A Pedagogy of Amplification

Danielle Koupf

This article argues that the intersection of invention and style is a rich site for rhetorical study, for amplification, and for critical-creative tinkering, a process of writing new versions of an old text. At this intersection, writers can tinker to amplify an existing text and thus work to continue or begin anew the inventive process. To illustrate these outcomes, I recover two exemplary exercises from nineteenth-century textbooks, where exercises in tinkering find many promising precursors. Revealing such precursors in the nineteenth century furthers work by scholars, such as Lucille M. Schultz, who have discovered innovation in instructional materials of this period. After analyzing exercises by R. G. Parker and Virginia Waddy, I extend my lens beyond the Western rhetorical tradition and forge connections between tinkering and African American and Indigenous rhetorical traditions. I then highlight an exercise in tinkering from my first year writing classroom in which students amplified a passage from Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature." Upon sharing and analyzing examples of student tinkering, I conclude by weighing the benefits and drawbacks of teaching amplification, reasoning that in pedagogical rather than performative contexts, amplification can reaffirm invention.

In his 1899 rhetoric *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric*, Amherst professor John F. Genung defines rhetorical amplification as "the final process of composition" (285).[1] He explains that upon creating a plan for writing, ideas "are expressed only in germ. They need to be taken up anew and endowed with life; to be clothed in a fitting dress of explanatory, illustrative, and enforcing thought. This is the office of rhetorical amplification" (285). Gideon O. Burton, on his long-running website *Sylva Rhetoricae*, identifies amplification as "a central term in rhetoric, naming a variety of general strategies as well as some very specific procedures or figures of speech." Moreover, "amplification names an important point of intersection within rhetoric where figures of speech and figures of thought coalesce. That is to say, means for varying and repeating kinds of expression (figures of speech, or *copia verborum*) overlap with means for developing ideas or content (the figures of thought, or *copia rerum*)" (Burton). Genung acknowledges this intersection in calling amplification "the meeting-ground of invention and style" (285). This meeting-ground, I argue, is a rich site for rhetorical study, a site where I see the writer stretching, extending, or building upon a text. In taking what

Composition Studies 49.1 (2021): 84–102

already exists and giving it greater attention, the writer practices what I call *critical-creative tinkering*.

Critical-creative *tinkering*, or *tinkering* for short, is a practice of reuse that infuses writing with the hands-on, experimental ethos of the makerspace (Koupf). It recasts writing as a material practice linked with discourses of crafting and making in which texts are open to manipulation and adaptation. Students write *inside* an existing text by adding, subtracting, substituting, rearranging, combining, and reformatting. They do not adopt a step-by-step procedure but rather an open-ended approach. Still, one change will typically demand another and so on. What results is not necessarily an improvement over the original text, though it may be; instead, it is an alternative—a new version. Tinkering proliferates possibilities, making it a prime tool for achieving amplification.

When tinkering to amplify an existing text, invention does not only continue, as Genung suggests, but may also begin anew—moving the writer in a new, unexplored direction. I contend that amplification is not always "the final process of composition," as Genung had it, but sometimes just the beginning. In fact, Genung concedes this point when he writes of the composer who amplifies,

> Having determined on his plan, let him surrender himself fearlessly to the current of his thought; let him be filled and fired with it *anew*, as if it had not been coldly analyzed. Nor should he be the slave of his own prearranged plan of discourse; that is, he should not let it chill the glow of his thinking. The mind often works more vigorously in amplification than in planning; and so the progress of actual composition may suggest a better arrangement of some points. If so, *let the work of planning be reopened*; and let not the writer shun the rewriting and rearranging thus necessitated. (286; emphasis added)

In this article, I demonstrate that tinkering with a text to amplify it is a productive invention strategy, both for persisting with an old composition and for jumpstarting a new one.

My experiences teaching tinkering have demonstrated that students who tinker achieve both critical and creative gains. They come to a greater understanding of both writing in general and the source text in particular by inhabiting that text, by dwelling inside it; tinkering is thus a critical practice. At the same time, tinkering creates new text and provides students with opportunities to try stylistic techniques in the source text; it is generative and therefore creative. At its core, tinkering is a process of inventing from preexisting materials, of patching things together, of reuse and bricolage.[2]

I have found many tinkering exercises in nineteenth-century rhetoric and composition textbooks, particularly in composition books designed for schools rather than colleges and universities. I recover these early cases of tinkering to establish a history of tinkering and to continue identifying invention as an outcome of nineteenth-century exercises. More than repetitive drills, these exercises provide substantive practice in style and invention. Lucille M. Schultz argues, "...nineteenth-century writing instruction in the schools was a site for tremendous pedagogical innovation—and, in fact, [. . .] it was in the schools that composition instruction as we know it had its beginnings" (6). She demonstrates how nineteenth-century composition books anticipate more recent trends in writing instruction, including free writing, sentence combining, and the importance of practice. I add to this list critical-creative tinkering. Associating nineteenth-century exercises with tinkering furthers Schultz's work of revealing innovation in textbooks designed for schools and extends scholarship reinforcing that grammar and style work serve invention (Blakesley; Butler; Stodola).

