CONCLUSION
MANGLE OF PRACTICE

How writing happens, how small increments of language come to be something larger, will probably always remain at least partly elusive. We can study key strokes, writing logs, writing protocol responses, final products, real-time observations of writers in action, writers' reflections on their processes, final reflections, eye-tracking results, neurological data, screen captures and videos of writers writing, among other data points that tell partial stories about writing. Still, a comprehensive understanding of the life cycle of writing, its production and its affective triggers, lies perpetually beyond our grasp. This is because the complexity of writing is both commonplace and extraordinary.

Rather than signaling the impossibility of writing research, however, perpetually incomplete writing studies gesture to the exuberant vitality of writing activity; no matter our best efforts, it cannot be pinned down. In the absence of comprehensive accounts of writing, we can monitor and document what scientist Andrew Pickering calls the "mangle of practice." For Pickering, science is characterized by a set of ongoing interactions between people and things, humans and nonhumans. Science, he contends, is best understood as a "dance of agency" (78). In this dance, a scientist is "trying this, seeing what happens, trying something else" (81). As an example, Pickering discusses an experiment with a bubble chamber, also known as a radiation detector, conducted by Donald Glaser that involved a series of recursive moves. "Sometimes Glaser acted as a classical human agent; then he would become passive and the apparatus took over the active role, doing its thing; then Glaser took over again, back and forth; and eventually a working bubble chamber emerged at the end" (Pickering 78).

Glaser's process and his engagement with the environment is performative, as Pickering points out (78), meaning that his observations, adjustments, and contributions responded to collaborations with his materials and emerged from an authentic situation. Glaser's process illustrates a refusal to "edit out the emergent aspects of the dance by substituting scientific representations for them" (Pickering 81). This is important. The dance of agency, for Pickering, represents a way of doing science that stays connected to the world. In contrast, he explains, "Scientific experiment depends on the detour I have been talking about: a displacement of phenomena away from the world and into the lab for the sake of producing knowledge which can then be re-exported to the world. . . " (81). That "we usually contrive not to see" the "emergent aspects of the dance" (81)

has significance for knowledge making activities of all kinds, including those within writing studies. Can we, should we, conduct studies of writing by participating in and documenting "[c]onstant monitoring of worldly performance" as itself part of what's worth knowing (82)? Pickering's point about worldly performance is not that monitoring activity can "ever pi[n] down the actual complexities of any important real ecosystem," but that we "simply have to look" in order to see the world and its activity as "lively and surprising" (83).

This book constitutes an effort to document the mangle of writing practice as represented by writers in the afterglow of writing's completion. It is an attempt to document the dance of agency that writers describe in acknowledgments, not with the goal of figuring out once and for all what conditions make critical, scholarly work possible, but with intent to foreground the emergent aspects of writing—borrowing a book from a friend, writing alongside animals, being affected by personal and/or political realities that change the shape of a project, and so forth. While my study lacks real-time observation of writers in motion, it does highlight how writers tell stories about writing. Implicitly, then, *Acknowledging Writing Partners* values narrative choices—not narrative veracity—as indicators of perceived as well as tacitly coerced writing debts performed within the context of acknowledgments. The book also highlights how a micro view of composing is valuable and can complement larger scale studies of writing and cultural identity. Further, despite a widespread immunity to focusing on individuals (and thereby the humanist subject), *Acknowledging Writing Partners* foregrounds individual and collective representations of writing and writers as sources that have relevance to writing pedagogy.

The individual-collective dialectic was animated for me today by a philosophy student in a dissertation writing class that I'm currently teaching. She wanted to know how I get writing done in between other responsibilities within and outside academia. "It helps to hear how people do this work," she confided. "Even though I know everyone's process is different, I just want to know what it's like for other writers." I share this student's interest and, ultimately, desire to feel less alone in the pursuit of putting words together because her comments resonate with Pickering's description of what it means to understand science. He argues that one first needs to know "(a) the performance of scientists—what scientists do; (b) the performance of the material world . . .; and (c) how those performances are interlaced with one another" (78). He views the "performative struggles" between the human and material world to be the central content of science (78). The take-away from *Acknowledging Writing Partners* is analogous to Pickering's point in that my reading of acknowledgments reveals writers' documentations of "performative struggles" and of relationships between writer and material world. In short, knowing how writers tell the story of writing is know-

ing something about writing. The graduate student who asked about my writing process seemed to understand this intuitively.

I hope this book generates a change in thinking and vocabulary from "writing about" to "writing with" to reflect that partnerships abound in relation to writing activity. Writing is inconceivable outside partnerships, by which I mean something more than the idea that writing is collaborative: practiced with other people, and in response to feedback (though, obviously, both are true, and both are collaborative). Writing is populated and partnered in ways that we can't always recognize. An indiscreet art, writing is something we do with others, created through contact with and exposure to diverse influences and agents. The fabric on your favorite chair, the smell of the laundromat down the street, the light coming in through a window, the muffled voices half heard through floorboards, the cat on your lap—all of these partners make writing a thoroughly collaborative—COLLABORATIVE!—event. I believe that awareness of this expansive view of collaboration, understood as involvement in and with the world, generates sensitivity to diverse writing practices as well as nurtures curiosity about writing, revealing the extent to which writing encompasses so much that we do not yet know or understand. Learning how to "simply. . . look," as Pickering puts it, can lead to revelations of writing's strangeness and stimulate grounds for further research inspired by emergent aspects of writing and the "dance of agency" characteristic of its production.

