deviate at all.

In addition, I suggest that in planning and executing a deformative job application, students must seriously consider the kind of professional persona they wish to perform. They must select key skills, knowledge, and personality traits to show off. This task of self-creation is essential to constructing effective application materials of both traditional and nontraditional varieties and is a significant difficulty for many professional writing students (particularly those who will not be applying for actual jobs and internships until later in their college careers). Even when a sample document or template demonstrates where to place all applicable information, students must still find and articulate individualized material to fill those designated slots. Self-creation requires more than adhering to a format. It is a significant occasion for invention that demands imagining and then projecting a suitable ethos or persona and recalling, selecting, and then representing important experiences and qualifications.

Developing different personae and identities in professional materials is an experimental task. Whether consciously or not, the writer is trying on different ways of thinking and expressing himself or herself, observing what results, and then perhaps adjusting those results. Writing letters of application requires adopting a voice and an ethos that often feels inauthentic; it requires posturing as though one is more confident and mature than one actually feels. My student Colin struggled with articulating a career path and sounding confident in his application materials. In an end-of-semester reflection, he articulated the creativity and difficulty involved in adopting an appropriate persona:

Professional writing is always “creative” in the ways that the writer has to consider who his or her audience is. The creativity comes in dealing with the constraints that different audiences create. Writing for different audiences has different levels of required “maturity”. For example, even if you want to be less serious but are writing for a board of CEO’s, you may have no choice but to write in a serious, formal tone. (2)

Writers have to construct that maturity. As much as developing maturity is an internal struggle, I propose that a process of building texts can also support it. A material practice of reading samples, trying out their suggestions, and reflecting on their results can guide self-invention.⁷⁷

Templates can certainly direct students’ invention by offering generative topics and sample language to imitate, but they can also prompt documents that lack personalization, with little distinguishing one student’s from another’s. Since the driving force behind a deformative

⁷⁷ In arguing for the importance of attending to style, Richard Lanham asserts in *Style: An Anti-Textbook* that students can find a sense of self through playing with a range of writing styles. He suggests that the invention of a self happens externally even though it seems a purely internal property: “What it is essential to see is that the quest for ‘sincerity’ leads not to an examination of feelings but to an examination of words. Sincerity begins not in feelings but in sentences” (117).

application is a set of skills and knowledge, preparing one demands that students foreground a particular person with particular competencies. The representation of this persona cannot take a backseat to writing that simply sounds right on the surface—an easy outcome for students drafting traditional documents based on samples. Once students have fully maximized this persona in the more demonstrative arena of deformation, they can translate it into something subtler in a conventional form.

Creating multiple versions of traditional résumés and cover letters also exercises inventive self-creation. Students must consider the different personae that different job opportunities favor. They can learn how to project multiple possibilities by experimenting with the selection, combination, arrangement, and representation of their qualifications and background. Notice how one of my students experimented with multiple personae in developing two versions of his résumé, shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6. Version 1 responded to a genetics lab seeking technicians, while version 2 inquired into possible positions at a local hospital that values community service.

Zachary -----

School

1234 BCD Boulevard
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
(724) 123-4567
xxx7@pitt.edu

Home (after August 1, 2013)

123 EFG Road
Indiana, PA 15701
(724) 123-4567
xxx@gmail.com

Education University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
B.S. Molecular Biology (minor in chemistry), 2013

GPA: 3.943/4.0

Relevant Courses: Molecular Biology, Molecular Genetics Laboratory (with writing practicum), Biochemistry Laboratory, Biophysical Chemistry, Macromolecular Structure and Function

Related Experience *Lab Experience* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2011 – present)
Work in two labs with Vernon Twombly and Craig Peebles that emphasize independent work and collaboration with other members of the lab. Learned how to use balances, centrifuges, spectrophotometers, autoclaves, and pipetters. Read and discuss recent molecular biology literature. Learned how to complete a large amount of work in a limited time.

Leadership Experience (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2009 – 2010)
Completed the Emerging Leaders program at the University of Pittsburgh. Involved attending two-hour classes two days a week, plus several extra meetings. Learned techniques for effectively communicating within groups. Learned how to deal with different personalities in a group.

Interpersonal Experience (Indiana, Pennsylvania, 2009 – present)
Work as a private tutor for chemistry and biology over the summer. Learned how to communicate scientific ideas to a nonscientific audience. Helped improve verbal communication skills.

Related Skills
- Proficient with Microsoft Word and Excel, along with statistical software, such as MiniTab
- Highly organized and detail-oriented; good at organizing data in a lab notebook
- Able to multitask in a lab setting

Honors
- Member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars
- Member of the Delta Epsilon Iota honor society
- Received \$4,000 Andy Kuzneski Scholarship for academic excellence

Figure 5: Version 1 of Zach's Résumé

Zachary -----	
School	<p>1234 BCD Boulevard Pittsburgh, PA 15217 (724) 123-4567 xxx7@pitt.edu</p>
	<p>Home (after August 1, 2013) 123 EFG Road Indiana, PA 15701 (724) 123-4567 xxx@gmail.com</p>
Education	<p>University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania <i>B.S. Molecular Biology (minor in chemistry, certificate in conceptual foundations of medicine), 2013</i> GPA: 3.943/4.0</p> <p>Relevant Courses: Molecular Biology, Biochemistry Laboratory, Metabolic Pathways, Human Physiology Macromolecular Structure and Function</p>
Volunteer Experience	<p><i>Concession Stand Volunteer</i> (Indiana, PA 2009 – 2012) - Raised money for the Indiana Area High School marching band - Stocked food in concession stands, prepared food - Ran the cash register, interacted with customers</p> <p><i>Tutor</i> (Indiana, PA 2009 – present) - Tutor local students in chemistry and biology - Remain well acquainted with basic life science information</p> <p><i>Book Sale Volunteer</i> (Indiana, PA 2006 – 2008) - Volunteered at St. Thomas More University Parish in Indiana - Sorted books into categories - Helped move books from trucks to sale location</p>
Laboratory Skills	<p><i>Lab of Craig Peebles and Vernon Twombly</i> (Pittsburgh PA, 2011 – present) - Know how to use: balances, spectrophotometers, centrifuges, pipettes, and autoclaves - Learned how to be a member of a team; had to rely on lab members to solve difficult problems - Did a large amount of work in a small amount of time; helped improve time management skills</p>
Related Skills	<p>- Well acquainted with a hospital setting; shadowed several IRMC radiologists (2011-2012) - High degree of empathy and compassion for patients</p>
Honors	<p>- Member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars - Received \$4,000 Andy Kuzneski Scholarship for academic excellence</p>

Figure 6: Version 2 of Zach's Résumé

Though he has limited experiences and awards to shape into a résumé, Zach used them to construct two distinct, yet related and overlapping, identities. Version 1 presents a scientifically-minded, high-achieving student with considerable lab experience, and version 2 presents a high-achieving science student with an extensive volunteer background. I contend that producing

unique separate versions of even mundane documents entails creative work. Even if Zach does not pursue one or the other version when actually applying for jobs, this assignment has prompted him to think through the multiple ways in which he can represent himself as a student and potential employee. It has exposed options and avenues for creativity. In fact, I would characterize this work as experimental in nature. It involves deliberative thinking: “What happens to my persona when I make these changes? What kind of position might suit this persona? How many unique personae can I produce through tinkering?” Zach may have conceived of his application materials as predominantly pertaining to his major of molecular biology, but by selecting the hospital as a potential employer and thereby choosing to substantially modify his initial résumé, he explored multiple career options and personal identities.

VI. TEACHING CRITICAL TEMPLATE LITERACY AND TINKERING

Incorporating tinkering into any class can help to inculcate in students an interactive and generative orientation toward texts. I contend that this orientation holds special value in the sphere of professional writing because it relies so heavily upon productively adapting forms and documents to new uses. Practice with tinkering exposes students to myriad ways in which templates and sample texts can be revised and adapted; it raises their awareness of the customary slots that populate all documents. These slots facilitate intervention; they challenge writers to move from simply copying toward copying with a difference. The ability to recognize these slots is especially valuable in the workplace, where so much emphasis falls upon time management, efficiency, and convenience. The ability to foresee how current texts might be adapted for future

uses is a significant critical skill that can save time and expense. It requires textual awareness, a recognition of the potentialities that existing texts (including templates) hold inside of them. I call this skill *critical template literacy*. It requires developing first, an awareness that texts indeed contain slots for reuse and intervention; second, an ability to recognize these slots; and third, an inventive capacity to fill them. Additionally, critical template literacy involves an understanding of both the flexibility and the limitations that templates provide. Two reciprocal pedagogical practices exercise this literacy: on the one hand, evaluating templates and identifying both their constraints and slots, and on the other hand, imagining how to build a template out of a genre or set of texts (which requires recognizing their slots too).

To develop the initial awareness that slots exist, students must be exposed to many texts. They thus begin to see that multiple texts emerge from existing templates, with *template* defined as a general shape or form from which to begin building.⁷⁸ Sorting out this array of texts may expose which are reliable, effective forms to reuse and adapt in future writing. Students may recognize which forms and which language have long-term durability and dependability. These are texts that have high rhetorical velocity: their textual or rhetorical features facilitate easy uptake and updating by future parties. For instance, a text might be especially authoritative in its content and sources, making it a reliable tool for accurately conveying information, which will not require much updating. It may be well-organized modular writing that uses bullet points or separate sections, so that its parts are easily segmented and extracted, allowing for convenient adaptation. Its mode of delivery may make it especially amenable to circulating and updating

⁷⁸ Though it does not refer specifically to templates for writing, the *OED*'s general definition for *template* can apply to making and building texts: "An instrument used as a gauge or guide in bringing any piece of work to the desired shape" ("Template, *n.*"). Something as mundane as a blank Word document acts as a template with settings such as fonts, spacing, margin size, and paper orientation shaping and constraining the writing that a user produces. In this way templates act upon all our compositions.

among a wide audience. Students see how existing texts serve as resources for future texts, given their textual and rhetorical properties. They may begin composing with such properties in mind, aiming to create texts that will be durable too.

Instructors can easily expose students to this array of texts in a professional writing course because there are innumerable templates and sample documents on the Internet and in textbooks and how-to guides. Providing so many examples facilitates tinkering in general by promising a wide field of raw materials from which to develop new documents. These raw materials may serve as templates or as sample language that students can choose to reuse and adapt for their own purposes. Instructors can supplement these examples with student writing, using both to develop in students a sense of the common slots that different genres of professional writing provide. Discussion of both student and professional examples would not concern just what is and is not working in them. It would also be a deliberative, future-oriented inquiry into what else can be done with these existing documents. Key questions might include: In what ways can these documents be adapted? In what other situations can you imagine using them? Where do you see in them openings or opportunities for further invention? Is it worth extracting any of their language or formatting features for use in future situations?

Examining sample texts as potential blueprints for templates can develop students' genre knowledge and give them practice in recognizing textual patterns—in format but also more locally in language and syntax. They thus grow adept at finding more obscure places where they as writers can intervene in expected forms to produce surprising and inventive results. Asking students not only to analyze examples but also to rewrite portions of them facilitates this writing skill. It is in rewriting that students might discover the more local options available to them, as opposed to the global options that a more cursory comparison reveals.

Turning from full sample documents to templates themselves also helps students see where slots commonly exist and how they might be filled in inventive ways. Critical analysis of templates facilitates conversation about the interplay of creativity and constraint that underlies so much professional writing. This analysis would consider the kinds of writing and designing that a given template seems to allow on the one hand and preclude on the other hand—that is, how much it constrains composition. Examining templates in this way also moves students toward the third condition above, toward learning how to fill preexisting standardized documents in inventive ways. Discussion could consider how a given template might be adapted in more imaginative ways as well as more conservative ones.⁷⁹ Studying form and language does not require sacrificing the intellectual discussion that scholars like Surma and Ronald have linked to theoretical inquiry. Complex questions about meeting readers’ expectations, deviating from convention, and drawing attention to oneself can emerge out of analyzing mundane artifacts like templates.

Professional writing courses commonly expose students to a variety of genres and specific documents, so that typical class periods feature discussion of sample texts. It is instructive, for example, to examine ineffective or inappropriate samples like the JP Morgan cover letter, or even to study selections from *Fakes* to reinforce genre knowledge and to investigate the degree to which writers can deviate from convention and still be taken seriously.

⁷⁹ Scholars have acknowledged the importance of developing students’ awareness of how *digital* templates limit options for composition. Anders Fagerjord has critically examined templates available in software used for building websites, blogs, and presentations, paying specific attention to the ways in which even something as simple as a blank PowerPoint slide constrains composition. He argues that teaching the skills of digital literacy requires attuning students to the prescripts that accompany digital templates. Kristin L. Arola updates Fagerjord’s argument in a recent article drawing attention to the limited creative avenues that supposedly liberating Web 2.0 platforms provide. Both scholars emphasize how templates make choices for us, not how we can creatively override or intervene in them. Arola comes closer, in suggesting that “Performing analysis, producing redesigns, and generating and using terminology helps students engage with the power of the template” (10), but she looks more for alternatives to templates than for ways of using them more inventively.

But actually participating in the process of constructing a “fake” or an awful cover letter would further (and perhaps more deeply) sensitize students to the thresholds that exist between boring yet conventional writing and inventive yet serious documents where good work still occurs. Stretching students’ writing toward the more unconventional may also help them later introduce subtler, less risky variations into their writing. Experimental exercises focusing on punctuation, word choice, and sentence length and structure can supplement such creative assignments. These give students practice in tinkering, which they can apply to producing new documents from scratch or to writing with the constraints that populate their templates.

I advocate for assigning ample space to “creative” or experimental writing exercises in professional writing courses, despite their traditional designation as “practical” courses. Many of my past students have reflected that they appreciate and enjoy professional writing because it seems to them their first “practical” writing course. They contrast it with literature courses and first-year composition because assigned writing genres match those that they will have to complete at some point in “the real world.” They see themselves gaining experience that will transfer directly beyond the classroom, in contrast to the more “creative,” essayistic prose required in other English classes, which they admit to padding with “fluff.” Thus, I recognize that a more creative approach to the teaching of professional writing may meet with resistance from students, as have my previous attempts at incorporating theories of writing, rhetoric, and professionalism into class readings and discussions. Students may think that supplementary theory and “fun” assignments disrupt the practical, straightforward approach that otherwise seems to dominate the course. As I suggested in Chapter 3, exercises in tinkering may appear unnecessary or unhelpful to students who become accustomed to matching each assignment with an eventual end goal in the sequence. Instructors must reinforce the value of developing general

verbal capability while also pursuing specific course goals and preparing for upcoming assignments.

But more importantly, tinkering, experimenting, or playing with language and format should be a goal of all writing courses, including professional writing. Courses in professional writing can retain their practical orientation while embracing a playful one too. Play and practice are not opposed. Play is practice with the English language. The capacity to play with language, to try out different possibilities, is a practical skill. It facilitates a general expanding and strengthening of language skills, building a repertoire that students can rely upon as both readers and writers. Play gives students a flexibility that they can only gain through experience with manipulating language. In professional writing, such flexibility can help students craft more interesting or surprising documents out of what are often assumed to be boring and dry forms.

5. REUSE EVERY DAY: POPULAR MODELS FOR INVENTIVE INTERVENTION

Digital environments are perhaps the most predictable sites in which to study textual reuse today. Often when I describe this project to others, they respond with questions or suggestions about remix, a term that can denote combination broadly, but which commonly refers to digital audio and video productions⁸⁰ shared, for instance, on *YouTube* and *Facebook*. Such productions are attracting attention today because they are easier than ever to create, given the accessibility of editing software and the availability of digital materials in the public domain. Furthermore, the culture of sharing associated with Web 2.0 applications makes possible a kind of everyday fame, which entices amateur producers to make and tinker in pursuit of the brief but potentially lucrative notoriety that viral videos promise. For those who do not experiment with digital production, remixed songs, videos, and images remain ready examples of reuse. These can be so striking that viewers recognize reuse with only a quick glance or brief listen—in contrast to those alphabetic texts that reveal themselves as reused or recycled only through longer, closer engagement.⁸¹

As I seek to expand the field of derivative writing practices beyond well-worn and expected topics like remix and plagiarism, I use this chapter to investigate a domain dominated

⁸⁰ I consider remix a type of reuse, but the term is used so widely, to mean any reworking of previous materials, that it has become almost synonymous with reuse. An important distinction for me is that a text can be reused without being combined with anything, while remix is generally characterized by combination and revision of its constituent parts.

⁸¹ Viewers who ignore the appendix to *Reality Hunger* might not identify it as reused, at least initially, and even a work of intertextuality as famous as *The Wasteland* may appear “original” to readers unfamiliar with its allusions.

by Internet culture yet not defined by it. Nor do I attend exclusively to the manipulation of multimedia texts, as the Internet also hosts popular works of alphabetic reuse. I analyze Internet culture but extend my concern beyond the commonplace of remix, toward general, everyday manipulation of language and materiality, and acknowledge reuse in other media venues such as television and print news. Reuse, revision, and manipulation are endemic to Internet culture but also appear elsewhere in forms that can add to the inventive strategies that I have been theorizing. In this chapter I thus maintain my focus on *textual* reuse while accounting for allied practices that also involve the reuse of other media. I call this loose collection of environments and media *popular cultures of reuse*, a term that recognizes their prevalence, their appeal to wide audiences, and their treatment of current events while not limiting their circulation to a single communicative outlet.

Emphasizing that reuse is a mundane, durable, and flexible practice requires that I contend with its magnitude—marked, for instance, by the near-daily appearance of new Internet memes. It is an open question of how to intervene productively in such a vast, expanding, and unpredictable domain. Numerous articles and blog posts have attempted to resolve the question of what makes content go viral by cataloging the enduring characteristics of viral videos: e.g., cute animals or children, an element of surprise, general and relatable content, appealing music, a simple message, or a connection to a public figure or authority (Poh; Rosen-Molina; West). But these sources do not consider how reuse in particular facilitates provocative results and more importantly, how specific interventions into preexisting materials serve invention. This chapter addresses on a material level how and where individuals can intervene in surrounding popular cultures. I move beyond subject matter toward the compositional procedures that produce these works in order to identify strategies that can transfer to multiple occasions for composing.

My concern with material procedures leads me away from numerical ratings when judging an artifact's inventiveness. A quantification like "number of views" or "most emailed" can tell us which videos and articles are popular, and therefore perhaps inventive, pointing us toward promising examples for further investigation. But factors such as celebrity endorsement can drive popularity, without providing insight into inventive moves that readers can then enact in their own compositions. Furthermore, I suggest that a piece of writing does not have to reach a wide audience in order for it to be productive. This issue of audience is of particular concern when adapting popular composing methods to the classroom, where effective writing probably will not go viral.

I inquire into popular cultures of reuse by exploring three interrelated topoi that get reiterated and reimagined across popular spheres. I use the term *topoi* in order to signify a common place, a site around which to invent. These places show up repeatedly in terms of either their content or form. They include what I am calling *scrap writing*, *(mis)quotation*, and *de/composed news*. These three topoi are suitable for investigating inventive reuse because each includes common, widespread cases that are not confined to isolated examples. None of them is a fad; each has persisted for some time and predates the Internet in one form or another. Using these topoi as test cases representing dominant current modes of composition, I propose how composers can intervene inventively in popular cultures. From these clusters I uncover alternative ways of thinking about invention at the present moment, leading to strategies that we can apply to composing more generally.

I. TOOLS FOR CRITICAL-CREATIVE TINKERING AMID POPULAR CULTURES OF REUSE

Just what is the “Internet culture” central to popular cultures of reuse? This term could describe a range of settings, as the Internet encompasses many communities, each of which can have its own culture. And it overlaps with domains I have explored in previous chapters, such as literature and professional writing. The web hosts guides to business communication and literary publications like *The Found Poetry Review*. When I refer to *Internet culture*, I refer primarily to a range of sites that participate in the culture of sharing, liking, and commenting that has developed with the rise of Web 2.0 over the past decade or so.⁸² There is interplay, however, between online sites and offline production. Web users can view clips and full episodes of television shows on various Internet sites. So while “popular cultures of reuse” certainly includes Internet, television, and print production, these three modes bleed into one another because the Internet supports a range of media. My label denotes a fluid domain.