My research into the nineteenth century has uncovered two remarkable exercises, one in R. G. Parker's *Progressive Exercises in English Composition* and another in Virginia Waddy's *Elements of Composition and Rhetoric with Copious Exercises in Both Criticism and Construction*, two books most likely designed for schools (Parker is identified as a grammar school teacher and Waddy as a high school teacher on their title pages. While it is difficult to know who actually consulted the books, we can infer that they were designed for school audiences). Though I focus on just two exercises, the procedures associated with tinkering pervade nineteenth-century rhetoric and composition textbooks, as students are constantly tasked with rearranging phrases and sentences, substituting words and phrases, adding to short essays and stories, and transforming one kind of writing into another. Yet Parker's and Waddy's exercises in particular—certainly not isolated examples—display the critical and creative elements necessary to qualify an exercise as true tinkering.

Lessons from the nineteenth century are themselves amplified as I move beyond the Western rhetorical tradition and identify resonances among tinkering, African American rhetorical traditions, and Indigenous composing practices. I build a web of relations to show that tinkering and the larger maker movement are not new: they have antecedents both across history and across cultures. In fact, my own exercise in tinkering encouraged students to forge such connections themselves by amplifying a paragraph from Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature." After analyzing student responses to this exercise, I conclude by weighing the benefits and drawbacks of teaching amplification, which in exaggerated form may merely pad a text, providing the "fluff" (in my students' words) necessary to reach a word or page minimum. I contend that

in a pedagogical rather than performative context, amplification—even when it produces "fluff"—is not a detriment, but an aid to learning and invention.

Nineteenth-Century Rewriting Exercises and Their Precursors

Schultz has argued convincingly that *exercise* in the nineteenth century "did not mean low-level activity, signifying repetition. Nor did it refer to easy-answer questions and fill-in-the-blank drills" (164). She continues, "'exercises' suggested a pedagogy based on practice, the use of performance-based (as opposed to recognition-based) activity to improve one's level of fitness in composing, not unlike today's use of exercise to signal a means of enhancing fitness or strength or musical proficiency" (164).

Schultz foregrounds exercises that asked students to invent in response to a prompt such as a picture or question. These contrast with what I have identified as another common form of exercise, which I call *rewriting exercises*. In nineteenth-century rhetoric and composition textbooks, students constantly practice rewriting. Rewriting exercises call upon students to combine, rearrange, substitute, add, and delete and in this way are reminiscent of tinkering. Importantly, though, some more than others help students achieve both the critical and the creative ends of true tinkering.

Rewriting exercises did not originate in the nineteenth century, nor in the Western rhetorical tradition. It is difficult to establish the exact origins of rewriting exercises, but antecedents can be found in classical models and across cultures. I argue that rewriting (or retelling, in an oratorical context) has been central to the history of rhetorical education. It appears, for example, in Quintilian's imitation exercises, in the progymnasmata, and in copia. Ian Michael glosses these connections in noting that transposition, prosing (i.e., turning poetry into prose), and sentence variation "are all derived from the teaching of rhetoric but they lost their coherence as the skills of rhetoric were fragmented and separately taught" (279). He continues, "These practices were taken over by grammarians and used for general linguistic training; but they were also recommended by teachers of composition and *belles lettres*" (279). Despite any loss of coherence, these exercises were widely diffused and applied to a range of literacy goals. Their wide applicability explains in part why they appear with such frequency across literacy texts.

Quintilian's imitation exercises are part of a larger curriculum that also includes the older practice of progymnasmata (Kalbfleisch), a set of graduated writing exercises that often featured rewriting or retelling. Students would recast a fable, retell a story backwards or from the middle, and explain the significance of a saying or deed, a task that involves paraphrase. Students would complete these exercises in preparation for crafting longer works in the future; as Jeanne Fahnestock explains, the progymnasmata was "an early tradition of

compositional exercises that isolated and practiced the units from which longer discourses could be built" (278). This tradition in fact supported rewriting as a literacy strategy: "Even if students never used the precise formulas for the individual exercises again, they would learn that the composition of any extended text was a matter of combining smaller, separately formed, and recombinable modules. Composition was an art of *bricolage*" (Fahnestock 379).

The rewriting exercises are perhaps most strongly linked to the practice of copia, often tied to Quintilian and Erasmus. Though it can refer to a rhetorical figure, *copia* also signifies a pedagogy that develops variety of expression by requiring students to rewrite the same sentence or idea in multiple ways. As Fahnestock explains, "Students learning Latin wrote different versions of the same statement in order to increase their command of vocabulary (through synonyms) and syntax (through alternate phrasing)" (395). Likewise, nineteenth-century rhetoric and composition textbooks, including those by William Williams, William Swinton, and Virginia Waddy, often include a section on "variety of expression" that delineates ways to generate variety by substituting phraseology or by rearranging syntax. In his sixteenth-century textbook *De Copia*, Erasmus famously rewrote the sentence "Your letter pleased me greatly" 200 times to demonstrate methods for generating variety. Similar, yet abbreviated, undertakings appear in the nineteenth century—for instance, Swinton rewrites "The whale is the largest animal" in twelve varieties to demonstrate how to recast a sentence, before asking students to do the same (53).