Of course, "simply looking" is not really so simple. How do we look? Through what lens? With what kind of attention? My study suggests that "looking" can benefit from more roaming, more lack of direction so that we can discover usable insights from interdisciplinary research and/or come to view accidental or mundane encounters as potentially promising content for intellectual work. Learning to appreciate the vitality of seemingly disconnected attachments can bloom into something substantial—for me, in this study, such attachments include a good album, a stirring acknowledgment, Lynda Barry on pedagogy, social media's obsession with animals and writers, Karl Ove Knaussgard, texts I happen to be teaching. Within composition studies, Ann Berthoff persistently models this approach to research and writing. Her edited collection, *Reclaiming the Imagination: Philosophical Perspectives for Writers and Teachers of Writing*, is practically a how-to guide for widening one's palette as a thinker and writer. The book includes no readings that directly address teaching writing but instead brings together work by philosophers, scientists, artists, poets, and rhetoricians in order to stimulate imaginative thinking about teaching. Aimed at cultivating a "tolerance for ambiguity" (viii), Berthoff's selections are meant to instigate thought rather than "cover" the topic of imagination. I recently stumbled upon another version of this approach to writing in a book called *How to Write About*

Music, edited by Marc Woolworth and Ally-Jane Grossan. In preparation for writing about a song, the editors coach writers to do the following:

> Research widely and eccentrically about the time and place
> from which the song comes and make a list of ten facts,
> events, and phenomena of that moment and locale that do
> not have anything directly to do with the song, the artist, or
> music in general. See what's happening in areas as distinct as
> philosophy, fashion, medicine, politics, and law—anything
> can prove a trigger. Make this list by relying on your intuition
> rather than attempting to link up the song in a logical way
> with the elements you choose. Don't despair at this point if
> you can't see a connection between the song and the facts.
> (364)

In reading and writing about acknowledgments, I have tried to follow paths as I've crossed them, allowing eccentricity and interest to guide my attention. I see this book in some ways, then, as an experiment in reading as wandering and making oneself highly suggestible. This stance is consistent with my claim that reading and writing embody a radical withness.

Radical withness, aptly aligned with Pickering's dance of agency, reveals that acknowledgments are rife with unusual (and mundane) details, making them potentially rich sites for writing research as well as for writing assignments. In *Rewriting*, Harris notes that he asks students to compose acknowledgments because they emphasize the labor of writing and the involvement of others in that labor: "Writing is real labor. It requires real time and resources to research, read, draft, revise, and prepare the final copy of a text. And this material work of writing, of the making of texts, almost always involves the help of others" (95). As this study has shown, paying attention to acknowledgments can heighten consciousness of relationships, places, feelings, and a wide array of activities relevant to writing—in fact, the curatorial, distributed, and immersed qualities of writing cited in the introduction are no small part of why acknowledgments can be difficult to compose and to consume.

As this study draws to a close, I would be remiss if I failed to mention that acknowledgments, however, are but one paratext of a larger genre set of marginal, fringe, or threshold texts that have the capacity to depict writing's constituting qualities. We see intriguing ways to gauge influences and interacting concepts, figures and objects central to writing not only in acknowledgments but also in forewords, epigraphs, footnotes, indexes, works cited, and appendices. Digital paratexts, too, generate expansive vistas through which to view partnerships. I think here, for instance, of Johndan Johnson-Eilola's description of writers and

their production informed by virtual composing practices: "[W]riters are not individuals (or even groups) who produce texts, but participants within spaces who are recursively, continually, restructuring those (and other) spaces" (1).

In this light, writers build spaces together online, and one of the ways they do so is through the use of paratexts. Multi-user tagging, for example, constructs organizational schemes that enhance findability and create shared connections otherwise impossible to realize. Pinterest operates on this principle by allowing users to create boards and tags that connect, say, vegetarian food pins to those assembled by other users. Co-constructing space through tagging and creating boards—that is, through writing—is a mode of invention and a tool for materializing community. Because user content on Pinterest is both main and marginal (i.e., some users may follow your vegetarian board; others may never come across it because it lies outside their interest), we can think of tagging and pinning as paratextual genre activities. Jodie Nicotra, who describes multi-user tagging through the term "folksonomy," contends that crafting participatory online spaces refigures concepts of text, agency, and audience traditionally tied to print forms: "With folksonomy, rhetorical agency and intention become much more complicated, because invention is revealed as not simply the product of an individual, isolated mind, but as a distributed process driven by the interaction of a multitude of users. It becomes impossible to assign the origins of the invention to any one individual; rather, invention emerges from a crowd" (W273). Thus, folksonomy—made up of paratextual components—is "nondirectional, bottom-up" collective writing (W273).

Digital writing partnerships are varied, dynamic, and increasingly central to participatory, crowd-sourced virtual community and meaning-making activities. Such partnerships reveal different kinds of information about writing than does my study of acknowledgments, largely concentrated on writing debts of one kind or another. Like acknowledgments, though, digital paratexts widen our view of what we can say about writing as a communal practice, an activity never without partners. Paratexts make center and margins perceptible, even if their distinctions become blurred; and awareness of writing partnerships admits diverse actants into the activity of writing. This matters because writing might be taught with more bodily awareness than it is currently, framing writing as a holistic practice that entails body, others, materials, and environment. Even just making this idea speakable could contribute to a more elastic culture of writing, one that encourages an approach to writing instruction built not only from what students know and need to know about writing skills but also from physiological, social, biological, and material experiences that contextualize knowing. Who or what is in charge of writing a research paper, for instance? The writer, library, the sources, the assignment, the tools and materials, the access, the place where

you encounter the research? While we often talk about rhetoric as relational and contextual, acknowledgments illustrate these principles very well for us and our students. We might use such texts as a basis for teaching writing practices, as well as for asking students to construct their own project-based narratives. What kinds of dances with agency are students doing and what are the implications for writing pedagogy and theory?