Several features make today’s web particularly amenable to reuse and tinkering. Everyday Internet use involves practices of sharing that facilitate tinkering with reused materials, even when changes made to those materials are not foregrounded. We can read the most mundane Web 2.0 activities as cases of reuse. Social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Vine*, for instance, feature liking and sharing functions that allow users to spread articles, videos, images, and quotations to friends and other members of their social networks. These

⁸² It was possible to share content and commentary before Web 2.0, as Internet users could circulate links, images, and other materials via emails, webpages, and early blogs. But Web 2.0 has foregrounded recirculation even in just its interfaces, which encourage recirculation with single-click access. William I. Wolff notes that before Web 2.0, there were fewer online articles linking directly to others. Now, “In the age of Web 2.0, successful sites facilitate the exchange of information between and among other sites. . . . They are Interactive Domains—spaces in which users engage not only to read what is on the screen, but to compose, communicate, create, share, and so on” (Wolff 218).

features enable simple, mechanical copying and redistributing of materials—what we might not traditionally associate with creative remix. But they also facilitate revision of and deviation from these materials. Reuse with minimal intervention (just copying) can easily become reuse with greater, even accidental, intervention. For example, when a *Facebook* user wishes to share a link, a blank text box will automatically appear in which he or she can add an introduction, an explanation, or commentary to the shared content. Viewers can then intervene in that content themselves by adding their own comments to their friend’s contribution. I view the added commentary and shared content as a composite work of reuse, not as separate components. Sharing reinforces that copying is not such straightforward work. What seems just reproduction of original material presents opportunities for intervention from a variety of sources, which can move the reused material in new directions while retaining the initial content.

Furthermore, just moving content from one place to another, de- and re-contextualizing it, is a form of revision itself. The new environment adds materials with which the shared content can interact and produce new meaning through combination, arrangement, and juxtaposition. For example, when several of a user’s *Facebook* friends share the same link, *Facebook* aggregates these on his or her homepage with a heading like “Jane Doe, John Doe, and 5 other friends shared a link.” This aggregation draws attention to the shared content and makes visible a critical mass of interest (and perhaps support or critique). Repetition has consequences, even when it involves a mechanical move like clicking “share” when viewing an article or other artifact, or copying and pasting a link into *Facebook*’s “update status” box.⁸³

⁸³ Over several days in September 2013, my *Facebook* homepage was flooded with links to Daniel Kovalik’s article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* about the death of an adjunct professor at Duquesne University. The sheer number of shares demonstrated great concern for the treatment of adjuncts among graduate students and faculty in Pittsburgh. Seeing this critical mass of support and critique prompted more shares in a show of solidarity. Soon the story went viral and was picked up by national media outlets like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Gawker*.

The breadth and open-endedness of the popular domain I have defined—its extension to myriad social, political, and material contexts—makes visible how greatly context, and thus the movement of text, can contribute to meaning, effect, and function. Tinkerers need not, and perhaps cannot, limit their revisions to the text itself, as this text interacts constantly with its surroundings. It can be difficult to demarcate text and context. The multiplicity of environments available to web users brings to the foreground questions of where to place one’s experiments and of how other users might then take them up as well. Popular reuse illuminates the difficulty of maintaining distinctions between what is “inside” a text and what is “outside” it, giving tinkerers additional rhetorical elements to explore and manipulate.

The web’s interactive, social nature cultivates an ideal environment for tinkering. Many users treat the Internet as a testing ground for materials such as the job applications of Chapter 4. Hiring managers can share entertaining or surprising applications, and applicants can request feedback from online communities offering support and expertise. Content-sharing websites such as *YouTube* have features that enable users to comment and respond to other users’ videos, images, music, and writing. When users take advantage of these interactive features, they may gain insightful feedback on their experiments that helps them to gauge the effects of their manipulations and determine whether further manipulation is worthwhile.

The wealth of texts and modes that characterize the popular domain as I have defined it make it a ready environment for extensive creative tinkering. A key condition for developing rich tinkering is the availability of many raw materials. Increasing the number of available components necessarily increases the number of possible combinations of those components. More diverse raw materials make more heterogeneous assemblages likely to occur, leading to surprising, inventive juxtapositions. However, juxtaposition alone is not a guarantee of invention

and should not become a formula for composing with disparate pieces.⁸⁴ In effective juxtaposition, contrast between two or more pieces produces a jarring effect from which the reader gains some insight or a productive disruption of the reading experience. When juxtaposition is expected, disruption is minimal and its critical-creative effects diminished. Furthermore, combining conflicting elements so as to follow a formula for invention through surprise diverges from the experimental, open-ended ethos that distinguishes tinkering from more rule-governed approaches to making.

More than offering a heuristic, a diverse stock of raw materials makes it possible to tinker with genre, style, and medium in addition to language, leading to compositions that are mixed with regard to more than just their combination of old and new material. They may, for instance, mix fact with fiction or image with text. Popular cultures provide rich sites for developing mixed and indeterminate works because they encompass materials of diverse genres, media, styles, and subject matter and are not governed by the kinds of artificial boundaries typically distinguishing English subfields. The inclusive way in which I have defined the domain *popular cultures of reuse* recognizes and facilitates the richness that results when tinkerers are not limited by generic categories or distinctions between high and low culture.

This domain has much in common with the literary domain of Chapter 2, in that both support wide experimentation, yet importantly, this domain is a less rarefied, privileged arena that highlights the everydayness of reuse. Common to both domains are practices that break with convention, mix genres and media, stretch the possibilities for reuse, and compel us to think about how to recognize and produce inventive work. Popular cultures generally promote less

⁸⁴ Scholarship on remix and reuse can overemphasize juxtaposition, so that it alone seems to guarantee inventive results. See especially Garrett, Landrum-Geyer, and Palmeri, who equate invention and juxtaposition in a section of their essay called “Invention Is Juxtaposition.”

exclusive, more accessible venues in which to contribute works that share the experimental, parodic, and playful bent of much “literary” reuse. In drawing this connection between literature and popular cultures, I suggest that the popular domain can accommodate practices that are associated with literature yet are too often inaccessible to everyday makers. I call into question the seeming obscurity of literary and academic practices such as Oulipo and de/composition by noting their affinities with enduring, everyday projects of reuse.

II. REMEDIATION AND SCRAP WRITING

Introducing Scrap Writing

I have devised the term *scrap writing websites* to name a group of related sites that collect and archive handwritten and printed documents, such as stray notes and signs, on the web. These scraps originate everywhere: users either find or create them and then scan or photograph them and email them to the site’s curator. The leading term *scrap* characterizes these specimens as mundane, often discarded and ephemeral bits of paper, usually not intended for wide publication but for immediate practical or personal purposes: for example, a sign meant to address employees in an office or a note passed between classmates. *Scrap* also conveys fragmentation. Many of these pieces represent only a portion of a larger project, and all of them have been removed from their initial context, adding ambiguity to the task of interpreting them. Pairing *scrap* with *writing* elevates these materials above the discarded and mundane by emphasizing that they are produced and thus affiliating them with the concerns of composition studies. *Scrap writing* calls to mind theories such as bricolage and poaching and practices such as scrapbooking and recycling (in the mainstream environmental sense). It is a form of making

meaning by finding interest and humor in (re)assembling the everyday materials that surround us; it shares the ethos of tinkering.

Contributions to scrap writing websites are quirky: long-lost notes and photos whose origins are unclear, inexplicable signs passive-aggressively warning store patrons against improper behavior, secrets mailed to the community art project *Post Secret* whose messages are veiled in opaque language. Visitors comment on and respond to these archives, helping to decipher foreign languages and coded meanings and posing questions and ad-hoc explanations for strange artifacts. Some of these websites have grown so popular that their curators have received book deals—even multiple ones in cases like *Found* and *Post Secret*. Scrap writing books add to a growing number of books adapted from websites and blogs. (See the appendix for a partial list of books born from websites.) Some reprint the best of the web scraps, while others promise new scraps that contribute some originality to their books.

Remediation inflects these networks of scrap writing at several points, as the original paper-based scrap becomes digitized via scanning or photographing, then lives a digital life on the web, only to be transferred back to paper in the form of a book.⁸⁵ This case of reuse on the Internet and in print raises questions of whether and how these procedures of collection, transfer, and remediation serve invention. They can seem mechanical—as though only making the initial scrap involves a creative element—and sometimes not even then, as many scraps (grocery lists, for instance) are mundane and written on the fly. Furthermore, the number of books derived from websites suggests that converting web content into print content is easy and straightforward. I demonstrate how three popular and durable scrap writing projects (*Found*, *Passive-Aggressive Notes*, and *Post Secret*) involve inventive interventions into prior materials. Extracting resources

⁸⁵ By *remediation*, I mean to denote the general practice of transferring and adapting content from one medium to another.

for invention from these examples will not only illuminate scrap writing but also offer ways of thinking about invention in affiliated practices that feature collection and remediation, such as assembling and organizing archives and compilations (especially miscellanies) and transferring documents from one medium to another, allowing them to transform in the process.

Found is a website that grew out of a print magazine that collects and shares found artifacts. Every day it features a “find of the day” (a scanned photo, note, or grocery list, for instance) alongside a title and brief commentary from the person who submitted it—where he or she found it, what it might mean, and what is interesting or humorous about it. Commentary varies in its level of detail and amount of speculation on the found materials.

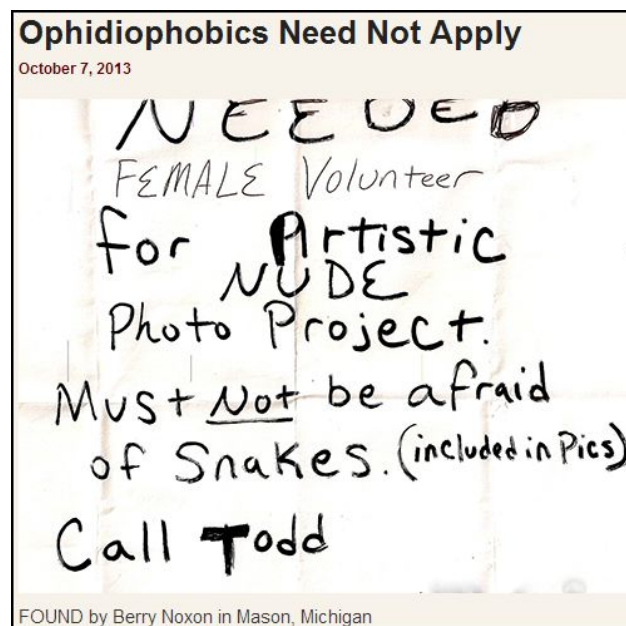


Figure 7: Sample Scrap from *Found*

Passive-Aggressive Notes (PAN) is a humor site that showcases irritating or condescending signs and notices from family members, coworkers, roommates, neighbors, and others who frequently complain in a passive-aggressive way. The site’s curator categorizes the submissions, often pairing similar ones in a single post, and adds titles and commentary to them.

Begun in 2005, *Post Secret* is a community art project to which individuals contribute by mailing unique postcards to the curator, each with a never-before-told “secret” on it.⁸⁶ Each week, the curator, Frank Warren, selects a sampling of postcards and posts them on the *Post Secret* blog, where they appear without commentary. Users can respond to them and offer support for one another in an online community that accompanies the blog, as well as on *Twitter*, where Frank sometimes shares additional secrets.



Figure 8: Sample Scrap from *Post Secret*

These three examples are among the most prominent and emblematic of scrap writing websites, but they represent only a portion of them. Others in the vein of *Found* and *PAN* include *GroceryLists.org*, which collects found grocery lists; community pools on the photo-sharing website *Flickr* that compile found notes and lists (see “...found notes,” “Shopping Lists,” and “Lots of Lists!”); collections of scraps and scribbles found in books (e.g., *Forgotten Bookmarks* and *ThingsInBooks.com*); and numerous sites that collect images of bizarre and/or grammatically incorrect signs and notes (e.g., *Engrish*, *Apostrophe Abuse*, and *The Blog of “Unnecessary”*)

⁸⁶ Some postcards make random declarations or offer words of wisdom, rather than reveal secrets. One postcard from the week of October 19, 2013 proclaims, “Just remember, I am strong enough to be my own hero.”

Quotation Marks). Among the more artistic pursuits⁸⁷ of reuse on the Internet is *Newspaper Blackout*, a site that collects users' handmade blackout poetry.⁸⁸ This site forwards the idea that everyday writing can be molded toward artistic ends. Its use of markers or pens recalls Tom Phillips's *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*, in which a narrative or poem emerges amid multi-colored artwork overlaying the original language of an unremarkable Victorian novel.

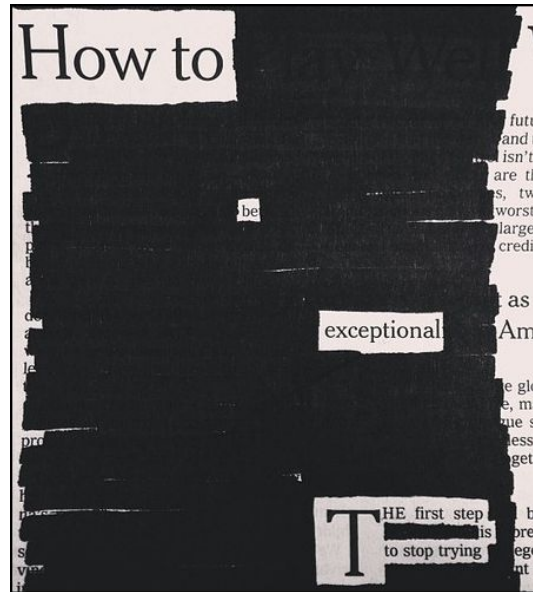


Figure 9: Sample Scrap from *Newspaper Blackout*

A central characteristic of scrap writing websites is the presence of remediated print or paper. Contributions feature scanned or photographed images of the original paper or plastic notes and signs, rather than transcriptions of them. Capturing their artifacts' original materiality is a primary inventive strategy that scrap writing websites exploit—aside from soliciting and storing intriguing artifacts. These sites thrive on remediation. Materiality contributes to the

⁸⁷ Several scrap writing projects could qualify as art and have in fact been housed in gallery settings. *Found* and *Post Secret* resemble cabinets of curiosities or museum exhibits; their contents are meant for display. And *Post Secret* and *PAN* have each had installations in art galleries.

⁸⁸ Blackout poetry is an approach to composition in which one excerpts a text and then crosses out selected words and phrases to produce a new text from old. This method is another take on erasure poetry, such as *Radi Os* by Ronald Johnson, *The Ms of My Kin* by Janet Holmes, and *Nets* by Jen Bervin. In contrast to these works, which use canonical literature (by Milton, Dickinson, and Shakespeare) as substrate texts, *Newspaper Blackout* encourages repurposing mundane materials.

appeal and mystique of scrap writing artifacts: users appreciate and often try to interpret extra-textual features like unusual handwriting and crumpled or stained pages.⁸⁹ Handwritten artifacts seem especially appealing because handwriting is unique; it can convey more personality than standard type, which many machines can reproduce exactly. Retaining signs of the scrap's material condition adds a bit more context to it while simultaneously drawing attention to how out of context it actually is, combined with other scraps bearing traces of other contexts and juxtaposed against the background of the host website and its uniformly typed titles, commentary, and links. Minute insights into a scrap's initial context can add a compelling sense of wonder and ambiguity to the scrap viewer's experience.⁹⁰ These sites are about more than just words; format, medium, and material serve as inventive input too.

Projects akin to scrap writing can qualify as inventive by exploiting similar affordances related to materiality. Curating digital archives, for instance, likewise requires considering how original manuscripts will be represented on the web. Curators of such sites acknowledge the value in preserving traces of original materiality by including handwritten documents. The online Walt Whitman archive, for example, contains a section called "In Whitman's Hand" that showcases his handwritten manuscripts. This archive exploits digital affordances. Technologies that facilitate the scanning, storage, and circulation of images have expanded access to obscure documents, which have value in allowing viewers to glimpse an author's notes, drafts, and

⁸⁹ See, for example, these excerpts from descriptions of submissions on *Found*: "I walked out this morning to get the newspaper and saw this crumpled up note stuck halfway under a flowerpot. It was so windy here yesterday that it must have blown in and got stuck there. At first, I thought it was an old tissue that we had left out there" ("Felen Tims Day"); "The handwriting reminds me of my mother's, so when I read it, I imagined it was written by a mother or middle-aged woman" ("Magical Moment"); and "[T]his had writing, and even more interesting it was a child's handwriting" ("Today's Note").

⁹⁰ Given the significance of retaining some of a scrap's original condition, compilation-style sites that do not transfer print materiality into the digital domain would not qualify for me as scrap writing websites. An example is *Postcards from Yo Momma*, which like *PAN*, collects amusing notes (from mothers to their children), but reproduces just the language of these notes and not their physical makeup.

private correspondence.⁹¹ Unlike transcriptions, scanned images reveal idiosyncrasies of handwriting and revision strategies, such as interlinear notation. Whether or not these idiosyncrasies contribute to scholarly insight, they open up the potential for discovery and provide for a different reading experience than a transcription does. Preserving a document's original condition as best as possible adds historical and material context while highlighting that it originated elsewhere and perhaps distancing the viewer from it. This distance may incite the viewer to approach the document from a different angle. Digitizing as opposed to just transcribing adds something: it prompts questions about the specimen's original context, as well as perhaps its new context and the technology that delivered it there, and it adds intimacy to a textual encounter that might otherwise feel mediated and inauthentic.⁹² It is an activity with inventive potential.

Some extra-textual features simply cannot be represented via transcription. Digitization preserves traces of features that lend intimacy, authenticity, and interest to paper artifacts. One of my own found artifacts is a Valentine's Day card composed on overlapping sheets of colorful construction paper. Just transcribing its message would not convey its endearing materiality. Bits of construction paper are reminiscent of grade school, youth, and simplicity. For viewers like myself who do not teach or spend time with young children, encountering construction paper is an infrequent occurrence that brings with it memories that inflect my reading and evaluation of the artifact.

⁹¹ Bringing documents out of obscurity does not just enhance scholarship, which appeals to a selective audience, but also enriches museum exhibits and general-interest reporting. The online magazine *Slate*, for instance, regularly features quirky historical documents on its history blog *The Vault*.

⁹² Tony O'Keeffe discovered as much in completing a multimodal project based on his father's correspondence with a friend. He notes in "Mr. Secrets: Multimodality's Complex Invitation to Remake Text, Meaning, and Audience" that typing up his collection of handwritten letters changed how he read them; it reduced them by eliminating the extra-textual impact of print-based materiality—the handwriting and treatment of paper that can lend writing more personality and authenticity and the reading experience more intimacy.

Opportunities for Inventive Intervention

There is nothing new or innovative about collecting discarded, ephemeral, or everyday writing. As numerous archives of ephemera indicate, there has long been interest in preserving printed pieces of history and observing the obscure and minute details that they convey. With scrap writing websites, however, everyday individuals can now share the materials they find or collect with a larger, wider audience, and communities created around these websites can function inventively by collectively intervening in the original materials. Viewing these interventions as contributions to a new composite text helps us to see that analogous works of compilation are similarly not just collections of separate, already existing components; instead, these disparate pieces come together to form a new whole with added function or value.