When adapted in the nineteenth century, the rewriting exercises are emblematic of a general shift from a pedagogy of mental discipline to a pedagogy of practice. Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz have defined mental discipline as "the theory that the mind had certain faculties in need of disciplined training" (7), and in rhetorical instruction, it surfaces in repetitive practices of memorization and recitation. The abstract, theoretical work associated with mental discipline gradually gave way to more concrete practice with applied skills like writing, first in the schools around the 1830s and then in the colleges around the end of the Civil War (Carr et al. 9).

Despite involving actual writing instead of recitation and memorization, nineteenth-century exercises in some ways continued to demonstrate the influence of mental discipline. Carr et al. concede that "By century's end, although the discourses of 'mental discipline' often yielded to discourses that valorized 'the practical' as an educational goal, the desire to exercise or cultivate the mental faculties never completely disappeared" (8). Students are frequently asked to carefully study and understand a passage before rewriting or paraphrasing it, as though they will grasp its meaning through sheer brute force. A disciplined approach creeps into paraphrase exercises especially; note how Waddy instructs students here: "The paraphrase of another's thought requires

the closest attention to every detail—strict criticism of the words and patient analysis of the grammatical features of expression" (297). Even when practice is a clear goal, it is possible to read rewriting exercises as repetitive tasks that drill students in textual operations: again and again, students must contract, expand, combine, substitute, rearrange, and transpose. I challenge this reading by connecting rewriting exercises to the critical and creative outcomes associated with tinkering.

Two Nineteenth-Century Exercises in Amplification

R. G. Parker's 1832 *Progressive Exercises in English Composition* was "enormously popular" and "among the first to emphasize practice," according to Schultz (21). Among its many rewriting exercises is "Lesson XXII: Narration Amplified," which, I suggest, offers a classical take on amplification. The model presents a two-sentence narration about the legend of Damon and Pythias labeled "Short narrative," a four-sentence elaboration labeled "Same story amplified," an 18-sentence elaboration labeled "Same story more amplified," and finally, a 29-sentence elaboration labeled "The same story still more amplified" (40-43). In imitation of this model, teachers would presumably provide a short narration from their own resources, and students would emulate the model to amplify the given narration by several degrees.

Parker's lesson accords with *copia*, or abundance, a class of amplification that involves "any method of staying on a topic by finding relevant material" (Fahnestock 394). Fahnestock explains that "Narratives are easy sites for *copia*, since they are elastic depending on the amount of detail provided" (398). Parker's lesson, by providing an extensive model, proves Fahnestock's point about the elasticity of narration. It shows that achieving this elasticity requires rhetorical invention and stylistic resourcefulness.

Imaginative, inventive work is necessary in moving from one level of amplification to the next. Students would have to imagine the steps involved in the action of the initial short plot, and they would have to invent the dialogue that might have taken place between the characters. While by no means inventing from scratch, students here are not engaging in Genung's "final process of composition," as the mere presence of different levels of amplification suggests that invention is ongoing—persisting but also beginning again and again. Presumably, students would be well-versed in whichever short narrative was provided, allowing them to use their memory to aid invention—remembering the details of the story and then amplifying them. We cannot assume that students always had the narrative in front of them; I suspect that they may have known it from memory, or at least instructors expected that they did. At the same time, students would have to draw upon their skills in style: synonymy, restatement, repetition, and embellishment.

Completing this exercise, I suggest, engages students in an early form of critical-creative tinkering. On just a surface level, it requires the moves associated with tinkering: rewriting through adding, combining, substituting, and possibly rearranging. Students write *inside* a given text: they insert new writing within the short narrative, stretching it in each successive version. Yet on a deeper level, Parker's exercise shares with tinkering the development of invention and style through rewriting. Students employ invention by imagining the scene, characters, and dialogue in the narration while experimenting with new stylistic techniques, such as synonymy, repetition, restatement, and any others that they may observe in the model and then imitate. Students tinker by generating new text—the creative element in critical-creative tinkering. Additionally, students would, ideally, come to understand whichever narration a teacher assigned through tinkering with it again and again—the critical element in critical-creative tinkering. Thus, this exercise serves not only to develop students' writing skills but also to enhance their comprehension of material for reading and memorization.

A more unusual and innovative exercise in amplification appears in Virginia Waddy's 1889 text *Elements of Composition and Rhetoric with Copious Exercises in Both Criticism and Construction*. This exercise is printed in a chapter on "Prose Composition," within a section on "Exercises in Paraphrase and Composition," under the heading "Development XIX." From these markers, I suggest that one goal of this exercise is to help students develop, compose, or generate text—that is, to invent. The exercise reprints Alfred Tennyson's two-stanza, eight-line poem "Requiescat" with these directions: "Weave into this a story of some one well known to you, and whose home you may suppose this 'fair cottage' to be; change the character, if necessary, to suit your purpose. In thus introducing narration, do not forget that the theme is principally descriptive, and that you should aim to produce a vivid picture of the scene" (329). The poem begins with the statement "Fair is her cottage in its place"—hence, Waddy's instructions to imagine "this 'fair cottage.'" Yet in the second stanza, it becomes a meditation on peaceful death, in keeping with the meaning of requiescat: "A wish or prayer for the repose of the soul of a dead person" ("Requiescat, *n*."). Waddy's directions ignore the somewhat morbid content of the poem, creating instead an opportunity for students to use their skills in imagination and description to amplify the short text—to extend, embellish, and personalize it.

