

10 Decentering the Author/ Celebrating the Typist in Doctoral Thesis Acknowledgements

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Abstract: This chapter arises from a project that aimed to trace the presentation of an emerging academic self in thesis acknowledgements across New Zealand, Australia, and Japan. Here, we consider ways that acknowledgements, those marginal sections of the thesis text, decenter the individual author as sole producer of knowledge (Burke, 2012) and highlight the situated-ness of writing practices, thereby providing alternative imaginaries for doctoral writing. Unlike the main body of the thesis, which must present a legitimate academic authorial self, this peripheral element tends to be a *back stage* moment (Eik-Nes, 2008) that reveals affective dimensions and the everyday practices of writing and that recognises the involvement of others (people and things) in the research and writing process. Analysis of these texts-within-the-thesis-text enables a reading against the grain—giving insight into who/what *else* contributes to a thesis and revealing the entanglements of academic scholarship and writing (Barad, 2007).

A dominant imaginary of the thesis writer is the solitary author—despite late 20th century assertions of its demise (Barthes, 1977). At the heart of this imaginary is the western European idea of a transcendental ego removed from social or physical connection (Kristeva, 1973). Yet there are myriad others besides the author who are also involved in producing the thesis, as a reading of doctoral thesis acknowledgements underscores; these texts tell quite a different story about the process of writing a thesis, opening up possibilities for re-imagining

doctoral writing. The data this chapter draws on are from a project that explored elements of identity formation within doctoral education by tracing the presentation of an emerging academic self in thesis acknowledgements across New Zealand, Australia, and Japan (Kelly et al., 2017). Here, we analyze historical texts: a corpus of acknowledgements from 1980 from the University of Auckland, University of Melbourne, and Keio University. This was a period in global higher education history on the verge of change as governments began to introduce higher education policies informed by neoliberal agendas, universities grew student numbers, technological developments reframed scholarly practices (Kelly & Manathunga, 2020), and the idea of global higher education began to shift and intensify by the decade's end as more students traveled to study internationally (Chou et al., 2016).

The three sites' differing historical contexts, however, differently inflected the changing forces that shaped doctoral education in this era. At the University of Auckland (a state university established in 1883), Ph.D.s in 1980 were mainly undertaken by those intending on an academic or research career, although a Ph.D. was not a requirement for one in all disciplines and was often done elsewhere. The number of doctoral theses submitted in 1980 was a mere 30 (compared to over 300 in 2016), completed across the range of disciplines but with the greatest proportion from the sciences (geology, botany, zoology, and chemistry). Similarly, for the University of Melbourne (a state university established in 1853), there were 67 doctoral theses submitted in 1980. We chose to ensure that the thesis acknowledgements of women and scholars in the humanities and social sciences were well-represented in this sample so that we could trace possible gendered or disciplinary patterns. While many of the graduates may have been hoping for an academic career, our analysis indicates that many of these theses were in fields closely related to, and often funded by, industry or public sector research organisations outside the university system (like the CSIRO —Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation). In both Australia and New Zealand, writing a thesis and becoming “an author” was integral to becoming an academic and scholar and, sometimes, an industrial researcher. For Keio University¹ (a private university established in 1890), there were 109 doctoral theses submitted in 1980; out of those, 63 were for an MD so were excluded,² 36 were in engineering,

1 The balance of public to private universities is one of the main differences between Japan and Australia and New Zealand. Chou et al. (2016) estimate that currently around 70 percent of university students in Japan attend private institutions.

2 The MD functions as a “professional qualification” and is different from other academic doctorate degrees (Hashimoto, 1998).

and 10 were in other disciplines (literature, law, economics, and commercial science). The Japanese case only focuses on acknowledgements in theses for an engineering doctorate as none of those in humanities and social science disciplines contained acknowledgements in the available copy. This variation indicates different practices of acknowledging others who contributed to the work in a public forum like the published manuscript not only across disciplines but also between Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Today, it is not mandatory in Japan to include acknowledgements when submitting a doctoral thesis, although practice still varies among the disciplines; it is encouraged in New Zealand and Australian universities where it is mandatory to acknowledge sources of funding and assistance with writing.

We initially approached the acknowledgements with the aim of noticing the writers' social, epistemological, and spatial connections (Kelly et al, 2017; Kelly & Manathunga, 2020). Our method was close textual analysis and included paying attention to conventions of the acknowledgements genre (Hyland, 2011) *and* to extratextual elements including layout and font (McGann, 1992). One effect of reading acknowledgements this way is that the impression of an impermeable thesis diminishes, revealing something that is instead made, the work of hands (Arendt, 1958). Acknowledgements reveal *backstage* aspects of thesis-writing (Eik-Nes, 2008), creating *textual porosity* (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2014) in the single-author text and enabling a different and situated idea of the thesis and writer to emerge. If we use that metaphor of a thesis-text as woven, the acknowledgements are a loophole in the texture showing elements of its making.