First, people who submit scraps to these websites can intervene in them by providing background information, as on *Found* and *PAN*. Adding contextual information can add to the humor and appeal of a scrap, or help viewers decipher it. Next, the curator of the website intervenes via selection (a scrap may be created and/or found and submitted, yet ultimately not featured on the site) and additional commentary, such as titles and responses. Titles and paratextual materials like tags can inflect how viewers respond. For example, a note posted to *PAN* on October 20, 2013 is titled “The coward’s way out of a roommate break-up” and comes with this context: “Writes Megan in Canada: ‘Found this in my room one night. No warning, no talk. Classy and cowardly.’” These additions to the photographed note, as well as its mere presence on the site, negatively characterize its ethos and shape viewers’ perceptions of it before they even read it.⁹³ Viewers can then intervene further by commenting on the scraps—identifying what makes them strange or intriguing, offering interpretations, or sending messages

⁹³ The note reads, “Megan, I don’t think it is working out between the two of us. I think it’s time you find a new place. I don’t want to have any hard feelings. Carol.”

of support (especially on *Post Secret* where scraps often describe personal struggles). Viewers may also circulate noteworthy scraps further through email and social media. Recognizing practices like commenting and labeling as interventional and potentially inventive reframes invention as an everyday phenomenon, readily identifiable in the small contributions that make up so much writing on the Internet (e.g., liking, tagging, organizing, and sharing).⁹⁴

Community responses to scraps are for the most part playful because they emerge in a setting that favors ambiguity and imagination.⁹⁵ On *Found*, for instance, commenting means dwelling in an ambiguous realm and trying to make sense of an alien object, divorced from its original physical context. Contextualizing description varies in detail, as these three examples demonstrate: “found in a classroom,” “on a car windshield in a parking garage,” “found in the pew on Christmas Eve at First Presbyterian Church [in Ann Arbor, Michigan].” The dearth of information about these finds contributes to the inventive potential of dwelling among them. They provide openings for inventing via observation, imagination, and evaluation, making them reliable heuristics. In fact, some scraps prompt rhetorical analysis as viewers attend to arrangement, juxtaposition, style, and authorship in their responses. For example, a set of two photographs posted on *Found* and titled “Huh? Yeah.” comes with the following context, which attends to their combination and arrangement: “The backs of these two photos are dated November, 1983. I’m not sure if they’re actually a couple, but these 2 pictures go well together.”

⁹⁴ New technologies for finding and organizing information on the web have prompted Jodie Nicotra to pursue the similar objective of expanding what counts as writing. She argues that linking, tagging, and arranging objects constitute forms of writing, but like others studying digital reuse and rearrangement, she does not distinguish among more and less valuable or productive methods.

⁹⁵ *Post Secret* is sometimes an exception here because much of its content has a serious tone. Given that so many submissions portray depression and anxiety, Warren has collaborated with suicide hotlines to encourage counseling for those who need it. Still, some secrets are funny or mysterious and provoke an interest in deciphering veiled messages. For example, a Holiday Inn postcard featured on October 19, 2013 (pictured above) says, “I judge you by the news channel that you pick to watch at breakfast.”

The following specimen demonstrates how scraps encourage intervention and thus serve invention. First, the title, plucked not verbatim from the scrap but from its general content, is ambiguous, but silly enough to be humorous. In addition, the submitter has provided commentary that not only portrays her own curiosity and inventive impulse but also urges a response by opening up a question: “I am ever curious what the chicken’s motivation would be to commit a heinous act and to which book they were referring.” (Finding and submitting this scrap has also inspired some poetic writing: Elisa writes that, “This tiny post-it note caught my eye as *a flash of yellow amidst the bright green grass*” [emphasis added]. Scraps can first of all prompt writing, but furthermore, writing that is descriptive and imaginative.)

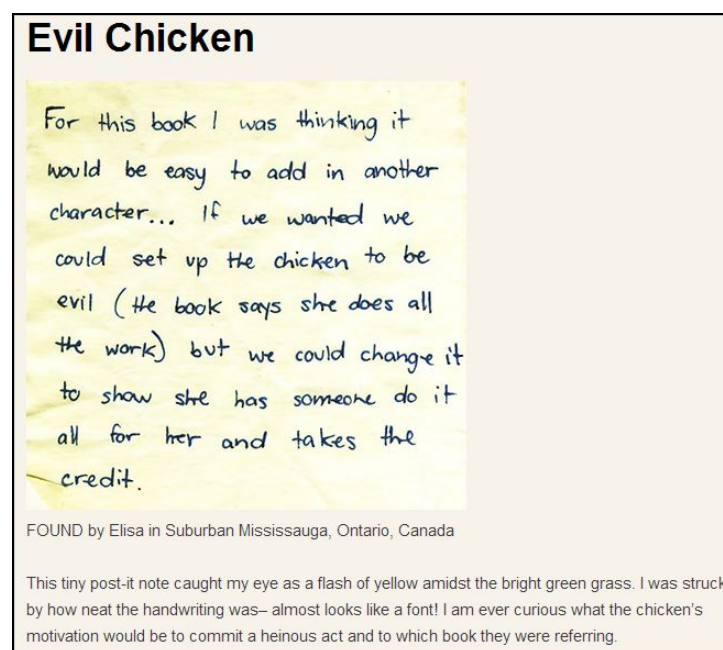


Figure 10: "Evil Chicken" Scrap from *Found*

In response, one commenter has deciphered this reference, writing, “The Little Red Hen! The hen has to bake the bread all by herself; none of the other farm animals will help her.” Another respondent jokes about adding to the story several new plot elements reminiscent of the *Harry Potter* series, such as “wizards,” “an English boarding school,” and “a dragon or two”; his or her

comment evinces the generative power of both the scrap and its first commenter. The scrap's inventive potential emerges from its decontextualized nature, ridiculous subject matter, and paratextual additions.

Another particularly generative scrap is one titled "Do Re Mi." Here again the scrap's ambiguity lends it inventive potential: it consists entirely of musical notations, which will not be decipherable to readers unfamiliar with reading music. The submitter's contextualizing comment also opens space for intervention. She writes, "I bought a folder full of old sheet music, and this was among it. I'm not sure if it's an original composition, or a handwritten version of an existing song."

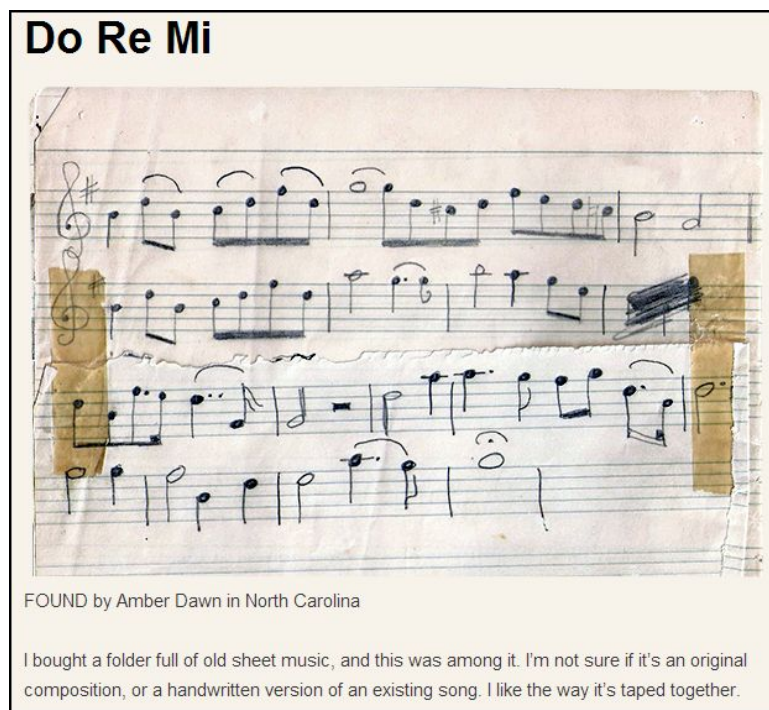


Figure 11: "Do Re Mi" Scrap from *Found*

The inquiry that this comment poses, much like the one above, prompts viewers to investigate the scrap, and the comments reveal that a process of translating or decoding has helped remove the scrap from obscurity. Jonathan writes in a comment, "After a lot of research (= asking experts) I have identified the tune as the Berceuse from the opera 'Jocelyn' by French composer

Benjamin Godard. One of those ‘lollipops’ that get played quite often despite being from an obscure source. It was very familiar but we couldn’t identify it—was driving us mad!” Other comments confirm his finding.

In contrast to these two scraps, which prompt interpretation and source identification, others generate jokes and everyday discussion. Scraps on *PAN* often provoke much commentary about the subject matter in general, given that the site pertains to common gripes related to daily living. These scraps are inventive in that they are productive of something—response, humor, questions, agreement. We can see this potential for response in an amazingly detailed roommate-to-roommate note about personal hygiene, which garnered 189 comments and 1,400 likes on *Facebook* between October 10 and October 21, 2013. *PAN* is chiefly a humor site, so it is in keeping with its ethos that so many comments mainly joke about the scraps. And because it draws attention to passive-aggressive behavior in particular, the site also provokes shock and amazement: some of the best specimens make viewers wonder how or why their authors might take such a rude or long-winded approach to correcting someone else’s behavior.

Thus, *Found* and *PAN*, while both collecting scrap writing, each have a distinct aim and ethos. *Found* encourages valuing discarded oddities and puzzling over them. Featured scraps become valued in merely being rescued from obscurity or the trash and gaining a spot on the site. *Found* does not solicit scraps of a certain content or tone, but may accept any found material. An explanation on the site reads: “We collect FOUND stuff: love letters, birthday cards, kids’ homework, to-do lists, ticket stubs, poetry on napkins, receipts, doodles—anything that gives a glimpse into someone else’s life. *Anything goes*” (n. pag.; emphasis added). Submissions become interesting when placed in this new environment that showcases found materials, drawing attention to them and facilitating sharing and commenting. *PAN* in contrast is driven more by

content—not just any kind of scrap, but scraps likely to amuse or annoy viewers. Both sites produce spaces for response and thus have inventive potential, but *Found* garners a more open-ended potential because it lacks a central interpretive frame like passive-aggressiveness. *Found* cultivates greater uncertainty, and perhaps greater consideration, by promoting extreme decontextualization. Its submission guidelines articulate a preference for mysterious finds: “[W]e tend to share ones that come from sources unknown. Mysterious contexts. Not something your sister wrote when she was drunk at your party, but something that appeared stuck to your bike tire. Those stories tend to be infinitely more interesting” (“Submit”). The distinction I have drawn carries over to compilations like those I described in Chapter 1. Miscellanies, for instance, are often like *Found*—more heterogeneous, less orderly and focused than compilations devoted to one or two genres, such as collections of quotations or jokes.

In tracing the movement of scraps through a network of different channels—from submitter to curator to website viewers—we can see how largely context figures into our perceptions of the scraps. The initial remediation—from paper scrap to digital image—will decontextualize a scrap to some degree. A scanned image will lack the texture and smell of a note found crumpled on a busy city street. Textures and scents provide some insight into an obscure piece of writing that on a screen, appears sanitized and removed from the physical world. At the least, then, remediation modifies the experience of reading a scrap, sometimes in substantive ways. For example, scrap images are two-dimensional and often do not include both sides of a piece of paper, which can limit how viewers interact with and learn from the scrap. Viewing a scrap in person offers more perspectives on the scrap and thus more potential insight.

On *Post Secret*, Frank sometimes uploads images of both sides of a postcard and enables viewers to toggle back and forth between them. But for the majority of secrets, he reveals only

one side, which limits viewers' interactions with them. Only Frank, who receives all postcards via USPS, experiences them in three dimensions. His handling of a postcard on April 12, 2009 demonstrates the limitations in showing viewers just one side of a submission. Initially, his blog displayed only one side of a postcard covered in stamps of superheroes; no message was included. When a follower of *Post Secret's Twitter* account asked, "The comic book one at the bottom... What's on the other side?" Warren tweeted an image of the other side, which said, "I dream of being a hero. Saving someone. Being the clear thinker in a case of hysteria. Refusing interviews out of modesty. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, I can't figure out how to save myself." *Twitter* has opened up a network that enables fans to make requests for further tinkering that can change their perspectives on the scraps as reading materials.

Inventive Scrap Books

In spite of the prominence of digital media and the decline of some print venues (such as periodicals), the book retains currency: new books regularly emerge from websites, in what we might regard as a strange case of backwards evolution. Viewers can even judge a site's success on whether it has released a book. Given that scrap writing websites are numerous, popular, and often comical and generate interest, conversation, and jokes, they would seem to make for interesting and commercially successful books. On the long list of books that have emerged from websites and blogs are many scrap writing projects. (See starred entries in the appendix.) These emerge from scrap writing websites and present photos rather than transcriptions of their specimens in order to give readers a sense of their original materiality.

Compiling a book out of a scrap writing website requires another round of remediation—converting digital images stored on the Internet to digital images printed on glossy book pages.⁹⁶ With the remediation and reformatting necessary here come further opportunities for intervention: these include selecting, organizing, and categorizing the contents; introducing the book; commenting on the scraps; and formatting and designing the book. Even though a book project would seem just to compile and repeat reused content (scraps on the website), it allows for much inventive tinkering to take place—just as compiling a scrapbook does. Scrapbooking is a creative compositional endeavor that offers opportunities for invention via labeling, organizing, selecting, and arranging materials. Taking advantage of these opportunities can result in an inventive product, different from an obvious repetition of the web-based precursor text.

First, compiling scraps into a book offers the occasion for inserting new scraps. Scrap writing books often include never-before-seen specimens, so that they offer something more than a greatest-hits version of the website. Alongside the selection of scraps come the sorting, categorizing, and organizing of them. *Milk Eggs Vodka*, a book that emerged out of *GroceryLists.org*, has an extensive table of contents classifying its lists according to prominent features: there are funny lists, poorly spelled lists, vague lists, healthy lists, and many more. These labels, along with the captions that accompany photos of scraps (most making jokes about them or identifying a peculiar feature), can inflect how readers read and interpret the lists. Along with the *PAN* book and *Found 2*, *Milk Eggs Vodka* includes original content in the form of these captions and lengthy introductions, which comment on, evaluate, and contextualize their

⁹⁶ J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin helpfully avoid limiting *remediation* to new technologies that improve upon and replace older ones. They acknowledge that “Newer media do not necessarily supersede older media because the process of reform and refashioning is mutual” (59). Scrap writing books demonstrate that even as the Internet makes scraps much more widely available, websites do not entirely replace books, which apparently remain relevant and fulfill functions that the sites cannot.

materials. Some, like *Found 2*, have elaborate designs, like a scrapbook motif, which contextualizes and adds interest and value to what would otherwise be just a collection of individual notes and photos. Such designs are not customary of all books, as a cover is, but add a unique element. Contributions such as labels, organization, and formatting are productive of new effects and can help characterize a scrap writing book as inventive. While they are not insignificant, these contributions are easily overlooked when invention is equated with just the creation of new text—and not its organization and formatting too.

Judging such books inventive has consequences for how we conceive of invention more broadly. Doing so recognizes collection, repetition, repackaging, remediation, and rearrangement as compositional processes with inventive potential. Though projects like scrap writing books are derivative of other texts, they do not just reprint web content and thus capitalize on recirculating old content in a new domain. Remediation does not entail simple transfer of material from one medium to another. Alongside remediation come opportunities for invention through arrangement, formatting, and the addition of new material.

I argue that the more inventive of these scrap writing books diverge more radically from their source websites and/or take better advantage of the affordances of the book form, such as design and formatting choices and paratextual materials. With the book form can come new functions and affordances, which signal that the remediation has been productive—that is, productive of some new effect. Recall similar new effects in *The Family Library*, an eighteenth-century miscellany that exploits compilation to allow for inexpensive, collective reading experiences. Remediation in scrap writing books makes more striking such change in experience and effect because it so clearly re-contextualizes materials by placing them in a new physical space.

For example, the format and material makeup of the book can contribute to new reading experiences different from what its companion website offers. Scrap writing websites offer a reading experience marked by immediacy and a steady influx of new scraps and commentary, whereas the books are static and durable; revisiting them means revisiting the same content, perhaps with a new perspective or new viewing partner to reorient one's reading. The websites are more chaotic and unstable, with numerous voices able to intervene and speak to one another through comments. The books are less dialogic, yet not entirely monologic, as they still combine the voices of the site's curator(s), the book's editor(s), and the scrap writers themselves. And experiencing the books with other people adds the potential for greater dialogue. Sharing the book's materials offers an interpersonal, face-to-face encounter, whereas sharing the website's content via email or social media is a more distant, impersonal experience. The book that emerges from a website probably retains its playful ethos, but may appeal to a slightly different, perhaps wider audience just by virtue of its medium. Bookstores and online booksellers can expose these books to viewers who may be unaware of the websites because they are often featured in displays and advertisements as humor or gift books.⁹⁷ Articulating these productive effects of remediation can help writers and scholars of all sorts of projects to argue for the reproduction of their work into multiple forms, to serve different audiences and convey multiple meanings and effects.

⁹⁷ Still, books born from websites have received reasonable criticism. An article titled "Top 10 Internet Sensations Turned into Pointless Books" blames "old-fashioned capitalism" for turning "what you once got for free" into something that costs money (Iannone, n. pag.). The author calls out books derived from *Post Secret* and *Twitter* accounts, among others. Similarly, an announcement that the website *Awkward Family Photos* had received a book deal spurred a poll asking readers, "Blogs to Books: Love It or Leave It?" As of October 24, 2013, 73% of respondents had voted "Leave it—what's the point? I can just read the blog online" (Popsugar Tech, n. pag.).

III. (MIS)QUOTATION AND INVENTING THE “WRONG” WAY

Misquotation can denote several different practices, including misattribution, editing and revision, and wholesale invention. A statement can be tied to the wrong person; it can be altered in ways ranging from subtle and inconsequential to radical, partisan, and libelous; and it can be newly created in entirety and erroneously assigned to a famous figure. The line between unacceptable misquotation and acceptable quotation is blurry, as many quotations actually reflect revision yet are widely accepted, so familiar that we might classify them as proverbs or aphorisms. So, while the “mis” in *misquotation* seems to characterize the entire practice as deviant, inaccurate quotations can become standard due to a memorable configuration of language that gains currency through repeated reuse. In this section, I do not mean to overlook the potentially harmful effects of some misquotation, but rather to acknowledge the pronounced presence of tinkering in the everyday practice of quotation. Popular quotation reveals that tinkering works as a collective, not just individual, practice that over time can shape our common language. Affiliating quotation with tinkering characterizes it as a resourceful process of sharpening and enhancing rather than always distorting. Furthermore, identifying quotation-tinkering as potentially inventive has implications for how we perceive similar low-level editing practices, which are often dismissed as inconsequential in contrast to wholesale invention.⁹⁸ Not all tinkering is beneficial—for the text, for its readers, or for its context—but framing misquotation as a form of tinkering invites us to re-see this practice as potentially inventive, and thus to re-see affiliated practices like editing in such a way too. Studying the spread of

⁹⁸ Tomlinson finds that the metaphors authors use to describe late-stage, surface-level revision belittle it, while they describe larger-scale revision much more loftily, as the reformulation of ideas (68-69). Tomlinson’s judgment here may come in part from the popular connotation of *tinkering* as an aimless, annoying, and painstaking process. She notes that some metaphorical stories “may even imply that writers are disrespectful of the value of such revising when they speak of banging or tinkering” (68).

misquotations also reveals which features of syntax, diction, and delivery are likely to facilitate uptake in popular settings, which can inform inventive strategies altogether.

The Lifecycle of a (Mis)Quotation

Quotations can take strange journeys in print, where they may be inexact or misattributed, but on the web, these journeys can become amplified thanks to the quick and far reach of social media. Soon after Osama bin Laden was killed in May 2011, a “quotation” attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr. began flooding the web through *Twitter* and *Facebook*. It read, “I will mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one, not even an enemy.” As Megan McArdle reported in *The Atlantic*, it turns out that the quotation’s original poster, Jessica Dovey, appended that sentence (her own) to a chunk of text that King had actually published (which she enclosed in quotation marks). But as the *Facebook* post traveled to *Twitter* and then to Penn Jillette’s⁹⁹ 1.6 million followers, it shrunk down to its most striking line—the part that King had not written. Dovey’s intervention, her addition to the reused text, was what stuck around, not King’s actual words. Adding to a shared text is a means of intervention with inventive potential. A well-crafted sentence like Dovey’s can successfully, though accidentally, impersonate a popular historical figure and thus gain currency. This case demonstrates that misquotation—the bane of credible journalism and academic writing—can be consistent with durable, inventive writing.