As in Parker's clearly marked amplification lesson, in Waddy's exercise students expand upon provided material by using their invention and memory. Students must add (or "weave into this") a story of someone they know, requiring them to use their imagination and their ability to recall a person and his or her home. Weaving additional material into the poem facilitates critical-

creative tinkering. Students who complete this exercise not only generate new writing but also come to understand the source text in a different way through interacting with it. They relate the poem to their own lives, imagine the scene through comparing it with an actual person and his or her home, and manipulate language to gain writing skills. The verb *weave* is remarkable in that it implies that although this exercise falls under the heading of prose composition, to complete it students must write within the poem itself. This interactive element is in keeping with tinkering, which asks students to write within their own writing, a peer's writing, or a published piece. Furthermore, the term *weave* places this exercise firmly within the realm of tinkering, with its connection to discourses of crafting and making.

This exercise is especially innovative in reimagining writing as a material activity in which multiple genres and modes (poetry, description) can intertwine. In fact, I haven't found anything quite like it in other nineteenth-century composition books. Similar exercises exist, yet none involves actually weaving into an existing poem a student's own inventions (see Harvey 83; Metcalf and Bright 37; Shaw 76, 81; and Tarbell and Tarbell 74). In no other exercise that I've encountered do students actively intertwine their writing with an existing piece of text.

Imagining what might result from Waddy's exercise suggests that it would share its spirit and characteristics with several writing traditions. It might resemble a lyric essay or braided essay that combines poetry with prose and intertwines disparate strands of thought—in this case, a personal example along with the poem. In this way, the resulting text would also resemble early fanfiction, adding one's own voice to an established piece of literature or artistic production. At the same time, it would loosely incorporate the moves associated with Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say* and Joseph Harris's *Rewriting*, in establishing first what Tennyson had to say in his poem and then inserting the student's own point of view. Though not constructing an argument, the student would follow a line of thinking similar to what these two instructional texts promote: first acknowledging another author's voice (Tennyson's "they say"), then adding one's own voice ("I say"), in this case to forward (in Harris's words) Tennyson's perspective. Finally, on a material level, I see in Waddy's exercise a relationship to scrapbooking, which Ellen Gruber Garvey has shown to be an especially popular practice in the nineteenth century, one that involves weaving together previous writing (a newspaper clipping, for instance) with one's own embellishments (an autograph or inscription, for example).

With scrapbooking comes a larger connection between tinkering and other hands-on, material methods of composing, which stretch well beyond

the nineteenth-century context in which I have until now situated this project. Tinkering resonates across rhetorical traditions.

Tinkering and Amplification across Rhetorical Traditions

An emphasis on reusing, rewriting, and intertwining existing materials extends beyond the Western, predominantly White rhetorical tradition represented in the textbooks that I have studied. In scholarship on African American and Indigenous composing practices, I see resonances with tinkering: a shared focus on intervening in existing texts, enacting a hands-on approach to making things, and composing across time and in relation to others. Recognizing these resonances bolsters my argument that tinkering and related makerspace practices are not new but rather, extend multiple rhetorical traditions.

In his study of African American rhetoric and multimedia, Adam J. Banks foregrounds interrupting and intervening in existing texts ("the scratch") as key moves in both Hip Hop and his own writing. I see in Banks's description of the scratch the practice of purposefully composing inside a given text observed in tinkering, in Parker's amplification exercise, and in Waddy's experiment with "weaving":

> The scratch is an interruption. It breaks the linearity of the text, the progressive circularity of the song. It takes the listener or reader back and forth through the song, underneath the apparatus that plays it, either to insert some other song or for the sheer pleasure of the sound of the scratch itself. What was noise, what was seen as the sign of a broken record or stylus, an unwelcome interruption in the continual march of text, groove, history, became a purposeful interruption, became pleasurable, became a way to insert other voices in a text, to redirect one's attention. (1-2)

Hip Hop composing processes serve Banks not only as conceptual or metaphorical models for writing but also as practical techniques. He explains here how, like a remix, his book loops, spins, layers, and repeats:

> I use the theoretical or conceptual work that the mix, remix, and mixtape do as lenses or ways to contextualize my study of a wide range of black multimedia rhetorical practices. So the chapters here cohere and yet they don't; they flow and yet they cut to other tracks, other conversations, looping in other voices in what might seem to be idiosyncratic ways. Some quotes get looped repeatedly, to serve a function like that of the sample—foundational ideas I borrow and build on that are too important for a single reference. And the prose itself spins, develops in circular ways at times, working through lay-

ering and repetition as well as through linear argument. In those ways, I hope this book models the mix and remix and becomes a kind of mixtape of its own. (7)[3]

Like the student who tinkers or weaves, Banks layers and loops existing materials (quotations, references, and concepts) to build something new (a scholarly monograph). He uses repetition to amplify "foundational ideas [. . .] too important for a single reference" (7).