What makes Dovey’s intervention inventive? Just on a textual level, ignoring its wide circulation (a potential objective quantification of inventiveness), several characteristics identify

⁹⁹ Jillette is one half of the comedic duo of magicians known as Penn and Teller. On his television show *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* Jillette helped debunk erroneous beliefs and established himself as a reputable source who can cut through “bullshit” information (such as misquotations). His followers thus might not have questioned the authority and authenticity of Jillette’s source when he recirculated Dovey’s tweet.

her sentence as productive writing. It speaks to current events, having been posted soon after bin Laden's death was announced. It implicitly responds to popular, publicized reactions to bin Laden's death, such as cheers of celebration and shouts of "USA!" The opposition in the sentence structure makes it memorable, and the general sentiment supports an admirable ethos marked by sincerity, generosity, and appreciation for life. Furthermore, Dovey's sentence appeals to the self-righteousness that characterizes much self-reflective writing in online communities; it implicitly portrays her as more ethical and compassionate than some of her peers, yet without directly arguing with them.

In sentiment, word choice, and syntactic elegance, Dovey's quotation could also strike the average reader as something King might have said. His actual quotation, which followed Dovey's introductory intervention, reads, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." Initially readers could distinguish the quotation from Dovey's addition thanks to quotation marks, but as McArdle indicates, at some point, a fellow *Facebook* user copied and pasted Dovey's status but removed the quotation marks for unknown reasons. (Perhaps he or she dislikes the way quotation marks look and eschews them on social media altogether, as do many users who post song lyrics and other quotations as unattributed, cryptic status messages. Without quotation marks, it becomes unclear who exactly is voicing such words and whether they represent the poster's actual feelings.) Once the unquoted, standalone text began circulating, it is easy to see why it might be stripped down further. Aside from *Twitter*'s restrictions on posts longer than 140 characters, there is the fact that the first sentence, Dovey's contribution, stands out as more readily identifiable with the news of bin Laden's death than do the sentences that follow. Dovey's line refers specifically to

“the death of one,” whereas King’s quotation speaks more generally about love and hate, concepts relevant at many times, given our war- and terrorism-saturated news.

Still, in an alternate scenario, an article about the spread of quotations could just as easily feature King’s actual quotation, as it exemplifies features consistent with high circulation. It is a memorable trio of sentences, thanks to repetition, parallel structure, and appealing imagery. The last two lines are especially concise and rhetorically savvy in their rhythmic repetition and parallelism: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” These lines sound poetic, almost biblical. Stylistic flourishes like rhetorical figures and rhythmic syntax can aid in a quotation’s uptake. And King’s actual words were in fact taken up—at least by Dovey, but also by the myriad websites that collect quotations from famous figures (which may account for how Dovey initially found this quotation).

When researchers compare “misquotations” to what they think are their authentic sources, the misquotations are consistently pithier, more concise, more rhythmically appealing, and/or more fluent than the originators.¹⁰⁰ Studying durable (mis)quotations reveals sentence-level features that facilitate wide circulation and appeal. Ralph Keyes argues that quotations favor mellifluous sound and authoritative ethos over accuracy—hence their common revision and misattribution. The case of (mis)quotation helps to frame tinkering as a natural or inevitable process. Keyes suggests as much in arguing that “It is a rare quote which can’t be improved” (14) and that “Quotations which start out too long, too clumsy and inharmonious end up shorter, more graceful and rhythmic in the retelling. They are *euphonized*” (13-14). Countless familiar misquotations support Keyes’s claim. For example, as Brian Morton reports, a popular “quotation” from Thoreau transforms his original words into a briefer, more direct and less

¹⁰⁰ Any utterance called the “real” quotation is suspect, however, as it may actually be a misquotation that has circulated widely. Uncertainty underlies all quotation-hunting.

subtle nugget of wisdom. “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined” emerged from the following more guarded and reflective passage from *Walden*: “I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours” (Morton, n. pag.). The popular version of Thoreau’s sentence converts a bit of conditional contemplation into a piece of exuberant advice whose message readers can grasp quickly and agreeably.¹⁰¹ It demonstrates a preference in public and popular contexts for brief, confident declarations.

Misquotations like this one often entail reducing, rearranging, combining, summarizing, or paraphrasing an original text so that it fits more snugly in the mind, on the tongue, or on a mug, tote bag, or magnet. Context often drives revision. For example, in a recent news article Danny Heitman reports that a Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial in Washington had to be refinished after its inscription—a quotation attributed to King—was disputed and ultimately removed. The inscription read, “I was a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness,” but as Heitman reports, King actually said something lengthier and less certain: “Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other things will not matter.” In whittling down these lines into a single sentence, the paraphrase removed King’s repetitive rhythm and sense of uncertainty. What resulted was more straightforward, perhaps “egotistical” as Heitman indicates, and better suited to a physical monument with limited space.

¹⁰¹ Keyes, Knowles, and Konnikova each provide many additional examples of misquotations that shorten, simplify, and remove doubt from their original sources. Two of the most famous reflect improvements in fluency: “Beam us up, Mr. Scott!” in *Star Trek* has been remembered as “Beam me up, Scotty!” and “If she can stand it, I can. Play it” in *Casablanca* has been remembered as “Play it again, Sam” (Konnikova, n. pag.).

Misquotations, then, are often not “misses” at all; those that stick around are better suited to their environments and usually improve upon their sources. Maria Konnikova, writing for *The Atlantic*, summarizes why manipulations like rearrangement, contraction, and removal of doubt enhance quotations that are actually longer and harder to remember:

Our brains really like fluency, or the experience of cognitive ease (as opposed to cognitive strain) in taking in and retrieving information. The more fluent the experience of reading a quote—or the easier it is to grasp, the smoother it sounds, the more readily it comes to mind—the less likely we are to question the actual quotation. Those right-sounding misquotes are just taking that tendency to the next step: cleaning up, so to speak, quotations so that they are more mellifluous, more all-around quotable, easier to store and recall at a later point. (n. pag.)

These changes reflect elements of rhetorical style that lend themselves to memorable delivery. There is a tendency toward shortening and simplifying writing in the popular sphere, given the sound-bite culture that pervades politics and current events, as well as the rise of digital micro-writing platforms such as *Twitter*, texting, and *Tumblr*. The term *misquote*, which Konnikova uses above, is another example of the collective tinkering that she describes: the proper term *quotation* has given way to *quote* and *misquotation* to *misquote*, simplifying and shortening our speech and writing, smoothing it out into a less clunky alternative. It has carried over from casual speech into published writing. The guidelines for rhythm and harmony that Konnikova and others use to characterize widely circulating quotations can likewise transfer to other writing contexts that favor brevity, memorization, and oral delivery, such as presentation titles, headlines, and slang. Studying how quotations are productively manipulated reveals sentence-

level writing strategies that we can apply beyond the confines of popular discourse, in both oral and print contexts.

Popular misquotation reflects collective tinkering or “crowdsourcing,” a version of mass authorship that we should not dismiss out of hand by affiliating it with inaccuracy rather than (re)invention. Corey Robin expresses a fresh perspective in support of expanding the use of tinkering beyond the classroom, into the public domain. He does not condemn misquotation, but regards it as an interesting textual and social phenomenon. He is intrigued by the notion that through the Internet in particular (but also through word-of-mouth and television sound-bites), we are crowdsourcing our texts and quotations, improving them over time via the collective wisdom of many untraceable, unacknowledged “authors.” What Robin is exposing here is a widespread, dispersed version of tinkering that takes place across popular spheres as reader-writers access, share, and revise bits of text. No text is off-limits to the tinkerer, even those uttered by revered figures, for each is susceptible to manipulation. Often such manipulations will produce more memorable, stickier “quotations.” Keyes even argues that “Any quotation that can be altered will be” (12). Alterations result from common preferences for certain sounds and rhythms, as well as from the need to establish authority and thus attribute a statement to someone recognizably famous.

(Re)inventive quoting is not new to the Internet era but is amplified by its culture of sharing and tracking contributions. Quotations come to belong to a public domain or collective commons where they undergo creative changes as they move from one context to another. Much as everyday language use modifies grammatical and syntactical prescriptions, reflecting popular usage over textbook correctness, familiar quotation emerges out of the public shaping, or crowdsourcing, of original sources. In exploring the quotation “The ideal college is Mark

Hopkins at one end of a log and a student at the other,” David Isaacson affirms the importance of public tinkering with sources. He finds that “there is a mysterious creative process at work in the vox populi that often imagines, shapes, revises, and polishes otherwise unmemorable words until they become memorable” (25). The idea of collective or collaborative authorship that Isaacson (like Robin, Knowles, Keyes, and Emerson) forwards celebrates that “There are many unnamed people who have a gift for words” (25). Defining and surveying the popular domain as it encompasses media within and beyond the Internet helps us to recognize how greatly everyday language users contribute to inventive linguistic activity—in collecting, sharing, commenting, and even just repeating the words, texts, and ideas around them.

Misquotations help identify reduction, substitution, and rearrangement as potentially inventive strategies and highlight the interventional nature of the often-mechanical act of sharing or liking.¹⁰² Sharing King’s misquotation intervenes in the original quotation by contributing to a critical mass of inaccuracy. McArdle notes that as it spread, it became more difficult to assess its veracity: Googling the quotation would yield hundreds of shared “mistakes.”¹⁰³ Sharing often has greater consequences for public figures, authorities, celebrities, and other contributors to social media who have many devoted followers attending to and recirculating their words. Had Penn Jillette not retweeted the misquotation, perhaps it would not have spread so widely and quickly. Linking the misquotation with the name Martin Luther King, Jr. also contributed to its spread; had Dovey not attributed any of the text to him, it probably would not have generated the same interest. Citation, even when inaccurate, intervenes by adding some kind of ethos or new

¹⁰² More mechanical sharing occurs when one just clicks a button marked “share” or “retweet.” Less mechanical sharing entails retyping a quotation, which requires just a bit more work and in some cases, yields revisions.

¹⁰³ Robert Strohmeyer reports in *PCWorld* that it was difficult to verify the King “quotation” because Googling it during the height of its popularity turned up so many recent uses of it. He recommends modifying the date-range filter on Google when trying to verify the authenticity of recent memes. Restricting search results to a time before the King misquotation became viral debunked its authenticity.

intonation to a statement. It is productive of something—such as authority, trustworthiness, or adherence to tradition. Especially quotable figures (such as King, Lincoln, Churchill, Twain, Emerson, Thoreau, Shakespeare, and Benjamin Franklin) can reliably add these important elements. The act of attribution—seemingly invisible because it is standard in academic and journalistic settings—is in fact an intervention that can contribute to the uptake, durability, and productivity of a text.

(Mis)Quotation: Quotation at Play

I have affirmed the inventive potential of misquotation, but I also want to acknowledge the danger in admitting some inaccuracies into our writing and speech. Misquotation, even just taking language out of its original context, can severely misrepresent figures and events. An extreme case of misquotation from September 2011 demonstrates the risk in cutting an utterance out of its initial context, textual or social. According to the *Toronto Star*, York University professor Cameron Johnston explained to his social sciences class the idea that “everyone is not entitled to their opinion” with the following statement: “‘All Jews should be sterilized’ would be an example of an unacceptable and dangerous opinion” (B. Kennedy, n. pag.). One student, Sarah Grunfeld, heard Johnston’s statement “All Jews should be sterilized” and immediately took to the Internet to accuse the professor of anti-Semitism. Because she excised this statement from a larger context, Grunfeld came to an inaccurate conclusion that threatened Johnston’s career. Even when confronted with the idea that she had misread her professor’s remarks, Grunfeld maintained, “The words, ‘Jews should be sterilized’ still came out of his mouth, so regardless of the context I still think that’s pretty serious” (B. Kennedy, n. pag.).

Grunfeld’s response may reflect an isolated case of ignorance—not malice—yet it is similar to the more deceitful practice of misquotation that Paul F. Boller and John George call

quotemanship, the use and abuse of quotations for partisan purposes (vii). While accepting that misquotation can arise from mistakes in reporting, Boller and George condemn quotemanship, which includes concocting quotations altogether just to advance one's position—for example, attributing anti-Semitic remarks to a respected figure like George Washington to gain clout. Of course I do not condone misquoting for intentionally malicious purposes. I want to stress a distinction between quotemanship and collective tinkering. The former tinkers with the content or angle that an utterance represents, resulting in a distorted perspective and/or meaning—what Bakhtin would identify as more vari-directional double-voiced discourse (*Problems*). The latter takes a less vari-directional, more rhetorical interest in manipulating language toward improved delivery and uptake.¹⁰⁴ Since quotemanship often involves the material moves associated with tinkering yet pursues misleading objectives, it exposes the need to evaluate exercises in tinkering with regard to their ethical treatment of source texts and their likely effects in their target contexts.

The difficulty in distinguishing productive from unacceptable misquotation arises in part from ambiguity in the term *quotation*. Gary Saul Morson helpfully breaks down its meanings: “The word ‘quotation’ itself has two meanings. In addition to naming the sort of expressions we associate with Dr. Johnson, La Rochefoucauld, Tolstoy, Pushkin, and Oscar Wilde, the term may refer more broadly to any extract” (215). What concerns Morson in his investigation into quotation as a literary genre, and what characterizes the circulation of quotations like Dovey's on the Internet, is the former definition—known often as a *familiar quotation*. A familiar quotation may be extracted from a longer work but is not the same as an extract, which is typically used for

¹⁰⁴ I label these practices more and less vari-directional in order to acknowledge that any appropriation of another's discourse exerts some individual pressure upon it, some form of evaluation, and thus cannot move in exactly the same direction as the original, but perhaps in the same *general* direction.

evidence, not for an isolated, easily packaged idea to be placed in a commonplace book, at the start of a five-paragraph essay, in a *Facebook* status update, or on a magnet.¹⁰⁵ Morson explains,

A quotation is not the same as an extract even when the two are verbally identical. The quotation is offered and read differently, as a complete literary work, whereas the extract is never quite complete and usually not literary. To be sure, one may *make* an extract into a quotation by framing it as such, and anthologizers often do, especially with their favorite authors. Part of the appeal of anthologizing must lie in such “making” of quotations by including them. (216-217)

Popular cultures of reuse, especially on the Internet, blur these two identities of *quotation*.¹⁰⁶ The important distinction for my purposes is that familiar quotations are *made*; they are malleable creative forms that occupy a domain of play rather than strict authenticity. Familiar quotations belong to a domain that admits and even encourages tinkering, while extracts do not.

I suggest that social spaces on the Internet such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* work as large, ever-changing compilations of quotations. The misquotations floating throughout them are legitimate familiar quotations remade in the act of anthologizing—in selecting and compiling them. These environments support the making and molding of quotations, as opposed to the faithful representation of verifiable extracts. We can see that they shape quotations rather than report the “truth” in that they approach citation more loosely than do more standardized domains like academic writing and journalistic reporting. When reusing a quotation from a *Facebook* status or tweet, a user can decide which parts of it to excerpt, how to punctuate it, whether to use

¹⁰⁵ Isaacson supports the distinction between the familiar quotation and the extract in remarking that “Quotations are an especially intriguing genre. Famous or familiar quotations are a subset of the larger category of quotations, which, of course, simply means words that are cited and repeated for some reason” (23).

¹⁰⁶ One case that demonstrates this blur is the use of bogus quotations from founding fathers such as Jefferson to support one’s position in contentious national debates. Nicole Saidi reported on gun-rights activists’ use of a spurious quotation from Jefferson to support their point of view. In such cases, quotations can serve both as evidence of a particular position and as decoration used for expressive purposes.

conventional capitalization, and whether and how to acknowledge sources. Dovey and those who copied her were not providing an extract but rather, were offering a general point of view or expressing a seemingly timeless idea, as familiar quotations do. The line between quotation and proverb or aphorism is thus quite fluid.

Theorizing popular quotation as a malleable and flexible, almost literary form of writing accommodates the different realms in which it can exist, some more standardized and others more playful. Each realm puts different pressures on how much manipulation a quotation can bear. Given the ambiguity that characterizes quotation as a practice and the ambiguity in what is acceptable in different popular realms, especially on the Internet, how can writers know which manipulations are permissible and productive? Quotation is marked by so much uncertainty that it seems to require testing. Feedback from others can help writers determine whether their tinkering is productive and reasonable. More standardized arenas, such as academic and journalistic writing, will accept only a minimal level of manipulation. But even accurate, “correct” quotation supports some manipulation. Just extracting a quotation from its source requires some cutting and moving of text, and writers may wish to modify a quotation by eliminating pieces of it and inserting ellipses. They may also add selected words in brackets, as well as attribution information and their own commentary. In looser, more playful environments, more manipulation is possible. Literary authors are relatively free to incorporate quotations and misquotations in their works for purposes such as characterization, comedy, and argument. Both exact and modified quotations appear in titles, in dialogue, and in allusions.¹⁰⁷ Popular uses of quotation extend these more ostensibly artistic uses, creating fluidity between art or literature and

¹⁰⁷ See Knowles for a list of titles that excerpt and in some cases abridge or modify words from another text. See Martín for a typology of the ways in which Bernard Shaw mobilized modified quotations to generate comedy and support his ideologies.

everyday personal or public expression, both of which occupy this domain. Fluidity appears as well in the decorative ways we commonly use quotations—for self-expression on personal belongings and on blogs and social media sites.

Dovey used the King quotation as this kind of decorative accompaniment to her own writing. She created a new sentence to help mold the chosen quotation into a relevant and supported sentiment for the occasion. What resulted was a composite invention whose original lines of demarcation (quotation marks) faded from view via adaptation. Others manipulated Dovey's composite to suit their own desires for expression. In particular, attributing Dovey's original sentence to King added the authority that quotations need if they are to travel far in popular cultures. Attribution is necessary in traditional anthologies for the same reason; it becomes a form of repair achieved via tinkering, collective or individual.

IV. DE/COMPOSING THE NEWS

A group of practices akin to de/composition appear throughout the popular domain; hence my term *de/composed news*. These practices may achieve the same end as de/composition—presenting a different take on the source text—but vary in their source materials (the news) and methods of manipulation. They take on subjects and sources that arguably have greater exigency than poetry and that can therefore occupy more diverse contexts and appeal to many viewers. Like Snodgrass's de/composed poems, de/composed news may accentuate one or more elements of an original story, substitute one of those elements for something else, and/or add commentary. Such approaches take many forms in popular spheres, spanning diverse media with parodic television shows like *The Colbert Report*, satirical reporting from *The Onion* in print and online,

and compilation and abridgment of current events on the web. In each case, composers invent by deviating from a real story, event, or speech. Whereas Chapter 3 identified invention in pronounced interference into source texts, in the popular sphere, both wide and subtle deviations prove inventive. Still, as in de/composition as a pedagogical practice, a key element of de/composed news is a discernible difference between the original and the de/composition. The actual news serves as an exigency and as a backdrop against which the de/composition generates commentary, comedy, and relevance.¹⁰⁸ For de/composition to achieve its full effect (i.e., critique, humor, explanation), viewers must have some knowledge of current events, which in many cases go unsaid as in an enthymeme; the news as backdrop is implied, not explicitly restated. Thus, popular de/composition also differs from Snodgrass's model in that it does not always reproduce the original text alongside the de/composed.

In this section, I trace a continuum of inventive deviation in this sphere, with some revisionist news sticking close to its source and some diverging more widely from it. Exploring this continuum demonstrates how popular environments afford us with multiple means of inventing through tinkering. I describe the *New York Times* abridgment of Obama's second inauguration speech as remaining more faithful to its source and *Bad Lip Reading* as deviating severely from its sources, toward nonsense. *The Colbert Report* and *The Onion* fall somewhere in between these poles, as they clearly reference and rely upon current events in order to parody them. In examining these examples more closely, I extract their general principles of interference and demonstrate a gradual movement further away from actual news. Given that I identify each of these examples as inventive, taken together this continuum of practices calls into question the

¹⁰⁸ Of course there is often no definitive news source representing the "truth," from which a de/composition deviates. The news is not a stable entity, as it gets represented differently across disparate media outlets. But a de/composition can work directly with a particular source, such as a political speech, which readers can isolate and then compare with the de/composition.

simple equation of greater interference with greater invention. Both minimal interference and extreme deviation can in fact be inventive. Context shapes how deviation serves invention. Outside the educational setting in which I previously examined it, de/composition employs a wider range of strategies and appeals to a different set of evaluative criteria. Variation is present as well in the fact that de/composition in this sphere does not rely upon Snodgrass's strategy of making an original text *worse*. Yet *de/composition* remains a viable term because of its emphasis upon *change*; "going wrong" signifies divergence, not necessarily degradation.

Invention via Minimal Deviation

The New York Times describes its abridged edition of Obama's inaugural address as follows: "[F]or anyone who wants something shorter, The Times has edited the speech in a way that keeps its main themes. No words have been changed, but roughly 60 percent of the text has been removed." No author has been assigned to this revision, lending it a sense of objectivity and authority stemming from the collective efforts of editors at a leading newspaper. This introductory pair of sentences draws attention to the abridgment's deviation from Obama's actual speech, suggesting that the editors have nothing to hide: the revision is not inappropriate or suspect. In revising the speech, the editors aimed to shorten it without drastically modifying its message and effect. Here we can see some overlap between quotation and de/composition. As an excerpt, this abridgment resembles a quotation of Obama's speech, just on a larger scale than we might normally associate with quotation. The difference in scale is significant: because it is not a short, familiar text, I place this example here rather than in the previous section. This placement also reflects the subject matter, which makes it emblematic of what I am calling de/composed news. But it diverges from previous cases of de/composition in that it does not appear

exclusively alongside its source text; it is designed instead as a time-saving *alternative* (not a complement) to the original speech.

Comparing the abridgment with the actual speech reveals that the main themes remain, but some details and explanations have been eliminated. These omissions are significant because without them, Obama appears to make claims and promises that lack some support and thus sound more intangible.¹⁰⁹ Although the occasion of inauguration calls for optimism anyway, reducing the speech via abridgment distances the President from his audience, making the speech more abstract and less rooted in practical realities. For instance, one excised portion admits that “The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult.” This sentence makes an obvious point yet importantly reassures listeners by acknowledging challenges. It introduces some uncertainty into an idealistic speech and thus characterizes Obama as more down-to-earth, perhaps more mindful than a campaigning politician making promises.

As a consequence of abridgment, the edited speech also contains some breaks in coherence. I sense an abrupt jump from “Today we continue a never-ending journey, to bridge the meaning of those words [the opening line of the Declaration of Independence] with the realities of our time” to “But we have always understood that when times change, so must we.” Some explanation should follow the first sentence to describe *how* we bridge the meaning of those words with our current situation. Yet because the speech has been written for oral delivery, many of its sentences employ rhetorical figures, parallelism, and periodic structure and thus can

¹⁰⁹ For example, “My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment, and we will seize it—so long as we seize it together” (n. pag.). It is unclear in the abridged version what makes this moment special, whereas the full speech prefaces this line with details about the hardships that we have recently endured (e.g., war and economic collapse).

powerfully stand on their own as self-contained units.¹¹⁰ Cutting up the speech does not drastically reduce its coherence. The abridgment resourcefully achieves coherence by retaining the original's repeated references to the Declaration of Independence. In his opening, Obama recites the line "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Throughout the speech, he refers back to that line with phrases like "We, the people" and "We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths" to establish textual unity.

Given its fairly unified rhetoric and preservation of the original's dominant themes, the abridged speech is productive: it achieves the *New York Times*' goal of offering a briefer, yet still informative version. This success can be attributed in part to the anonymous abridgers themselves but also to the original text, which is especially amenable to abridgment. The original speech incorporates redundancies so that abridgment can safely eliminate passages without eliminating whole ideas. The tone is diplomatic and the material general, without many essential details but rather, big ideas represented via key terms. Audience is frequently invoked, again enhancing redundancy, and many sentences are crafted as independent units so that abridgment does not severely disrupt coherence. The original text exemplifies an easily adaptable, modular, and reconfigurable style because it was composed for oral delivery. Listeners cannot revisit previous parts of a speech during its delivery, so the speaker must reiterate key points. When adapted for a print context, the speech can lose redundancies that were initially essential.

¹¹⁰ Sam Leith characterized Obama's speech as "a greatest hits of rhetorical tricks" in *The Guardian*, writing that "All [Obama's] favourite oratorical devices were on display, and all at once" (n. pag.). These included syntheton, anaphora, allusion, alliteration, and repetition.

The abridgment demonstrates that redundancy is a key textual property for facilitating interference without significant deviation from the original whole. This project of abridgment did not require significant interference—just cutting, as opposed to adding, substituting, and/or rearranging too. But when necessary, interference did not require extensive planning or experimentation because of the redundancies accommodating abridgment. A less unified speech with looser cohesion would require more decision-making from abridgers. Adding to the inventive features (mis)quotation revealed in the previous section, my analysis of this abridgment identifies informational redundancy as another strategy for achieving quotability. Thus, from examples such as this one, we can extract techniques for producing durable writing that can travel—that is, writing susceptible to easy, ethical, and productive reuse.

Importantly, however, even amid redundancy, some excerpts can stand out as particularly significant or unprecedented, as was the case with Obama’s allusion to the Stonewall riots. While redundant portions can be easily removed, particularly memorable or singular assertions need to remain, or else the abridgment will lack essential elements of the original. In the case of something like the mention of Stonewall, personal evaluation accompanies mechanical deletions of redundant material, so that the process of abridgment moves away from a more procedural process toward one that mixes procedure with thoughtful intervention. Because it does not diverge much from its source, this abridgment could seem more like patchwriting than tinkering. But because it must employ both procedural and personal interference, as this last example suggests, I argue that it constitutes inventive tinkering. This example demonstrates how seemingly minute decisions made during the editing process (keeping or discarding an allusion) can have significance and thus implies that invention remains a concern of so-called lower-order writing or late-stage revision. To recognize the significance of preserving the Stonewall

reference, we must view the abridgment alongside its original and have some knowledge of the current social and political climate regarding gay rights activism. The dyad of original and de/composition reveals that the abridgment acts as an interpretation of or take on the original. As a specific practice of reuse, de/composition has its own value in creating this kind of telling relationship between an original text and one or more reused versions of it. Transferring the method of *reading* de/compositions as a pair of texts to other settings (even those like this one that diverge from Snodgrass's approach) offers us a significant resource for reading, interpreting, and valuing all kinds of reuse.

Considered alone, the abridgment still demonstrates invention in fulfilling a new purpose—quicker reading. The same must be true when writing effective abstracts and other shortened versions of longer forms. Here I am thus merging my criteria for invention: I have suggested that the presence of an emergent function correlates strongly with inventive reuse and that the level of interference can be used to assess whether tinkering is inventive. Though the *New York Times* staff has not modified the speech as radically as Snodgrass reinvents some of his selected poems, the abridgment qualifies as inventive de/composition because one, it offers a perspective on the original speech and two, it is productive of something or makes something new possible—a different reading experience.

Pedagogical settings may favor interference, valuing it alone as evidence of productive writing because it requires experimental thinking and exploration from students. But in popular settings, whatever interference does occur must also produce a derivative text that will attract readers. Hence, the union of my previous criteria for invention alongside this continuing concern with amount of interference.

Invention via Greater Deviation

In a project similar to abridgment, Daniel W. Drezner uses de/composition to critique the President, rather than just abstract his speech. A few days before Obama's second inauguration, Drezner published "Obama's First Inaugural—Revised" in *Foreign Policy*. The piece models a more partisan take on de/composing the news that aims explicitly to make an argument. Drezner works more like Snodgrass in rewriting a text retrospectively to offer an "interpretation" of its messages: whether and how Obama delivered on the goals his first inaugural speech promised. He clearly manipulates the original speech and highlights his contributions to it through changes in font and tone. This approach adapts Snodgrass's technique of distinguishing his de/compositions from their originals through side-by-side arrangement. The piece furthermore asserts itself as a critique rather than straightforward abridgment by assigning Drezner's name to it.

Drezner intervened in an already abridged version of Obama's first inaugural address "to reflect a more realistic era" (Drezner, n. pag.). The project conveys the disappointment that some of Obama's supporters have felt after experiencing what they perceive as failures during his first term as President. It also suggests that Obama's early mission was too idealistic, full of "soaring rhetoric" that could not meet fruition (Drezner, n. pag.). This disappointment reflects on the inaugural address genre altogether, a genre that *calls for* soaring rhetoric that Drezner suggests listeners should not take seriously.

Drezner relies on procedures of reuse to edit Obama's first address into a more accurate representation of how his first term actually played out. Drezner primarily employs addition, deletion, and substitution, using strike-throughs and red insertions to highlight his changes. Some changes reflect opposite sentiments ("the time has come to set aside childish things *and go*

straight for the truly infantile things"); others add qualifiers and hedge a bit ("we gather because we have chosen hope over fear *until someone tries to bomb a plane with explosives in their underpants*"); and some make looser arguments and weaker promises ("we'll work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat *make modest progress on nuclear arms reductions and nuclear safety*"). Some changes are humorous because they employ language and tone at odds with the occasion (e.g., "*Just to reiterate: I. Have. Drones*"; "we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect *and lots and lots and lots of drones*"). These insertions are examples of looser joins that lack the cohesion of tighter joins, which would more smoothly blend original text with new text. The looser, more jarring cohesion draws attention to Drezner's changes. At the same time, however, Drezner does not diverge entirely from political rhetoric; most additions are not unusual or foreign in vocabulary or structure. And from a quick glance, his text derives about half of its length from Obama's actual speech. Drezner adheres to the original template while diverging from it: he uses revision as a mode of critique and thus establishes a new approach to de/composition that can be applied in both the classroom and the public sphere.

While critiquing Obama's first inaugural speech, Drezner also parodies the rhetorical situation altogether. This kind of speech is supposed to project goals for the future and instill pride and hope in listeners, but Drezner upends these objectives. He converts optimism into cynicism. Much as Snodgrass's de/composed poems subtly comment on poetry more generally (how it works and what makes it successful), Drezner's de/composed speech implicitly critiques the inaugural speech genre. The President *must* sound idealistic and therefore fills his speech with hopes that cannot be accomplished. He must also address a bipartisan audience, including many voters who did not support his candidacy, and so must attempt neutrality.

It is important to highlight that Drezner produces parody through appropriation and interference instead of entirely “original” composition. His practice is essentially material: he builds on the original as a template that he selectively revises. Using font options, he *shows* readers where Obama did not deliver on the promises of his first speech: readers can see where Drezner has had to strike-through and insert text, so they can be in on the joke while reading and do not have to consult Obama’s speech. Drezner thus makes a clearer, stronger, and more compelling argument about Obama’s failings. His critique is more explicit than it might be had Drezner written an “original” piece lamenting Obama’s first term more generally. Drezner’s revisionist project inventively exploits the affordances of reuse.

By intervening directly *inside* Obama’s speech, Drezner impersonates the President. More traditional impersonation—the kind that takes place on a stage—may deviate less from its source in language, sound, and appearance than does Drezner’s approach, yet still produce a new effect. Impersonation entails reproducing a text (the object of impersonation) in a new context, which changes its intonation and thus its meaning and effects on audiences. The impersonator tinkers inside the text as well as with its boundaries, the outside context with which it comes into contact. The new context brings with it expectations for comedy. Impersonation underscores the instability of an inside-the-text and outside-the-text distinction and opens up context as a powerful site for tinkering.

Take, for example, Tina Fey’s celebrated impression of Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential campaign season. Shields argues, “If Tina Fey’s impression of Sarah Palin hadn’t been based closely on verbatim transcripts of Palin’s performances, it wouldn’t have been remotely as funny, and it wouldn’t have affected the election; the comedy derived precisely from its scrupulous reframing of the real” (53). This statement emphasizes the apparent authenticity of

Fey's performance and thus shifts evaluative attention away from deviation toward imitation. But importantly, at the same time that Shields stresses close imitation, he also recognizes that *intervention* must intersect with mimicry: he commends the "scrupulous *reframing* of the real" (emphasis added). It is in reframing or re-contextualizing Palin's speech and behavior that the *SNL* skit intervenes in the original. The new context is a source of invention. And since *SNL* is an entertainment venue fairly removed from the political arena, the move of reframing produces considerable deviation, even if the language itself reproduces Palin's language verbatim. Moving Palin's speech into this new context imbues it with new meaning. It is the comedic, satirical atmosphere of *SNL* that makes Palin's speech freshly laughable, as viewers are encouraged to see it through a new lens of parody and critique. Impersonation, even when it is effective because it is accurate, deviates from its source by repackaging or reformatting its language (body language as well as words). The original language gets re-contextualized and re-uttered in the voice and body of another person in another setting; this new "package" (context and body) adds new effects. Emerson acknowledged the inventive contributions of new voices speaking old texts in his essay "Quotation and Originality." He comments that "We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects, as by what he originates. We read the quotation with his eyes, and find a new and fervent sense, as a passage from one of the poets, well recited, borrows new interest from the rendering. As the journals say, 'the italics are ours'" (102).¹¹¹ The acts of selecting, quoting, and reciting reused language each have inventive potential. The person or source who repeats old language can also add something to it, even when just moving it from one context to another and not revising its content. In Fey's performance, Palin's words become double-voiced

¹¹¹ The significance placed upon recitation reflects the time during which Emerson wrote, when key literacy skills included elocution and public address. Reciting well requires not inventing new material but rather, inhabiting already existing material in a believable way expressing appropriate emotion.

and diverge from the path they initially took (Bakhtin, *Problems* 194-195). Context becomes indistinguishable from content as it too contributes to meaning.

The satirical newspaper and website *The Onion* relies like Drezner did on actual news stories to achieve its parodies but diverges further from them, generating more new text in the process. It appears at first as mostly “original” writing, without the extensive material reuse that we saw in both treatments of Obama’s inaugurations. However, many *Onion* articles call for an awareness of current affairs, which serve as an implicit backdrop against which the parody registers. More importantly, however, *The Onion* resembles “real” news on a material level. Its layout and organization mimic real newspapers and news websites, and its headlines and language reproduce the ethos, sentence structure, and vocabulary typical of news reporting. In fact, uninformed readers regularly fall for *The Onion*: the website *Literally Unbelievable* compiles gullible *Facebook* posts that comment on *Onion* articles as though they were real news.

For *The Onion*, even entirely “new” articles may rely on actual news as a prompt for invention. They may comment on actual news by exaggerating it or representing a humorous perspective on it. Take, for example, a brief article from September 10, 2013 called “John Kerry Costs U.S. Defense Industry \$400 Billion.” The first sentence reads, “Responding to initial reports that Syria may relinquish its stockpile of chemical weapons following Secretary of State John Kerry’s assertion that doing so would decrease the likelihood of American military strikes, representatives for the domestic defense industry complained to reporters Tuesday that the top-ranking diplomat may have cost them \$400 billion in revenue” (n. pag.). The first part of this sentence, up until the comma, reflects real news, and could in fact derive from a legitimate news source. The tone, vocabulary, subject matter, and long, clunky sentence structure all give the impression of news reporting. In the second part of the sentence, after the comma, the satire

appears. The unnamed author of this article has creatively reinterpreted the news of Syria's decision to turn over its chemical weapons by imagining an alternative perspective: that of the defense industry, which would profit from the opposite news—increased likelihood of American military strikes. In presenting this distasteful point of view, *The Onion* acknowledges that certain elements of the U.S. economy would benefit from military intervention, despite the concomitant loss of life, political strife, and damage to land and infrastructure. The article confronts readers with an unpleasant aspect of war and critiques the economic engine that drives even what appear to be universally unfavorable events.

So here, *The Onion* intervenes in real news by imagining another perspective on that news, one that is not nonsensical—it is true that these industries profit from war—but that would not ordinarily appear in print. This article does not entirely make up a story but instead, extends the news with a critical-creative project of de/composition. It exposes something that is only implicit in the actual news, just as Snodgrass reveals possible meanings of original poems. On a procedural level, the writers have combined news-appropriate conventions of language, syntax, and tone with actual subject matter and “original” humor and have added to a preexisting backdrop a new, imagined perspective. The result is inventive in that it produces humor and critique and exposes a new, or at least unacknowledged, point of view.

At the furthest extreme of de/composed news is a series of humor videos called *Bad Lip Reading (BLR)* available on *YouTube*. Each video relies upon real footage of current events and popular figures yet uses voice-overs to deviate widely from the original audio track. *BLR* dubs over the original recordings (e.g., footage from presidential debates, music videos, movies, and football games) by substituting new words and phrases for those actually uttered. Yet the new language matches the mouth and facial movements of the actual language uttered. Humor

emerges in part from the illusion of reality that the videos produce. The technique is at least a unique treatment of the selected video clips and perhaps an altogether new technique for many viewers. Executing it so seamlessly requires careful reading and creative rewriting. Writing for *BLR* requires first determining which words and sounds can correspond with the facial movements that the raw footage includes and then choosing from among the many possibilities the silliest and most unexpected combinations.

For example, *BLR* renders President Obama’s 2013 recitation of the official oath of office as follows. This transcript cannot convey the correspondence between speakers’ faces and their language, but it does demonstrate how wildly *BLR* diverges from its sources.

Table 9: A *Bad Lip Reading* of Obama's Oath

<i>Bad Lip Reading:</i>	Actual Oath:
Chief Justice John Roberts: “K. Repeat after me. I’m proud to say yo momma took a Cosby sweater.”	R: “Please raise your right hand and repeat after me. I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear.”
President Obama: “I’m proud to say yo momma took a Cosby sweater.”	O: “I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear.”
R: “Elvis Presley had sex appeal.”	R: “That I will faithfully execute.”
O: “Elvis Presley had sez...sm.”	O: “That I will faithfully execute.” ¹¹²
R: “I’ll do the spaceman boogie.”	R: “The office of President of the United States.”
O: “I’ll do the spaceman boogie.”	O: “The office of President of the United States.”
R: “I’ll brush on my sassy face.”	R: “And will to the best of my ability.”
O: “I’ll brush on my sassy face.”	O: “And will to the best of my ability.”
R: “There’s two different Einsteins.”	R: “Preserve, protect, and defend.”
O: “There’s two different Einsteins.”	O: “Preserve, protect, and defend.”
R: “I enjoy makeup.”	R: “The Constitution of the United States.”
O: “I enjoy makeup.”	O: “The Constitution of the United States.”
R: “OK, that’s all.”	R: “So help you God?”
	O: “So help me God.”

¹¹² It appears that the reason these two excerpts do not line up exactly is the omission of this line: “That I will faithfully execute.” “I’m proud to say yo momma took a Cosby sweater” derives from “I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear,” and “Elvis Presley had sex appeal” derives from “The office of President of the United States.” The latter transformation is especially noticeable because in both, Obama stumbles over the last syllable.

BLR's technique is analogous to that used by erasure poets like Jen Bervin, who in *Nets* created new poems out of Shakespeare's 150 sonnets by bolding selected words; however, *BLR*'s results diverge far more from their sources than do Bervin's. Rather than erase all words except those that she chose to keep, Bervin bolded some and lightened others; the originals remain but fade into the background as emphasis falls on selected language. *BLR* "erases" the original audio, but its shell remains, in that viewers can still see that individuals are speaking. Unlike in *Nets*, viewers of *BLR* videos cannot quite make out what the speakers are actually saying (unless they are skilled in lip-reading). New audio replaces the original yet still appears to fit. This technique of de/composition obviously exploits the affordances of digital media—the ability for users to tinker with video and audio tracks in addition to alphabetic text.