Banks warns against dropping remix concepts into our scholarship without careful attention to the traditions from which they emerge. His work thus encourages me to trace tinkering's precursors beyond the nineteenth-century Western rhetorical tradition. In his book, Banks enacts this himself in calling the DJ a digital griot. He explains, "The storyteller and preacher are oft-studied griotic figures in African American culture. The DJ as a griotic figure has received much less attention. The DJ has taken up many of these roles and has been grounded in many of these oral and folklore traditions for decades, sometimes completely under the radar" (19). The griot is a "time binder," a "keeper of history, master of its oral tradition, and rhetor extraordinaire" (23). Viewing the DJ as a griot underscores that he or she is enmeshed in collaborative networks connecting past to present. His or her remix is not an individual composition but a community effort across time and space, as Kristin L. Arola argues in her work on composing as culturing.

Arola critiques treatments of remix in composition studies that continue to focus on the product and the individual despite the collaborative reuse in remixing preexisting materials. She turns to American Indian composing practices to refocus on process and community over product and individuality. She forwards "a process-based approach to making, one that acknowledges that a writer never composes in isolation. There is no authentic self who produces original works, instead there are writers who exist in relation to one another, draw from one another, and produce within ecologies of meaning" (280). Arola tells a story of a man creating a waterdrum for a sick boy and reflects, "I share it here for the purposes of illustrating how existing objects (logs, deerhide, water) are used with great intention in order to create something new. This composing process very carefully acknowledges the relations that existed before the composer entered the scene, while also acknowledging the relations the composer hopes to bring into existence" (280). Arola concedes that students are not crafting waterdrums in their writing classes, yet her analogy helps concretize the notions of composing with preexisting materials and of forging connections across time that are central to rewriting practices like tinkering and remix.

Banks and Arola each urge composition scholars to continue acknowledging the web of relations in which we and our practices are situated and to contribute to that web by building ever more connections. While I shed light on both tinkering and two remarkable nineteenth-century exercises, I recognize, too, that these innovations harken back to longstanding traditions of making. Thus I situate my own experiments with tinkering, an example of which follows, both within and beyond a Western rhetorical tradition.

Critical-Creative Tinkering to Amplify Walker Percy

In my first year writing seminar on the theme "Rewriting," students began the semester with Walker Percy's 1975 essay "The Loss of the Creature." A mainstay of David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's reader *Ways of Reading*, "The Loss of the Creature" argues that our views of tourist destinations and our educational experiences are occluded by the institutions designed to help us see them. Percy's primary example is the Grand Canyon. Students typically grasp the gist of Percy's essay on a first read, yet tinkering with it can help them achieve a deeper understanding and make connections across time to their own experiences. Tinkering is an essential stage in my sequence of assignments on Percy's essay, as it provides a stepping stone from reading the essay to writing a new essay about it; students get inside Percy's essay beginning with a single substitution. They interrupt and intervene in the text, echoing Banks's "scratch." As in Donald Murray's "internal revision," discovery accompanies rewriting, but importantly, in both tinkering and "the scratch," rewriting is not confined to revising just one's *own* text.

After practicing Harris's coming to terms with Percy in a discussion board post or reading response, students tinker with Percy's essay by substituting "the Grand Canyon" with a place they have visited or an experience they have had. My instructions read, in part:

> For this assignment, you will tinker with the long paragraph beginning with "Why" on p. 459-460 of "The Loss of the Creature." Start by replacing the words "the Grand Canyon" in the first sentence with some other thing or place you've experienced. Then, rewrite the rest of the paragraph, sticking closely to the original text, but making changes based on your initial substitution of "the Grand Canyon." Try rearranging, substituting, adding, deleting, and combining both words and sentences.

The initial substitution necessitates further substitutions and additions as students elaborate on, or amplify, the story they have begun sharing. The content of the tinkering exercise can then become the basis for the next as-

signment, in which students relate a story of struggling to see or experience something due to the presence of a "symbolic complex" as Percy describes it. Students can then choose to amplify this story further still in a longer essay concluding the unit in which they more fully come to terms with, forward, and counter Percy's ideas.

In proceeding from a brief tinkering exercise to a longer story and finally to an even longer essay, this sequence of assignments shares its series of amplifications with Parker's exercise. The tinkering exercise in particular overlaps too with Waddy's exercise in that students must write within an existing piece of literature, incorporating their own experiences through both invention and memory. Students weave into Percy's paragraph their own nascent story, both to understand Percy's text in a different way (the critical aspect of tinkering) and to generate new writing (the creative aspect). They must recall an experience from their own lives while using their imagination and invention to mold that story to the template Percy provides. Students who tinker in this way become crafters, and composition becomes crafting. As Kristin Prins puts it, "untrained crafters can make their own discoveries, if they have the time and space to play. This play is part of the work—the writing and revising and rewriting and revising that we would recognize in FYC classes" (159). Tinkering exercises such as this one contribute to a makerspace ethos in composition classes, encouraging discovery, play, and experimentation.