BLR videos seem to parody the entirety of the figures and occasions that they de/compose, rather than comment specifically on certain claims. The humor in these videos is more general than that in many parodies of the news; finding it funny does not require that one be well-versed in recent events or very familiar with popular figures. The formulations that it produces are so bizarre and silly that they can appeal to a wider audience than more specific political commentaries might. This example thus moves further away from the productive dialectic between actual news and de/composed news, toward using original materials to make something entirely new in effect. It is the inventive *technique* and not just the content that attracts viewers. In great contrast to the abridgment with which I began this section, the inventiveness of *BLR* derives from maximal rather than minimal interference into prior materials.

Each of these de/compositions approaches the news as material to reuse and manipulate, not as inviolable content. But more nonsensical examples like *BLR* take this approach to its

subversive next level by avoiding the explicit critique that satire traditionally pursues. It represents the news instead as a material resource that, like any other kind of text (literary, musical, artistic, comedic, mundane), is susceptible to play. The starting text inflects the resulting de/composition (as redundancy in Obama's speech clearly demonstrated), but does not entirely determine its genre and effects. As *BLR* illustrates most strikingly, tinkering remains an open-ended practice whose outcomes cannot be predicted. Reusing the news can serve disparate, yet at times overlapping, goals in popular cultures: providing information, as in the more straightforward abridgment; offering critique; and creating humor.

De/composed news brings into relief a larger, more general practice of writing: reshaping the real, the known, or the "old." In fact, each example that I have examined involves creatively molding something "authentic" into something "new." Scrap writing appropriates raw, often discarded materials to collect, display, and generate conversation, humor, and art. Misquotation adapts prior, sometimes "original" quotations for new purposes, much as Shields does in his own work of "quotation." Misquotations bend or revise some "truth," which may itself evince prior revision. Finally, de/composed news relies upon actual news, or the general backdrop of current events, to produce humor and critique, sometimes tricking unsuspecting viewers and sometimes obscuring a commentator's "true" point of view (e.g., Stephen Colbert's persona). Shields imagines all writing in this vein: "What actually happened is only raw material; what the writer makes of what happened is all that matters" (204). His "writer" need not be refined further or limited to a certain genre of writing. These topoi are not outliers in the field of writing; they demonstrate that *all* writing manipulates some preexisting material and thus call for re-viewing writing altogether.

Combining disparate materials in this way—old with new, factual with fictional—has inventive potential in that it often leads to mixed or indeterminate forms. As Shields would say, once one begins to alter raw material, one comes to dwell in an indeterminate domain, somewhere in between fact and fiction, old and new. It is difficult to classify much popular reuse according to generic categories. For instance, is scrap writing art or writing? Is it nonfiction or fiction? Is *The Colbert Report* factual or fictional? These examples blend genres and forms and make easy distinctions difficult. They demonstrate that tinkering with language can coincide with tinkering at the higher levels of genre and form, resulting in elastic, playful texts. Tinkering can produce generic ambiguity, and such ambiguity is productive, as *Reality Hunger* makes clear, because it prompts critical-creative musing on genre, form, reality, art, and compositional concepts. As in de/composition of poetry, de/composition in popular cultures draws attention not only to the content of a particular piece but also to broader issues such as these.

V. TOWARD MAKING AND EVALUATING REUSE EVERY DAY

How can composers intervene productively amid masses of ever-multiplying materials? And how can they know when they have made productive interventions? These two questions have been central to this dissertation and to this chapter. They seem to be especially pressing questions when investigating popular cultures of reuse because the Internet makes visible via social media, production-oriented sites like *YouTube*, and ubiquitous reader comments, just how many individuals, many of them amateur producers, are trying to enter large, ongoing conversations and even gain fame from a viral video or *Twitter* account. But these questions are not concerns just when trying to intervene in popular conversations. They extend to all textual activity,

especially writing in instructional settings.¹¹³ Such settings can overwhelm students with texts and positions regarding a subject of interest, making it difficult for them to engage with other perspectives, to account for their reading of source materials, and to articulate “new” points of view. These questions have thus driven successful guides to academic writing such as *Rewriting* and *They Say/I Say*, both of which model writing as a social process of conversing with other texts and ideas. But because they emerge out of conventional academic environments and extract rhetorical moves from traditional academic writing, both guides ignore the more playful, experimental approaches to intervention that reuse models—popular reuse especially. Composition scholars¹¹⁴ have advocated for more flexible, “creative” approaches to academic discourse. I contribute a new perspective to their ongoing conversation by focusing on the ways in which reuse in particular opens up new possibilities for academic writing.

Dwelling among popular cultures of reuse can reorient writers and readers toward a more open-ended approach to inventive intervention. Rather than disciplining them to recognize and abide by generic and material divisions (e.g., fiction and nonfiction, old and new, original and reused), this open-ended approach makes available new possibilities for play and experimentation. This domain allows producers to experiment in the spaces in between conventional distinctions between genres, forms, styles, or contexts. There they encounter and grapple with the ambiguities that accompany hybridity. Inventive student writing—more unexpected, less predictable and rule-governed—could grow out of recognizing and inhabiting the in-between spaces that popular reuse so readily cultivates. Such inhabitation could reenergize

¹¹³ Popular and instructional settings can certainly overlap. *Newspaper Blackout*, for instance, offers instructional videos and step-by-step directions for creating blackout poetry, while also compiling examples for entertainment.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Lockhart, Dent, and Saltmarsh; Maxson; and *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*.

the more mundane, disciplined writing that seems to exist apart from the artistry and humor associated with much popular reuse.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, exposure to this domain could enrich and redirect students' critical reading of popular and everyday texts. Identifying the ways in which such texts challenge and play with conventions of genre and source use might lead students to find similar characteristics in both their own writing and others' writing. Amy J. Devitt has suggested that all texts evince interactions among multiple genres and that genres themselves are never fully stabilized (713). Texts in this domain might be more readily identifiable as such. Recognizing this multiplicity can help us acknowledge the complexity of even everyday texts that go in and out of fashion quite quickly due to the viral nature of popular media. Acknowledging that all genres mix and move might help students see how diverse and flexible their own writing repertoires and personal productions already are. Sampling the popular domain can facilitate such discovery.

When students take on writing projects that are less familiar and predictable than conventional, well-entrenched forms like the thesis-driven essay, how can students and their instructors evaluate what they are creating? How can they identify productive interventions? These questions concern any kind of newly developing writing, not just that which occurs in a classroom context. As mash-up videos begin spreading on the Internet, for instance, viewers need reliable ways of judging them, rather than simply liking all of them just because they all

¹¹⁵ Although popular reuse performs entertainment and critique in particular, it also supports more practically-oriented reuse, as in the abridgment of Obama's speech and in our general capacity on the web to quickly and easily share and cite information. In popular cultures, reuse can offer convenience and efficiency via one-stop reading on news aggregating sites, quick digestion of relevant information, and easy access to commentary from others. As I argued in Chapter 1, reuse can in cases like these produce the mundane emergent function of convenience through re-packaging and recirculating.

employ mash-up. One means of beginning to evaluate a work of reuse is to identify the presence of an orchestrator,¹¹⁶ tracking and then evaluating his or her interferences into the raw materials.

In compiling the strategies for inventive intervention that this chapter has uncovered, I continue to present alternatives to the moves that scholars like Harris and Graff and Birkenstein have codified. These alternatives correspond to moves in which readers might glimpse traces of an orchestrating writer's presence; they indicate how he or she is carving out a space amid the surrounding cultures. These strategies have inventive potential in domains other than popular cultures, but will not exist as equivalent possibilities in every writing situation. Different contexts will place different pressures on composers, pushing them toward some inventive strategies over others. These strategies include 1) copying, sharing, and recirculating a text, which may involve finding it, as in scrap writing; 2) adding to a text via labels, titles, introduction, explanation, or commentary; 3) remediating a text to move it from one setting to another; 4) editing and tinkering with a text via procedures like reduction, substitution, and rearrangement; 5) deviating from or interfering in a text, moving it in a new direction, which involves retaining some initial text while revising it and sometimes adding to it; and 6) adding a new or buried perspective to an existing text. These six strategies, identifiable in the examples this chapter has explored, can be broken down further, into three dominant strategies, which may be combined in a single work of reuse: 1) moving a text, de- and re-contextualizing it; 2)

¹¹⁶ With their term *authorial offering*, Janis and Richard Haswell come close to a concept like the orchestrator I envision here. Furthering their argument that singularity is a hallmark of authorship, they describe a persistent habit among writers of wanting to add one's own voice to a text, or even of doing so without realizing it. What results is an authorial offering. An orchestrator is always present somewhere in the text, even when it is made entirely of preexisting texts. Although Haswell and Haswell rightfully acknowledge that one can place a personal "stamp" on a text unintentionally, their term "authorial offering" seems to retain too much sense of intention in its notion of offering or putting forward. I prefer the idea of searching for traces because it acknowledges the partiality and uncertainty of authorship.

bringing something in a text to its surface, accentuating or highlighting, perhaps by excerpting; and 3) adding a new or separate element to a text, which can occur via combination or addition.

In deciding how and when to use these strategies, composers may consider how their texts will be taken up, read, and evaluated in whichever sphere(s) they enter. The target context can inflect a composer's approach to invention, as well as the text that he or she produces. In order for such feedback between context and composition to occur, the composer must know of the conventions and constraints characterizing the context; his or her writing will emerge in conversation with his or her reading in the target context. For example, short blurbs are especially widespread on the web, in television ads and news reports, and in print genres like periodicals and newsletters. These accommodate the practices of skimming and sampling common to much popular reading. Thus, we have seen brief *Onion* articles, an abridgment of Obama's speech, and small scraps of writing. A composer wishing to intervene effectively in this domain may aim to compose short, easily accessed, and quickly digestible texts. Meanwhile, the instructional domain places different pressures upon composers, whose work will be evaluated with regard to specific goals, sometimes including length requirements. Students must show their learning. Hence, when instructors bring alternative writing practices into their classes, they may try to infer a student's process, through side-by-side comparison of two texts or in reflective, explanatory, and/or analytic writing paired with an experimental assignment. Furthermore, educational settings may reward any experimentation, regardless of the effectiveness of the outcome, as a mark of putting into practice a concept students have learned. Finally, constraints imposed by technology and law can affect which texts composers reuse, the extent to which they transform them, and where they publish the results. Fair use accommodates only some reuse. A composer may be limited to just sharing and not revising a text, or to keeping the revision for

personal rather than public viewing. Obama's presidential speeches afforded a rich site not just for reuse, but also for significant interference because they are in the public domain.

How can composers know when they have intervened productively in preexisting materials? A dominant question to ask is: What does the resulting text make or make possible? Is it productive *of* something? I have shown that reuse can produce the following: a new function, such as the new reading experience that scrap writing books promote; a new value, as in the pithier, more memorable (mis)quotations; new meaning or effect, such as humor, critique, or ambiguity; a new or mixed genre; and a new or wider audience and thus, greater accessibility and circulation. A secondary question might be: Does this work of reuse generate response or revision? That is, does it advance writing by generating more writing? As Bakhtin has suggested, just in sharing texts, and not adding to or revising them, viewers implicitly evaluate those texts, respond to them, and contribute something to their surroundings. Recirculating a text entails rearticulating it.

We might thus regard every recirculation of a text as evidence of its inventiveness, and in fact, seemingly objective quantifications of a text's circulation often drive readership. A video with many views on *YouTube* will propel new viewers to watch it, whereas a more obscure video with fewer views may seem less worthy of one's time (and may be less likely to come to one's attention). While in many cases viral content is in fact inventive, factors other than the content often influence a text's appeal; as I have shown, extratextual features like celebrity endorsement can drive popularity too. Certainly more obscure, less popular content can be inventive, as is often the case in the classroom, where participants cannot expect their assignments to go viral, due to their limited audience, circulation, and longevity.

Given such complexities, I want to avoid depending upon quantifications of a text's spread in order to assess its inventiveness. Instead, I have focused on composing strategies that writers and readers can try out. Thus, the second set of questions above remains subordinate to the first, at least in popular realms. In other settings, however, a text's ability to garner a response from an audience adopts a more prominent role in determining invention. A text chosen for reading and examination in an educational environment must invite response so that students and instructors can discuss it and write about it. Works of art and literature should prompt discussion, interest, and questions. And in professional settings, job candidates want their application materials to generate response so that potential employers will request an interview. Taking risks in application documents can provoke questions and interest that would make for a successful interview. In such cases, this second question comes to overlap with the first: the text produces a new function in generating conversation, debate, and questioning. A textual chain emerges.

A recent post to the WPA listserv offers a test case for considering my criteria for evaluation. The post included a link to a typical remix video along with an inquiry into whether it is "creative." The video explores the theme of "history" by compiling countless images that document the earth's origins, the evolution of humanity, recent historical events, and emerging technologies ("Our Story in 2 Minutes"). The video moves through these images rapidly and pairs them with intense instrumental music. Some viewers might regard it as a simple compilation—just collecting images from the Internet, arranging them in an obvious chronological order, and setting them to music to provoke emotion. But when we begin considering the composer's probable process, we realize that he or she had to decide which images to include. We glimpse how the composer has intervened into raw materials.

Contemplating these decisions opens up an inquiry into what this particular group and sequence of images suggests, what it might argue, and how changing it might produce a different argument. When paired with interested viewers, the video opens up conversation; it provokes questions. Its full inventiveness emerges in relation to an audience of willing participants. Particularly when viewers are not given a pair of texts as in *De/Compositions*, discussing and questioning a work of reuse in a group setting can help them extract meaning and value from it. There is critical and pedagogical value in dwelling with others amid the uncertainties inherent to reuse, whether in a classroom setting or in an online discussion space like those examined in this chapter.

CONCLUSION: SUSTAINING REUSE, SUSTAINING ENGLISH: TOWARD PEDAGOGIES OF CRITICAL-CREATIVE TINKERING

As I discovered while completing this project, once one begins searching for reuse, it appears just about everywhere. Reuse factors into all the work we do as scholars and instructors of English.

We confront plagiarism policies when designing syllabi and assignments and evaluating student writing. We reuse our own syllabi, lesson plans, assignments, policies, handouts, and rubrics from one class to another, from one semester to the next. In our writing of scholarship and teaching materials, we quote, paraphrase, and summarize. We adapt colleagues' assignments. We reuse our own writing as we compose and revise research projects for presentation in different venues. We write the same comments on student writing again and again. We share scholarship, news, and resources for teaching via social media. We tweet near-verbatim bits of conference presentations so that absent colleagues can follow along. We scan, photocopy, and distribute texts to students and colleagues. We reuse PowerPoint presentations. We save and archive annotations, articles, and student work. We use anthologies and coursepacks. We offer students reading guides and translations. We trace quotations, footnotes, and citations so we can build upon or contend with previous scholarship. We sequence assignments so that students constantly add to and revise what they have already written. We read multiple drafts. We teach workplace writing and acknowledge that templates and previous documents can conserve time, energy, and resources. We teach creative writing with reference to

well-codified forms and styles and avant-garde techniques of translation, transposition, and algorithmic writing. We view film and TV adaptations of books. We direct students to open-source and public-domain materials for multimodal projects. We ask students to rewrite and revise. We adapt templates for recommendation letters. We rely upon writing manuals and textbooks that repeat and renew other sources. We encounter much of the same language year after year, as we read student work, professional articles, and institutional documents. We recognize in student writing bits of our own language, drawn from class discussion and assignment sheets. We write and converse in clichés, readymade phrases, and buzzwords.

The fundamental practices of reuse that underlie all these examples have long been central to scholarship and culture at large. Reuse is a longstanding tradition that will persist even as trends like remix and mash-up diminish. I have focused in this project on the history of modern English studies, from roughly the mid-eighteenth century to today, yet recognize that the history of reuse extends much further back in time. Reuse drives transmission of myths and folklore in oral culture. It underlies the classical progymnasmata, a set of repeatable exercises that George Kennedy has recently reproduced and that several composition scholars have proposed reestablishing (see Delli Carpini and Zerbe; Fleming; Hagaman; and Ray, “A Progymnasmata”). And in the sixteenth century, Desiderius Erasmus proliferated exercises in revision and repetition with the publication of *De Copia*. Erasmus built upon Quintilian’s charge that students of rhetoric develop an abundant supply of language and subject matter to prepare them for future rhetorical occasions (Kreiser 86). Compilation is central to various forms of textual collection, such as commonplacing, that have been in practice since ancient times and studied in medieval, early modern, and later contexts (see Haven and Swann on commonplacing; Blair, Hathaway, and Knight on compilation). Nowadays it is commonplace to argue that all art

and literature has been influenced, that true originality is a myth, and that we all just repeat or add to what others have already said.

Simon Reynolds critiqued such commonplaces in a 2012 *Slate* article that lumps together recent work including *Reality Hunger*, “The Ecstasy of Influence,” *remixthebook*, *In Praise of Copying*, and *Uncreative Writing* under the heading of a movement called “recreativity.” In contrast to these publications, Reynolds takes the unpopular position that “genius” is still a viable concept, along with originality and novelty. He even argues that artists who believe “that it’s possible to come up with something new under the sun are much more likely to try for that and thus stand a better chance of reaching it” (Reynolds, n. pag.). Recreativity justifies and elevates “lazy, parasitic work.” Yet Reynolds seems to suggest that what he wants to recuperate as “genius” is actually something akin to invention through tinkering. First, he acknowledges that Nabokov may have reused the title and plot of *Lolita*, but he transformed them via brilliant storytelling, characterization, and language. And then to conclude his article, Reynolds declares:

The stealing and the storing is the easy part. The much harder—and forever mysterious—stage is the transformation of the borrowed materials. Recreativity has nothing to say about this stage of the process, the bit where, every so often, genius comes into play. It’s not the fact or the act of theft but what’s done with the stolen thing that counts: the spin added that “makes it new.”

I suggest that inventively transforming those borrowed materials depends upon mundane practices of tinkering, not what Reynolds calls a “forever mysterious” process. Nabokov tinkered so elegantly and substantively with his sources that it is his novel, and not its precursor (Heinz von Lichberg’s short story), that has spurred further reuse through adaptation and that now has a place in the canon of English literature. Aligning such tinkering with invention and not genius

(the term Reynolds prefers) recasts it as a longstanding process of production that can be prompted and reliably identified—not a mythical quality available to select individuals and only legible when one adopts an “I know it when I see it” approach.

This dissertation was motivated by my own frustration, shared with Reynolds, that recent works had only affirmed the allure and excitement of reuse, without any instruction in how to reuse well and how to identify reuse as successful. From heuristics for composite texts to procedures for critical-creative tinkering, this project has explicated some orderly yet open-ended approaches to effective textual reuse. I thus not only elaborate reuse as a sturdy tradition of writing and teaching writing but also argue for supporting and sustaining it as English instructors. In contrast to lazy and parasitic work, reuse can be productive—but importantly, isn’t always.

For a common situation in which reuse occurs yet is not necessarily inventive, consider the curation of links, videos, and images via social media. On *Facebook* and *Twitter*, virtually all users are compilers who find and forward interesting artifacts to entertain and enlighten their followers. Users may initially encounter these links through browsing other compilations: those their friends keep and those that content-aggregating websites like *Buzzfeed* specialize in. Can users claim some ownership over their collections? Is their curatorial work worthy of credit?¹¹⁷ To assert ownership over what they share, users would have to demonstrate some inventiveness or novelty. Compilation is not in itself inventive, but should not be dismissed altogether: it has inventive potential.

¹¹⁷ A submission to *Gawker*’s online advice column “Thatz Not Okay” questioned whether a social media curator should be credited when his or her friends re-share pieces in the collection. In response to this query, Caity Weaver, the author of “Thatz Not Okay,” wrote “You’re upset that people are sharing work (that you didn’t create) without crediting you (for not creating it)?” (n. pag.). She calls this “curator’s lament” “the fakest problem in the world” and reasons that, “You’re not conducting hundreds of hours of independent primary source research here, cobbling funny pictures together on a wing and a prayer; you are finding a .jpg that someone else found and sharing it. You are doing exactly the same amount of work (ctrl + v) as the person who follows you.”

Some practices can move curation toward greater inventiveness. Unearthing materials not already circulating widely via *Buzzfeed*,¹¹⁸ for example, requires some labor and ingenuity to find and recognize as share-worthy. Forwarding such material adds freshness to the artifacts swirling around one's social network. Content alone can thus generate novelty and surprise, relative to an audience. Curators can also add commentary, explanation, and personal evaluation to the materials that they share, marking them as somewhat transformed through the process of re-appropriation. Invention here can emerge via the generation of new text, such as clever or funny captions. Similarly, a curator can combine several findings in one post in an illuminating or provocative way, much as museum exhibits might gather artifacts from different contexts in order to draw connections among them. Finally, just moving materials from their original environment into the space of *Facebook* can be inventive in the way that scrap writing typically is. When cut from their initial paper context and introduced on the web, scraps become radically de- and re-contextualized, provoking new questions and interest. Some core strategies of reuse that I have uncovered—re-contextualizing, adding, combining, and rearranging—can help distinguish more from less successful reuse and thus discredit statements like Reynolds's that imply reuse is an altogether negative trend.

¹¹⁸ *Buzzfeed* and similar sites have been critiqued for uninventively reposting information, even though its "listicles" each bear the name of an author. Viewers have reproached these authors for posting materials that have already been widely shared on other sites (especially *Reddit*) and for failing to credit their sources, a practice they have since curtailed (see Chen). Like personal compilations, some listicles are more inventive than others: they share less familiar content; incorporate smart, humorous captions; arrange photos in a meaningful way; and/or compile materials under accessible, funny titles.

I. THE TINKERER'S TEXTUAL STANCE: READING, WRITING, AND EXIGENCY

Illuminating and then sustaining reuse as an ongoing inventive tradition encourages taking on a stance that regards all texts as fluid systems open to intervention. This approach re-envision texts as material things that, somewhat paradoxically, also remain radically open. Texts are materials that invite and withstand bending, extending, shaping, and reshaping. They can be broken down, taken apart, and reassembled along any number of axes.

A more concrete way to describe this radical openness is via familiar conceptions of revision. Through process approaches, instructors have commonly sought to instill in students the idea that all their writing is open to revision and never complete. Reframing the textual stance via reuse, I take this commonplace further and suggest that all texts, regardless of their origins and owners, should remain forever open to further manipulation—by any hands. Composition becomes open-ended and collaborative, with each text offering the potential to generate more text. This openness need not exist materially, through changes to copyright law, but rather, can signify a stance toward texts that readers adopt, with eventual material results. Readers stand as participants invested in future writing, not as mere observers. Writers such as Kelcey Parker and Francine Prose have called this reading-with-an-eye-toward-production “reading like a writer” and have affiliated it with the teaching of creative writing, where students use close reading to grab onto powerful language. It is also consistent with rhetorical criticism. Tinkering does not originate this approach but foregrounds it and distinguishes it from more common approaches to reading that students employ, like reading for meaning and fact-

finding.¹¹⁹ These approaches certainly do not disappear in reading as a tinkerer. Tinkerers accentuate another layer in their reading: an evaluative stance, marked by persistent questions of “What does this text offer me? What can I do with this text?” For tinkerers, reading works in service of reusing and imitating.

Readers can adopt the tinkerer’s stance with regard to any text, but context will frame which texts they approach in this way. Model texts emerge from reviews, classroom discussions, workshops, and assigned readings, all of them pointing toward good writing worth emulating or excerpting. Yet in arguing for the prominence and value of reuse in so many contexts, I have affirmed its prevalence and thus the widespread applicability of the inventive, interactive stance that tinkering inculcates. I propose that any text might be productively reused and want to distance tinkering from hierarchical distinctions among texts, authors, and genres. I suggest that readers invested in writing and reuse look everywhere for material worth adapting; all writing is fair game. A composition student might reuse a quotation or approach from either a classmate’s work or an anthologized essay—or from both. Any piece of writing might contain something worth sharing or modifying. One who regularly thinks like a tinkerer—always searching for material to reuse—approaches reading with curiosity. Even the blandest institutional discourse, for instance, might excite aspiring writers—as in *Fakes*, whose contributors have reused the conventions of everyday documents to generate surprising and humorous fiction.

I envision the tinkerer’s stance as uniquely reframing issues of exigency. Amid enthusiasm in composition studies for community- and project-based learning, I do not subscribe

¹¹⁹ A dominant approach to reading among college students is what Cheryl Hogue Smith has identified as mining for meaning or “right answers” that students think they need to find (62). Smith helpfully recognizes potential in this practice, acknowledging that “While this meaning-finding process does subvert the rhetorical and interpretive skills students need to engage thoughtfully with texts, it also shows that students have the capacity to read with a focused attention—a skill that, if honed in more productive ways, can transfer students’ focus from a scavenger hunt within a text to their transaction with that text” (62). I suggest that one way to hone this impulse is to redirect students’ attention to what they as tinkerers can make of a text, what they can do with it, and why.

to the belief that less exigent writing assignments, like language exercises not directly tied to “the real world,” lack value. I suggest that these can bolster students’ writing and reading, including the other projects that they are undertaking. At the same time, I recognize that tinkering is not without consequence. I reframe exigency as encompassing more than an immediate pressing need and thus associate tinkering with both poetic and rhetorical traditions.

Reading as a tinkerer can take on more or less urgency. It can be a leisurely stance like that which one assumes while puttering around a garage or workbench fiddling with whatever seems interesting at the moment. A fascination with one’s tools and materials and a desire to make things drive such endless, aimless energy. The same could be said of committed writers who do not require the exigency of a class assignment in order to work on their writing. Wendy Bishop encapsulated this lack of exigency in sketching how students envision creative writing differently than composition: creative writing is fun, “something done to pass time,” whereas composition is imposed on students, constrained, mandated (“Crossing” 181). From a creative writer’s perspective, tinkering is less exigent and seemingly less rhetorical, given that a conventional characteristic of rhetoric is its responsiveness to a pressing need. Yet this approach also serves a commitment to gaining facility with language through constant exposure to texts, which is a very rhetorical disposition. One skilled in rhetoric applies its principles to composing for all occasions, whenever they might arise. Tinkering with diverse texts in multiple contexts prepares students for the unpredictability of future composing situations.¹²⁰ Playful,

¹²⁰ In a recent *Pedagogy* article, Chris Kreiser draws upon improvisation in performative contexts such as dance and oratory to suggest that learning to improvise in the moment of writing contributes to students’ general rhetorical sensibility. Improvisation serves an ongoing literacy. By quoting Quintilian as follows, Kreiser indicates how general facility with language helps develop the rhetorical disposition that I have invoked: “[T]he all-important gift for an orator is a wise adaptability since he [or she] is called upon to meet the most varied emergencies” (81). Tinkerers must practice improvisation too—they must make do with the resources available to them, which shift with each change in context. Tinkering has much in common with the improvisational exercises that Kreiser promotes, with the key difference being that tinkering involves reuse of preexisting text.

contemplative textual activity can thus take on exigency when considered within the larger scheme of a literacy curriculum. Exigency can emerge, often unexpectedly, from mere immersion in ideas and texts. The leisurely reading that tinkering promotes can incite interest and response, leading eventually to reuse.

Furthermore, tinkers adapt and their tinkering grows less aimless and uncertain. Over time, with more exposure to different textual worlds, tinkers learn which texts are most malleable and which are reliable aids to invention. Tinkering with specific texts feeds back into one's general facility in reading and writing, including the ability to discern which sources are worth poaching. *Reality Hunger*, for instance, has served for me as a particularly persistent text, thanks to its breadth of subject matter, variety of styles, persuasive force, and occasional impenetrability. Of course which texts serve as reliable models and sources also depends upon the project at hand. Thus, I want to stress that tinkering accommodates more and less exigent and determined writing situations. It is both a poetic and a rhetorical practice. On the one hand, it drives experimentation and meandering play. And on the other hand, it is a dependable approach to revising texts so that they better accommodate rhetorical situations. The more widely tinkering is implemented, as a stance one can take toward any text, the more flexible and robust a practice it becomes.

II. TINKERING AND THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

English studies today is a fragmented field that in its different departmental instantiations may include literature, film, television, cultural studies, digital media, journalism, creative writing, rhetoric, composition, gender studies, childhood studies, comparative literature, and linguistics in

various combinations. Given the breadth of subject matter and theoretical approaches that these subfields each incorporate, it is difficult to identify much coherence in English studies at large. The surge in new independent departments of writing over the last few decades suggests conflict between composition and other branches of English, particularly literature. Departments of writing may emerge out of top-down initiatives in English departments, as a result of competing values, goals, and epistemologies. But often they come about in a more bottom-up fashion, not as a result of theoretical factions, but from unique local constraints concerned with staffing, funding, and curriculum.¹²¹ Points of continuity between literature and composition persist—separation is not the result of irreconcilable differences on a broad intellectual level—and thus bridging these branches remains for me a promising possibility.

Coherence and continuity remain concerns even when composition splits from English, given that independent departments may combine branches of study, such as professional writing, creative writing, journalism, composition, rhetoric, and linguistics. There is enormous variety among independent departments, particularly with regard to the place of creative writing—whether it stays with literature or pairs off with composition. Since writing can be divided into so many different genres and purposes, the same taxonomic impulse partitioning many English departments into distinct tracks or majors easily transfers to independent writing units too. Thus, the need for some common nodes applies to different departmental configurations, and tinkering could help fulfill that need in both English studies and writing

¹²¹ In *A Field of Dreams*, narratives about the formation of independent writing units at various institutions foreground issues related to departmental budgets, staffing, and hiring initiatives. Chris M. Anson notes in his contribution that the question of whether composition classes can operate successfully in an English department is always a local one (“Who” 161). Theresa Enos argues the same (248). Sometimes the decision to eject composition from English departments comes from an institution’s administration rather than the department itself, indicating again that these changes do not result entirely from theoretical discord. It is important to note, however, that in composition studies it can be difficult to distinguish material concerns from scholarly differences, as much work in the field takes up questions of adjunct labor, tenure, and the role of composition courses in college curricula.

programs. Ultimately, however, I advocate for retaining a connection between literature and writing in particular (whether or not they occupy the same department) because I see a focus on writing enhancing literary studies and literary works serving as significant resources for teaching writing. This interanimation is best achieved, I think, in departments of English studies.

If anything *does* hold English studies together, it is a shared investment in texts. This investment is so broad and is articulated through so many disparate practices that it can serve only as a weak connection among branches, not a common core. As Devitt has noted, the meaning of *texts* varies from one disciplinary branch to another, as does the emphasis upon consumption or production of them. Of all the theoretical approaches that textual study can adopt, what is most consistently central to the wide field known as literary study is, as Jonathan Culler has suggested, close reading. In fact, almost anywhere in an English department concerned with the reading of written texts, there is close reading. It is an activity that students of composition, creative writing, and literature regularly perform. But like *text*, *close reading* gets elaborated in many different ways and is used toward diverse ends. Close reading can attend to one textual feature here and another one there. It varies in its attention to detail and the critical lens through which it is pursued. Perhaps its meaning has been diluted over time so that it is easily equated with reading or analyzing more generally, given how frequently it is invoked.¹²²

As an activity put in service of tinkering, close reading is, I suggest, best defined as a broad disposition toward breaking down texts. It directs attention to the parts of a text—its words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, rhetorical devices, structure. It invites readers to slow down their reading, break down the text, and mull over its components. Close reading is central to textual activity, not a method to confine to literary study, nor to identify solely with New

¹²² See Bialostosky on the variability and imprecision associated with the term “close reading.”

Criticism, especially as it is often regarded—as outdated and decontextualized. Close reading is essential to successful textual reuse and critical-creative tinkering.¹²³ Therefore, as I think about what we in English can make of reuse, I wish to reaffirm the value of close reading as a general orientation and particularly as it can be reimagined as an approach to production.

Culler helps to clarify what it is about close reading that makes it applicable across English studies and easily put in service of the creative work I am advocating. To me, close reading offers essential preparation for reuse in that “It enjoins looking at rather than through the language of the text and thinking about how it is functioning, finding it puzzling” (Culler 23). It draws attention to language. Culler stresses that close reading turns readers toward “strangeness” (22)—to language that compels and confuses. Readers need not subsequently resolve such strangeness, but perhaps just regard it as a resource, something to look for in future reading, something to try out in future writing. Culler argues,

In fact, the work of close reading is not primarily to resolve difficulties but above all to describe them, to elucidate their source and implications. I would stress that close reading need not involve detailed interpretation of literary passages . . . but especially attention to how meaning is produced or conveyed, to what sorts of literary and rhetorical strategies and techniques are deployed to achieve what the reader takes to be the effects of the work or passage. Thus it involves poetics as much as hermeneutics. (22)

¹²³ My student Erin captured an interesting relationship between reading and reusing in reflecting on the critical-creative collage essay she composed for Introduction to Literature. She wrote, “I think using other peoples’ words to voice your own opinion is on the one hand easy because other people always say it better. On the other hand, it is hard to find people who support exactly the same position you do. Also, you must be completely certain of what you support because reading someone else’s stance on a topic can sway you. I was not sure of my stance on *Reality Hunger* and Shield’s [*sic*] until I had to think through this prompt and find supporting texts to use in the ‘creative’ section” (3).

Critical-creative tinkering pursues ends that we might characterize as poetic and hermeneutic. I do not, however, describe tinkering as hermeneutic because I see it provoking questions about sources, genres, and writing in general that do not always lend themselves to interpretation, but rather to critical thinking more broadly. As an enhanced approach to close reading, tinkering involves close reading, yet that reading is oriented toward invention. It makes central the poetic element that Culler identifies. In fact, Culler recognizes value in putting a text into a reader's hands, asking him or her to rewrite or manipulate it through memorization or translation, and affirms that such activity can feed back into general literacy by "giv[ing] a sense of how elements of the language fit together" (23). He thus invokes the tradition of rewriting that I have highlighted in reading and writing exercises from the eighteenth century onward, though with his concern for literary study, rather than more broadly for English studies or literacy education, he does not connect this tradition to the critical-creative writing that I argue should be central to the field.

Despite broad appeals to close reading throughout English studies, so-called "literary" or "creative" writing most draws attention to strangeness in language, so literature and close reading have been firmly linked. "Creative" and "literary" categories are difficult to maintain, however, because they are contextual and arbitrary and because so much writing blends creative with critical and expository modes. Thus, I decouple close reading from literature and argue that all language can be looked at—though certainly, some language more readily compels attention. Some literary texts, especially poems, are designed to draw attention to their language. Through versification and lineation, for instance, poetry can magnify syntactic features that translate to other texts, where they just remain more hidden. Affirming the wide applicability of close reading has significant consequences in that it contributes to the idea that all texts, no matter

their origins, authorship, or complexity, are open to scrutiny and tinkering, and should be approached as potential creative resources for invention.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, for instance, as tinkerers, we can find openings toward creative intervention even in what seems the most mundane writing that English departments teach—professional discourse. Though *creative* and *literary* are terms resulting largely from institutional customs, they remain key terms for this dissertation because I want to affirm the centrality of these kinds of texts to the teaching of tinkering and endorse their prominence in English studies. I occupy an admittedly strange position in advocating for an emphasis on production, a view in line with arguments for writing studies curricula, while also asserting the continued value of literature, the branch of English typically invoked in opposition to composition. This position lends itself to forging connections between disciplinary branches, by, for example, incorporating multi-genre or hybrid writing styles into reading and writing assignments.

Part of my reasoning here is that creative writing, especially poetry, is particularly well-suited to demonstrating and teaching tinkering. Short, puzzling, and descriptive texts like poems, songs, flash fiction, and scrap writing facilitate close reading and identification of ready slots for manipulation. They can make visible how minute changes in punctuation, word choice, and sentence structure produce new effects. These brief texts encourage dwelling on language as readers are compelled to look closely at individual elements and their interactions with one another, rather than limiting their reading to a main idea or argument. I recall how choosing Rita Dove's densely descriptive, almost wordy poem "Vacation" helped Kirsten achieve an interesting de/composition in Chapter 3 because of the original text's accessible openings for substituting one image or adjective for another. Likewise, the example sentence that R. G. Parker

used to demonstrate syntactic rearrangement in his 1832 textbook clearly dramatizes how subtle manipulations—no new text added—produce new effects because the sentence is brief yet syntactically complex, with several easily manipulated descriptive clauses embedded within it.

As I envision a future for English studies in which tinkering, experimentation, and critical-creative composition are valued, I see literary or creative writing as a central resource for the field. As a resource, it not only demonstrates complexity, illuminates other cultures and contexts, and provokes challenging questions, but also provides models of writing into which readers can intervene, so as to inform their reading and writing habits on a larger scale. Exploring the openings for intervention in “Vacation,” for instance, can help readers identify analogous openings in Parker’s sample sentence, and eventually, to apply such thinking when reading and revising their own writing, when providing peer commentary, or even when filling in templates for business letters. As Bishop mused in her contribution to *A Field of Dreams*, literature and writing can coexist in English studies because literature can serve as a springboard to writing (“A Rose” 234-235). Reading literature can sensitize writers to language and prompt them to generate their own compositions. Tinkering with a variety of texts, and especially with those exhibiting pronounced “strangeness,” exposes readers to options for composing, helping them develop copious expression. This consequence is in line with a central goal for teaching writing: simply helping students to keep generating more writing.

Establishing this reciprocal relationship between reading literature and producing critical-creative compositions could result in stronger connections between the teaching of literature and the teaching of “creative” writing, a label I wish to extend to all writing. As I have emphasized, critical-creative tinkering (through de/composition or imitation, for instance) helps to open curricula to creative writing assignments that invite students to experiment with the genres that

they are reading.¹²⁴ In this context, tinkering conveys active, experiential learning consistent with what educational theorists and proponents of hands-on learning call “making.” Sylvia Libow Martinez and Gary S. Stager argue that making “obliterates the distinction between a vocational and academic education” (intro). Eliminating this distinction is important because it makes education less hierarchical and abstract; students gain concrete experience that allows them to grasp concepts *and* contribute materially to the world around them. There is a similar power and prestige imbalance between production-oriented and consumption-oriented English education, especially in accounts of the discipline that pit composition against literature.¹²⁵ Blending creative production with critical analysis curtails this imbalance.

In an educational environment that values making, tinkering with outside texts can lead students to produce their own compelling creative works, pieces they may wish to show off in a portfolio or even submit for publication. A key question then arises for them: *At what point does my manipulation of another’s text become a “new” text for which I, the tinkerer, can take some credit?* A student in one of my Written Professional Communication courses posed this question after identifying the prevalence of templates in professional environments. While his question seemed motivated more by curiosity than by a desire to stake a claim for his work, I imagine that students pursuing writing degrees, “professional” or “creative,” might ask this question with greater urgency. After all, they want to publish and do not want to infringe upon anyone else’s copyright. Even when they are tinkering and reusing, students want recognition for their work,

¹²⁴ Kelcey Parker argues for “creative” approaches to literary criticism by highlighting Lance Olsen’s “critifictions”—texts that blend interpretation and analysis with fiction writing. She illuminates the compelling contributions that so-called creative writers like Olsen offer to literary study, noting that critifictions and other creative assignments (such as imitations) used in literature courses provocatively ask students to read and write as *writers*, not just as critics.

¹²⁵ Barry M. Maid has likened this situation to divisions between theoretical and practical work in departments of foreign languages, math, and political science (94). Similarly, Jane E. Hindman has suggested that a hierarchy distinguishes rhetoric from composition, theoretical from applied research, and soft from hard sciences (119).

and publication norms today continue to stress authorship—even in inherently collaborative contexts like *Buzzfeed* listicles and scientific research articles, for instance. It might be more accurate to envision authorship in such contexts as contribution or participation. Whether or not the author paradigm persists, or gets replaced by one of these alternatives, the challenge of making one’s contributions visible will remain a prominent concern.