A typical response to this tinkering exercise, written in 2018 by a student named Robert, begins with substituting *Victoria Falls* for *the Grand Canyon*. All changes appear in brackets:

> Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at [Victoria Falls] under [natural] circumstances and see it for what it is—as one picks up a strange [shell] from [the beach] and gazes directly at it? Seeing the [Falls] under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the [natives]; it is rather that which has already been formulated—by [Facebook, Instagram posts, Snapchat filters, and the words *Victoria Falls.*]

More than replacing the Grand Canyon with Victoria Falls, Robert has made significant changes by updating Percy's examples of "picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders" with "Facebook, Instagram posts, Snapchat filters." Along with other students, Robert found that Percy's examples of the symbolic complex have become outdated and that social media has amplified the effects that Percy noticed in 1975. In class, many students argued that images posted via social media give viewers preconceived notions of tourist destinations so that when they visit them, their actual experiences may not

match up to the hype produced online. (The counterpoint to this argument, we discovered, is that without social media and other forms of promotion, viewers may never know to visit these sights at all.) In his reflection, Robert noted, "Percy's ideas of people being held to this 'preformed complex' was seen with postcards in his time and now is very relevant today with social media. Overall, I would say that this process of tinkering allowed me to see that Percy's ideas are a lot more applicable, and that he truly had a vision for his time period and the time periods to come." This reflection demonstrates the critical component of tinkering, as Robert made connections between Percy's time and our own and thus achieved a deeper understanding of the arguments in "The Loss of the Creature."

Later in his paragraph, Robert replaces Percy's original use of the pronouns him/his/he to describe his imaginary "sightseer" with gender-neutral pronouns them/their/they. Percy's "If it does so, if it looks just like the postcard, he is pleased; he might even say, 'Why it is every bit as beautiful as a picture post-card!'" (460) becomes for Robert "If it does so, if it looks just like the media post, they are pleased; they might even say, 'This will make a great Instagram post!'" These small but meaningful changes show that tinkering has led Robert also to pay close attention to choices of language and style and thus gain greater insight not only into Percy's piece in particular but also into writing more generally.

A sign that tinkering is especially generative occurs when a simple substitution prompts the tinker to invent in excess of the original. This can be seen with Abigail's tinkering exercise, completed in the same semester. Abigail begins by substituting "New York" for "the Grand Canyon" but then generates a number of new thoughts. What follows is the first part of Abigail's paragraph, with her own writing in brackets.

> Why is it nearly impossible to [visit a city like New York and appreciate every aspect of it the way a person might view a town they have lived in all their lives]? It is [nearly] impossible because [of the way cities like New York have been promoted in everything from movies to music]. Seeing the [city] under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. [All the postcards and travel brochures shape the city in the mind of the consumer to be a city of pretty flashing lights, fancy stores, and Broadway shows. However, when you go to New York you are not seeing the postcard version of the city, with the Statue of Liberty a short hike away from central park and the gorgeous Plaza Hotel. Because of the city's advertisement, people go expecting to find a wonderland and are disappointed.]

Just in this excerpt, which is less than half of the paragraph Abigail produced, we can see that tinkering prompted her to develop many of her own ideas beyond substitutions. The length and elaboration suggest the presence of marked amplification, in that one adjustment leads Abigail to make several changes and eventually find her own voice amidst Percy's. This is a sign that tinkering is developing Abigail's creative capacities while also critically linking her experiences with those that Percy imagines. It furthermore suggests that Abigail engaged in invention both to continue her understanding of Percy and to begin her own intervention through personal experience, making amplification not a final stage in composing but an intermediate one.

The term *critical-creative tinkering* sounds akin to Matt Ratto's "critical making." A distinction between the two practices is that the former results in a text and the latter a material object, but an important connection between them is an emphasis upon process and reflection. Ratto states that "while critical making organizes its efforts around the making of material objects, devices themselves are not the ultimate goal," but rather, "a practice-based engagement with pragmatic and theoretical issues" is (253). In my sequence of assignments, the tinkered-with text is not a product to display but a thing to think with. I usually tell students that I am more interested in reading their reflections than their tinkered-with texts, so the latter can be messy or confusing. Rather than deemphasizing the work of tinkering, I mean to stress the powerful cognition and reflection that comes along with tinkering.

In reflection, students consistently noted that tinkering helped them make discoveries about Percy's text and about writing more generally. For instance, Jonathon commented, "This tinkering exercise made me think about changing my writing style a bit. [. . .] A bit more change and diversity between sentence lengths, and rhythms would improve my writing." Importantly, students learned about their ideas and about writing while in the process of tinkering. In other words, tinkering acted as a heuristic promoting invention. Sean, who substituted "computers" for "the Grand Canyon," used his reflection to elaborate that "we sometimes view computers as inadequate even though they are remarkable feats of engineering" and then added, "That idea came to me *as I was tinkering*; I did not start with that claim, only with the word computer and the original paragraph" (emphasis added). Likewise, Jonathon wrote, "*I learned throughout tinkering*; there was a lot more to the writing than what I had gathered during the first pass through" (emphasis added).