Fair use guidelines help writers identify some ways to avoid infringement, or make a case that their reuse is appropriate. For instance, one is more likely to be accused of infringement when profiting from reuse than when generating critical, scholarly, or educational benefits without monetary compensation. Factual or nonfiction works support fair use more readily than fictional or highly creative ones. As I have shown, however, it can be difficult to identify a piece of writing as either factual *or* fictional, and furthermore, fair use offers guidelines, not hard-and-fast rules. A factor as important as the amount of text reused is open to interpretation and judgment: what counts as a “small quantity” as opposed to a “large portion” of a text (Crews)? Such questions require writers to think rhetorically about the context in which they wish to publish their writing, the effects it will have on readers, and any repercussions for the originators of their sources.¹²⁶

Another approach to this key question is a personal one: When do I as a writer feel that I have transformed my sources substantially? When do I see that my writing represents my “unique” point of view? Responding to such questions introduces an unruly affective dimension into determinations of appropriate textual reuse. These questions offer subjective ways of

¹²⁶ Kenneth D. Crews of the Copyright Advisory Office at Columbia University offers a helpful and concise summary of fair use guidelines as a checklist that tinkerers can use to determine how likely it is that their work constitutes fair use. He clarifies that the checklist “is not an exercise in simply checking and counting boxes” and suggests that tinkerers “need to consider the relative persuasive strength of the circumstances and if the overall conditions lean most convincingly for or against fair use” (Crews, n. pag.). Fair use guidelines offer just one way of opening up discussion about ownership and invention of texts; such discussion will also incorporate personal judgments and evaluation.

judging the degree to which a writer identifies with a piece of writing. Despite the prevalence of reuse and the apparent inevitability that I will write something that has been written before, I find convincing Janis Haswell and Richard Haswell's suggestion that writers impose some uniqueness upon every text they write, even what seems most generic. They note that every genre, no matter how standardized, can bear an author's "stamp" (157). A writer might detect this stamp even when it is not accessible to readers; he or she must then argue for it or otherwise make it visible.

A reader's judgment may be heavily influenced by familiarity with the source text(s) and the ability to recognize tinkering. His or her training and background matter too. Readers well-versed in close reading and interpretation seem predisposed to inventing potential explanations for works of apparent "meta-plagiarism." For example, in the case of Quentin Rowan's admitted plagiarism, critics recognized the ease of reading his patchwork novel as a work of parody, experimentation, or performative meta-criticism. It is likely that those of us inclined toward meaning-making will search for, and probably find, a "point" that an experimental piece appears to be pursuing. Lizzie Widdicombe, reporting in *The New Yorker* on Rowan's plagiarism, invokes the vast scholarship helping readers to make such interpretations, quoting one commentator's hypothesis that "Rowan 'could have used a dream team of literary theorists to get him out of trouble'" (58). Ruth Graham also identifies this knee-jerk interpretive reaction among writers and readers in reporting on a recent spate of poetic plagiarisms. She notes that when poet Paisley Rekdal learned that a man named Christian Ward had re-appropriated one of her poems, made minimal changes to it, and published it under his own name, "Her first reaction was to wonder if it was some kind of experiment. Perhaps by changing the gender of the author of a poem about infidelity and infertility, he was teasing out new meanings?" (Graham, n. pag.). Such

logic can justify nearly any minute, inconsequential editing and thus obviate questions of credit and ownership altogether.

In a classroom context, instructors may require that students introduce a certain amount of new material into projects emerging out of previous writing. Revision guidelines used at Pitt in Seminar in Composition, for instance, equate substantial revision with the addition of at least 50% new writing. While such suggestions helpfully encourage students to continue generating new text and not be content with what they have already produced, they attempt to quantify what we as readers and writers often experience on a more affective, intuitive level—the point at which we feel our writing is “done” or “good enough.” Furthermore, I have shown that *not* adding new text, but just rearranging, reformatting, or recombining what already exists, can be inventive and thus contribute to a successful revision. However, such a revision would not be substantial enough in the eyes of a reader looking for a certain quantity of new, never-before-seen material, in keeping with Pitt’s policy.

I argue that the most promising way of resolving this key question is to examine works of reuse according to their inventive potential, as I have advocated throughout this dissertation. When trying to determine whether he or she has intervened enough to call a text “mine,” a writer can ask questions such as: Is my version productive of something? Does it produce new functions or effects? Does it significantly illuminate the original text? Does it introduce a new or buried perspective or argument? Does it convey added elegance, humor, or convenience? Identifying one’s writing as inventive does not necessarily mean that one now has legal control over it according to fair use, but it does suggest that one has made a significant mark on the original text(s). Of course responding to these questions opens spaces for the kind of overly interpretive thinking I critiqued above—thinking that can find some kind of statement in nearly

any piece of writing or art. In learning environments, instructors could ask students to justify their reuse by accounting for, even arguing for, the new effects they see their writing producing. Such an assignment would take seriously the affective dimension to these judgments, asking students to articulate how they feel, yet would also demand that they ground such judgments in features of their writing and writing process.

Questions like this one represent the kinds of complexities that arise when English students begin thinking of themselves as makers. Examining texts, practicing the moves that they evince, and studying their influence lead to questions about how to rewrite them and the consequences of doing so. Such questions can open up timely and complex discussions about how writing circulates and is valued in current and past textual economies, how readers might use or benefit from publishing works of reuse, which manipulations current and past copyright regimes might permit, and which experiments seem worth circulating rather than keeping private. Making production more central to English studies not only exposes students to more writing strategies and helps them generate more writing, but also leads them toward such rich questions, many of which instructors already aim to provoke. Tinkering moves curricula in this productive direction because it instills in readers an inventive stance and demonstrates how reading does not have to be a closed activity, an end in itself, but an opening toward production. Importantly, however, when tinkering is valued, an emphasis on production does not preclude study and analysis of texts; it does not force a division between writing studies and literary studies. All texts, and as I have argued, especially “strange” creative ones, remain valuable for their capacity to spur both writing and critical thinking.

The implications of tinkering extend to how we envision the English major and English education more broadly. In the past couple years, I have more than once encountered a comic

titled “Perks of Being an English Major” circulating via social media. It has gone viral since being published in 2012 and now boasts more than 800,000 *Facebook* “likes.” The comic has four panels, each depicting a young man named Jacob (presumably the artist and author Jacob Andrews) being cheered as a celebrity, complete with flashy sunglasses, for his English major talents. First, two young women beg Jacob to read them a book and analyze a poem, and he responds, “Ladies please, I’m a busy man.” The next panel shows that indeed he is busy, as an older man congratulates Jacob for being offered “all the jobs.” Next, Jacob receives a phone call: “Jacob, this is the President. I need you at the White House to analyze this Shakespeare play.” In the final panel, Jacob gleefully pounces on bags of money. The comic is funny because it so concisely encapsulates a future that English majors, and many others in the liberal arts, are increasingly told by the popular media they cannot expect. It seizes on the most obscure, seemingly inapplicable abilities that English majors gain and presents them as impossibly important and urgent. Significantly, however, the comic runs with the most commonly dismissed, stereotypical tasks associated with English majors—reading and analyzing old, classic texts epitomized by Shakespeare. What gets left out is writing. This omission is significant because the most persuasive way to argue for an English education (and humanities training more broadly), rather than depict its seeming obscurity, is to describe the communication skills that graduates gain, skills that news outlets and college promotions staff continually affirm are valued in all fields of employment. Tinkering can contribute to moving writing, and other forms of making, closer to the center of English, appealing to a general need for strong communicators in our society.

III. SUSTAINING AND SPONSORING REUSE FOR THE FUTURE

How can writers and educators contribute to texts that will not only evince reuse, but also help sustain reuse as a tradition of writing? This question has implications for strategies of both writing and circulation. In order to reuse a text, a writer has to be able to find it. The only reusable texts are those in circulation. Educators already contribute to keeping texts in circulation through their assigned readings. But they might be more strategic about circulation by for instance, exposing students to several different approaches to a single assignment or giving them resources for investigating archival texts that emerge out of the context surrounding a reading assignment. Both of these suggestions would increase access to uncommon, less public, and less privileged texts such as student writing from previous semesters and historical materials not widely included on syllabi. Class participants could also use tools of social media to promote and advance texts that they value and want to continue circulating. When students serve as occasional compilers of alternative class reading lists, authority over which texts matter and deserve re-circulation grows more dispersed and additional texts gain attention. Incorporating lessons on rhetorical velocity and circulation can help students identify strategies of invention, arrangement, and delivery that will help keep their own writing in circulation too.

Instructors can also promote and help produce texts that invite reuse and tinkering. These are texts that promote interaction. Features both internal and external to a text can stimulate further intervention. In a recent *Enculturation* article, one of its three coauthors, Galin Dent, identifies how the rhetorical features of hybrid essays can prompt interventions from readers. He responds to his coauthor Jennifer Saltmarsh's writing, which he characterizes as "a wonderful mix of analysis, theoretical probing, documentary, and creative non-fiction," in a way that affirms the capacity, even necessity, for intervening—that is, he acknowledges an opening for

invention. “There is something about its honesty that leaves room for the reader’s interpretation, for complexity and texture—somehow this kind of writing lets the reader decide,” he writes. “This is a quality that I find in my favorite types of research, research that lets us think it through for ourselves and make up our own minds about the findings. It compels us, as readers, to also be critically reflective.” This kind of writing, which moves between different modes of discourse to allow for creative contemplation amid quotations, reporting, and narrative, leaves openings for readers. Hybrid writing like Jennifer’s contains loose joins, like those I have identified in *Reality Hunger* and in Fontaine and Hunter’s article from *JAC*. Quotations need not make up the bulk of such writing, as is the case for Shields and Fontaine and Hunter; the writing on which Galin is commenting is not a collage of quotations, but a collage of modes of discourse. Writing that mixes genres, forms, and styles, like that highlighted in the popular domain, can invite interaction and response and thus foreground for readers their ability to play and tinker with it. Such writing is looser, more performative, and less straightforward than conventional expository prose. It is unfinished, leaving openings for conversation.

Textual features that provide readers with many available routes into tinkering also help to sustain reuse. For instance, the dense adjectives, modifiers, figurative language, and imagery in descriptive texts (poetry, creative nonfiction, or fiction) provide many “slots” inviting substitution, a core move in tinkering. David Yost and Chris Drew use a Wilfred Owen poem to demonstrate the inventive potential in fill-in-the-blank creative exercises. They suggest that their assignment—removing Owen’s characteristic language and imagery and then asking students to supply new possibilities—helps students appreciate the original piece of literature and directs their attention to “words as the building blocks of text” (196). Given its vivid, at times startling language, “Dulce et Decorum Est” worked well for this exercise by drawing students to specific

images through close reading and consideration of alternative expressions. Likewise, loosely organized texts, such as a sparse, lyric essay like Eula Biss's "The Pain Scale," are well-suited to tinkering. They invite creative rearrangement of textual chunks because meaning builds via accretion and combination rather than through linear chronology.

While consistent features underlie some major examples of reuse, what usually drives it, especially outside the classroom, is pleasure or admiration. Writers reuse language and excerpts that they find compelling, informative, or eloquent. They may identify with a passage and feel that it will lend a new perspective or nuance to their own writing. Writers who reuse are immersed in text; they enjoy reading, viewing, or otherwise engaging with texts. In a general sense, sustaining reuse calls for cultivating a love of text. It is difficult to inspire such feelings in students, especially with any consistency, and as T. R. Johnson has argued, teaching toward any kind of "feeling" like pleasure is generally suspect and unpopular as a result of longstanding distrust of "expressivist" pedagogies in composition studies. But I think instructors, whatever their theoretical orientations, typically want to create classrooms that are pleasant and hospitable to as many participants as possible. Fostering such environments means fostering a kind of pleasure. Furthermore, even when instructors inevitably cannot satisfy every student's reading tastes, they can help students recognize which features make some texts more and less appealing to them, a kind of education that can motivate their extra-curricular textual pursuits. Tinkering supports such endeavors because it reorients students' perspectives on textual interaction, changing how they read by foregrounding opportunities for appropriation. Approaches like critical-creative tinkering that combine making with learning can help students gain satisfaction through reading and writing.

I have uncovered two models of interaction that can serve as resources in helping import pleasure and satisfaction into literacy activities. One model is Web 2.0 and its abundance of social media. The Internet is brimming with texts and with opportunities for reuse, and it supports communities of people with shared interests who can exchange materials that they like, such as songs, videos, images, comics, and fan fiction. Users who sustain an active social media presence customarily find and then share what they enjoy and consider interesting. Reading on the Internet is largely a social activity, in that even if one reads an article independently, he or she may share it with others and then discuss it virtually with them. Sharing is essential to keeping content in circulation and to encouraging users to produce content in the first place. Producers will fail to get noticed if others do not share or add to what they have contributed, and users who wish to sustain conversation must contribute materials and commentary that does not just repeat what others in their social circle have already offered. Circulating content and attracting attention for one's contributions are so fundamental to social activity on the Internet that sharing, liking, and commenting capacities have become so expected as to be almost invisible. As we consider which features of social media could serve our classrooms, it is important to remember that these invisible features are tied to pleasure.

The web's culture of sharing might offer educators one route into introducing a sense of pleasure and purpose into classroom literacy activities, thus helping to sustain tinkering. Just as *Facebook* users might share an entertaining cat video or thought-provoking essay simply to inspire humor or insight in their friends, students might share with classmates materials that they find relevant to the class. Students could "sponsor" texts for both modeling and discussion through contributing to a wiki or online discussion board, as my literature students did in a mini-encyclopedia of "unoriginal" texts. To enrich our conversation of *Reality Hunger*, students each

submitted two annotations on “unoriginal” works not mentioned by Shields. Writing about recent songs, *YouTube* videos, parodies, and adaptations gave students more current, legible examples to illustrate Shields’s arguments and increased their exposure to reuse and its writing techniques. Giving students some responsibility for finding examples of good, compelling writing encourages them to approach reading from the tinkerer’s stance—as a critical, evaluative activity oriented toward future writing and reuse. Furthermore, it welcomes students’ own interests and enjoyment in the classroom, particularly by framing them within a social context where other participants can show appreciation for their contributions.

General approaches to teaching that focus on playing and building offer another model for bringing pleasure into literacy activities at the college level. Discourse about these approaches helpfully emphasizes the value of student engagement through enjoyment, but at the same time, casts such enjoyment as a universal effect of activities in making. I am suspicious of any claims to universal appeal in education but also worry that an overemphasis on making will institutionalize tinkering rather than respect its unpredictable, situational character. It is an instructional approach that best retains its quirkiness and informality when undertaken in combination with and in contrast to other pedagogical methods.

When makerspaces and hands-on educational environments are described, their capacity to generate pleasure is framed as a given. The social, active, and physical aspects of these spaces all contribute to enjoyment and relevance. Proponents of making often describe its payoffs in an idealistic fashion—a way of fusing learning and play and reintroducing for older students some joys of childhood.¹²⁷ For educators, making and experimenting function as what Hans Ostrom

¹²⁷ Martinez and Stager, for instance, romanticize tinkering by proclaiming that “Classrooms could once again become places of great joy, creativity, and invention” (intro). Fun is taken for granted and thus not a central argument: “This book doesn’t just advocate for tinkering or making because it’s fun, although that would be

calls *plerk*. Plerk returns college students to a more fluid, dynamic learning environment: in advocating for “jazzing around” with writing, Ostrom argues, “[C]hildren do not know the difference between work and play as they acquire a language. Children don’t have time for such petty differences; they’re too busy learning. Work and play are fused into work-and-play, more than the sum of the two parts. Plerk. If we’re feeling stuffy today, we could use the word *facility*” (77). Plerk is the ideal outcome for activities in tinkering, one worth striving for even while we acknowledge the limits of generating pleasure given institutional constraints and student attitudes.

I see in tinkering and in these educational approaches a model of a collaborative workspace that we can integrate into English classrooms. Placing acts of creation—writing, editing, revising, planning, mapping, drawing, collaborating—at the center of our courses gives students a more active role in their education and promotes feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction tied to pleasure. Even students who dislike a class like shop and feel they are no good at working with their hands can experience satisfaction in grasping how structures work and in contributing to something they assumed they could never make—for instance, a small wooden bridge or a poem. It is the material element central to textual reuse that is so significant here. Seeing, touching, and experiencing results make the teaching and learning of English more satisfying for all participants.

sufficient. The central thesis is that *children should engage in tinkering and making because they are powerful ways to learn*” (intro).

APPENDIX

PARTIAL LIST OF BOOKS INSPIRED BY WEBSITES

*Indicates a scrap writing project specifically.

Amason, Jessica, and Richard Blakeley. *This Is Why You're Fat: Where Dreams Become Heart Attacks*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009. Website: *This Is Why You're Fat*.

Belton, Claire. *I Am Pusheen the Cat*. New York: Touchstone, 2013. Website: *Pusheen the Cat*.

Bender, Mike. *Awkward Family Pet Photos*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2011. Website: *Awkward Family Pet Photos*.

Bender, Mike, and Doug Chernack. *Awkward Family Photos*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010. Website: *Awkward Family Photos*.

Birmingham, Duncan. *Pets Who Want to Kill Themselves: Featuring over 150 Suicidal Pets!* New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009. Website: *Pets Who Want to Kill Themselves*.

*Boyle, Caitlin. *Operation Beautiful: Transforming the Way You See Yourself One Post-It Note at a Time*. New York: Gotham, 2010. Website: *Operation Beautiful*.

Braden, William. *Henri, le Chat Noir: The Existential Musings of an Angst-Filled Cat*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2013. Website: *Henri, le Chat Noir*.

*Cagen, Sasha. *To-Do List: From Buying Milk to Finding a Soul Mate, What Our Lists Reveal about Us*. New York: Touchstone, 2007. Website: *To-Do List*.

Cheezburger Network. *There, I Fixed It: (No, You Didn't)*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2011. Website: *There, I Fixed It*.

Davis, Jim. *Garfield Minus Garfield*. New York: Ballantine, 2008. Website: *Garfield Minus Garfield*.

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- Fraioli, Sophia, and Lauren Kaelin. *When Parents Text: So Much Said...So Little Understood*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2011. Website: *When Parents Text*.
- Garza, Mario. *More Stuff on My Cat: 2x the Stuff + 2x the Cats = 4x the Awesome*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008. Website: *Stuff on My Cat*.
- Garza, Mario. *Stuff on My Cat: The Book*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006. Website: *Stuff on My Cat*.
- Graphjam.com. *Graph Out Loud: Music. Movies. Graphs. Awesome*. New York: Gotham, 2009. Website: *Graphjam.com*.
- Grumpy Cat. *Grumpy Cat: A Grumpy Book*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013. Website: *Grumpy Cat*.
- Halpern, Justin. *Sh*t My Dad Says*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010. Website: *Twitter* account "Shitmydadsays."
- ICanHasCheezburger.com. *Teh Itteh Bitteh Book of Kitehs*. San Francisco: Gotham, 2010. Website: *I Can Has Cheezburger?*
- *Keaggy, Bill. *Milk Eggs Vodka: Grocery Lists Lost and Found*. Cincinnati: How, 2007. Website: *Grocerylists.org*.
- *Keeley, Bethany. *The "Book" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010. Website: *The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks*.
- Lander, Christian. *Stuff White People Like: A Definitive Guide to the Unique Taste of Millions*. New York: Random House, 2008. Website: *Stuff White People Like*.
- Leto, Lauren, and Ben Bator. *Texts from Last Night: All the Texts No One Remembers Sending*. San Francisco: Gotham, 2010. Website: *Texts from Last Night*.
- Lil BUB. *Lil BUB's Lil Book: The Extraordinary Life of the Most Amazing Cat on the Planet*. San Francisco: Gotham, 2013. Website: *Lil BUB*.
- Lindsay, John. *Emails from an Asshole: Real People Being Stupid*. New York: Sterling, 2010. Website: *DontEvenReply.com*.

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- *Rothbart, Davy. *Found II*. New York: Touchstone, 2006. Website: *Found*.
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