I suggest that this heuristic aspect of tinkering led students to generate abundance, or copia. They created more ideas than just the one produced by the initial substitution of "the Grand Canyon" with something else. Sebastian, for instance, initially wrote about a fast food restaurant, but additional ideas came to him, too:

> Tinkering led me to think about pop culture's influence on society's view of things, whether it be music, clothing, etc. I can especially relate to this myself. If a song is on the top charts on Spotify, I automatically save it to my downloads and listen to it. Even if the song isn't that great, the fact that it is liked enough by other people to get onto the top charts list, sits in the back of my mind whenever I listen to it and influences my opinion. In a way, fads can lead to the lack of originality, or the "loss of the creature" as Percy puts it. The preformed complex in Percy's piece could be pop culture, in the sense that it seems to make up peoples' minds for them.

Furthermore, many students discovered a new direction for the sequence of assignments upon completing the tinkering task. Few persisted with their initial substitution in subsequent assignments. This finding is somewhat unsurprising given that as writers we often veer away from first ideas as we continue to write and think, but it also highlights the inventive potential of amplifying a text through tinkering with it. Robert summarized the heuristic experience of writing within a preexisting text: "I actually really liked the experience because it gave me a guide to edit and do what I wanted. I was not forced to put words on a blank page with no help. I see how tinkering can be an effective tool for future pieces of writing that I encounter. Tinkering will allow me to discover relationships between past texts and the modern day." Here, Robert places himself in the web of relations that practices of reuse make visible. He connects tinkering to what Banks proposes is so valuable: forging relationships across history and culture.

Conclusion: A Pedagogy of Amplification

Amplification is a useful tool for inventing new text while learning more about an existing text. But it has its limits: unrestrained, it can grow tedious. Nevin Laib voices a prevailing view when, amidst praise (and demonstration) of amplification, he grants that "It is a sin to be superfluous. Pad, repeat, ramble on too much and risk correction. Redundancy is moral failure. It reveals a proclivity for slackness, inefficiency, and deception, a fondness for listening to oneself, for self-indulgence, a lack of substance and weight. People who say too much (and mean too little) are considered verbose, garrulous, prolix, tedious, unreadable, and irrelevant" (446). Furthermore, not all occasions call for amplification. As Genung acknowledges,

> It is not always necessary to the life and distinction of a thought that it be followed out in detailed, amplified form. Not infrequently the very opposite treatment is more effective. Some ideas, from their

> nature or from the part they play in the composition, should be expressed as tersely and sententiously as possible, or should be merely hinted and left to work their way by suggestion. It gives vigor to the work when a considerable proportion of such condensed material is interspersed with the rest . . . (286)

Genung identifies the value of balance and variety. As Laib concludes, "Amplification and conciseness are companion arts" (457).

Recognizing that amplification can serve the needless and even deceptive padding of texts, I do not condone unrestrained amplification in all rhetorical performances. I do, however, promote amplification as an educational experience. I distinguish amplification as a pedagogy from amplification in rhetorical performance. When amplifying in a particular rhetorical performance—an essay or speech, perhaps—a rhetor must be selective. He or she must ask which points require amplification and when to apply tinkering's procedures to elevate and extend a text. Yet even then, amplification is not necessarily mere padding but can serve useful, even graceful, repetition: "Amplification is useful and necessary. Restatement helps readers understand the concept. Those who do not grasp an idea when it is first articulated may understand it better when it is phrased differently or when the subject is described from a different perspective" (Laib 449).

A pedagogy of amplification, in contrast, favors amplification for purposes of invention, development, and learning. As Laib puts it, "Amplification, I would suggest, is not the addition of superfluous material to the text but an essential part of explanation itself, a basic skill of interpretation and inquiry, a means through which we explore and articulate what we perceive and what we mean" (448-9). It is essential to writing-to-learn. This version of amplification promotes "reexamination, reinforcement, reconsideration, and refinement, a *process* of writing and rewriting the thought until it is truly clear, until its nature is completely described and its nuances are revealed" (Laib 449; emphasis added). These, I suggest, are the ends promised by so many rewriting exercises of the nineteenth century. They, like Parker's and Waddy's exercises, promote a version of amplification that encourages learning, clarifying, and realizing—in short, inventing. Yet as Banks reminds us, we must be aware of which cultural and historical traditions we are amplifying, whether such amplification is for performance or pedagogy. Amplification, in fact, offers students and scholars opportunities to acknowledge the many traditions in which their writing is situated because it favors enlargement, expansion, and thus greater connection.

Notes

1. See Carr at al. (17-18) for distinctions among *rhetoric*, *reader*, and *composition* book. I have followed these distinctions, though I sometimes use *rhetoric and composition textbook* to identify a broader class of texts instructing students in rhetorical principles (the province of rhetorics) and in practical exercises (the province of composition books).

2. The bricoleur has figured prominently in multimodal composing theory. K. Shannon Howard, for example, analyzes the composing practices of a character in a recent movie by identifying them with bricolage and explains, "The term *bricolage* has been associated with new media and popular culture for years now [. . .]. Its typical employment connotes the collage-like activity of online users and writers as they take pieces and links from different locations and juxtapose them in a new work" (140). Her description emphasizes the key role of reuse in bricolage, of combining disparate preexisting materials.

3. In both tinkering and remixing, composers combine prior materials in new ways, making both terms widely applicable to multimodal composing. Tinkering, however, emphasizes a process of coming to terms with an existing text by reworking it and building upon it—by amplifying it. In this way, tinkering accords with Arola's revision of remixing and making as process-oriented rather than product-oriented endeavors.

Works Cited

Arola, Kristin L. "Composing as Culturing: An American Indian Approach to Digital Ethics." *Handbook of Writing, Literacies, and Education in Digital Cultures*, edited by Kathy A. Mills, Amy Stornaiuolo, Anna Smith, and Jessica Zacher Pandya, Routledge, 2018, pp. 275-284.

Banks, Adam J. *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.

Blakesley, David. "Reconceptualizing Grammar as an Aspect of Rhetorical Invention." *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Susan Hunter and Ray Wallace, Boynton/Cook, 1995, pp. 191-203.

Burton, Gideon O. "Figures of Amplification." *Sylva Rhetoricae*, http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/Groupings/of%20amplification.htm. Accessed 14 Jan. 2021.

Butler, Paul. *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Rhetoric and Composition*. Utah State UP, 2008.

Carr, Jean Ferguson, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz. *Archives of Instruction: Nineteenth-Century Rhetorics, Readers, and Composition Books in the United States*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

Fahnestock, Jeanne. *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion*. Oxford UP, 2011.

Garvey, Ellen Gruber. *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*. Oxford UP, 2012.

Genung, John F. *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric with Illustrative Examples*. Boston, Ginn & Company, 1899. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. 2nd ed., Utah State UP, 2017.

Harvey, Thomas W. *New Language Lessons*. New York, American Book Company, 1900. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Howard, K. Shannon. "Beca as Bricoleur: How *Pitch Perfect* Embraces the New College Composer." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2015, pp. 139-156.

Kalbfleisch, Elizabeth. "*Imitatio* Reconsidered: Notes toward a Reading Pedagogy for the Writing Classroom." *Pedagogy*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, pp. 39-51.

Koupf, Danielle. "Proliferating Textual Possibilities: Toward Pedagogies of Critical-Creative Tinkering." *Composition Forum*, vol. 35, 2017, https://compositionforum.com/issue/35/proliferating.php. Accessed 20 Jul. 2019.

Laib, Nevin. "Conciseness and Amplification." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1990, pp. 443-459.

Metcalf, Robert C., and Orville T. Bright. *Elementary English*. New York, American Book Company, 1895. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Michael, Ian. *The Teaching of English: From the Sixteenth Century to 1870*. Cambridge UP, 1987.

Murray, Donald M. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." *The Essential Don Murray: Lessons from America's Greatest Writing Teacher*, edited by Thomas Newkirk and Lisa C. Miller, Boynton/Cook, 2009, pp. 123-145.

Parker, R. G. *Progressive Exercises in English Composition*. Boston, Lincoln and Edmands, 1832. *University of Pittsburgh*, https://digital.library.pitt.edu/collection/19th-century-schoolbooks. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Percy, Walker. "The Loss of the Creature." *Ways of Reading*, 9th ed., edited by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011, pp. 459-471.

Prins, Kristin. "Crafting New Approaches to Composition." *composing(media) = composing(embodiment): bodies, technologies, writing, the teaching of writing*, edited by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki, Utah UP, 2012, pp. 145-161.

Ratto, Matt. "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2011, pp. 252-260.

"Requiescat, *n*." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, http://www.oed.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Schultz, Lucille M. *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools*. Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

Shaw, Edward R. *English Composition by Practice*. New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1898. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Stodola, Denise. "Using Stylistic Imitation in Freshman Writing Classes: The Rhetorical and Meta-Rhetorical Potential of Transitions in Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Medieval Treatises." *The Centrality of Style*, edited by Mike Duncan and Star Medzerian Vanguri, WAC Clearinghouse, 2013, pp. 57-69.

Swinton, William. *A School Manual of English Composition*. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1879. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Tarbell, Horace S., and Martha Tarbell. *Essentials of English Composition*. Boston, Gunn & Company, 1902. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/ Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Waddy, Virginia. *Elements of Composition and Rhetoric with Copious Exercises in Both Criticism and Construction*. New York, American Book Company, 1889. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.

Williams, William. *Composition and Rhetoric by Practice, with Exercises, Adapted for Use in High Schools and Colleges*. Boston, D. C. Heath & Co., 1894. *Google Books*, https://books.google.com/. Accessed 22 Jul. 2019.