Our approach is also informed by an understanding from postmodern theory of the thesis as text that is produced in material and social contexts (Barthes, 1977; Kristeva, 1973). In their discussion of doctoral writing and publishing strategies, Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler (2013), drawing on Norman Fairclough (1992), suggested that a thesis text is never constructed in isolation from its context. Instead, they argued, a thesis sits within a discourse community that has "specific practices, histories, conventions and expectations," which other members, including supervisors, support the thesis writer to understand, enabling access to the community (Thomson & Kamler, 2013, p. 31). Acknowledgements, we found, reveal people and practices that assist writers in conforming to discourse community expectations and that enable writers to produce texts appropriate to the discursive context. Acknowledgements also indicate the broader forces that shape (enable and constrain) textual production within the academic community and beyond in the wider social, economic, and technological domain (see Molinari, Chapter 2, this collection).

Writing, Acknowledgements, and the Single Author Idea(I)

The link between “scholar” and “author” has a long history in university traditions, as others also explore in this volume (see Mitchell, Chapter 1). While early European monastic universities engaged in communal scholarly and writing practices (Thomson & Kamler, 2013), from the late 18th century advanced students were re-imagined as authors of written texts, such as the doctoral dissertation (Clark, 2006). A doctoral thesis is one of many elements from western models of academia that have been widely, albeit strategically, adapted, resulting in what Meng-Hsuan Chou et al. (2016) termed an “isomorphism” (p. 3) of higher education institutions globally. The research university “emerged in Germany in the nineteenth century” and was “later adapted in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States” (Chou et al., 2016, p. 4). The modern research university was defined by writing rather than speaking, so the idea of the book—fixed, unchanging, able to be distributed—contributed to creating a powerful “authorial persona” (Clark, 2006, p. 211). Such power and authority necessitated clarity around authorship and raised questions about the nature of collaboration—particularly between supervisor and student. “Where does advice or correction end, and collaboration or co-authorship begin?” asked William Clark (2006, p. 207). With so much at stake (one had to write to get ahead in the Enlightenment), authorship came to be defined as singular, the work of an individual “modern hero of knowledge,” so academic writing practices adjusted in conjunction with this ideal (Clark, 2006, pp. 211-212).

The practice of acknowledgement arises out of this history and allows for recognising the input of others without surrendering claims to legitimacy as an author. To put it another way, if other contributors could no longer share a title page, space had to be made somewhere in the text to acknowledge input—financial, intellectual, or otherwise. At the same time, this practice also allowed for the display of one’s connections or patrons (Genette, 1997) and membership in a community of scholars (Clark, 2006). Acknowledgements enabled doctoral writers to display social standing and intellectual connections without surrendering claims to authorship.

The conception of the authorial “hero” remained largely unchallenged in western literary and scholarly arenas until the mid- to late-20th century, when postmodern theorists, including Roland Barthes (1977) and Julia Kristeva (1973), contributed to a questioning (or death) of the idea of the author. According to Barthes (1977), writing is where identity is lost not formed, the role of readers is crucial in the production of meaning, and all texts are the work of many: “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost . . .” (p. 142); furthermore,

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations. . . . (p. 146)

Despite such assertions, by the 1980s, the ideal of single authorship remained (and continues to remain) important in academia because of those same issues of qualification, expertise, and legitimacy that underpin the original concept of the Ph.D. (Clark, 2006). The single-author Ph.D. thesis continues not only as a strongly held imaginary (Kelly, 2017) but also as a legal credential to practice as a scholar, to be a doctor of philosophy. This was the point made by Jacques Derrida (2004) in his own doctoral defense in 1980: There are “procedures of legitimation” with the conferment of titles that reflect the “essential tie” between the university and “the ontological and logocentric . . . system” (p. 121). In writing, we construct a singular authorial scholarly identity *and* we justify our right to be conferred with a title. As Robyn Barnacle and Gloria Dall’Alba (2014) put it, “what is the doctoral thesis if not the site in which an author establishes credibility as just that: an authoritative author?” (p. 1140).

If acknowledgements began as a textual practice enabling the display of the connections of a scholarly “man among men” (Genette, 1997) without surrendering claims to authorship, scholarly legitimacy, and the title of Dr., they can, however, also reveal the many hands that go into thesis work. What is clear from the acknowledgements we analyzed is that the work of writing is, like research, supported by others. While in our data there was evidence of some credentialising or display of social and scholarly connections, there was also a grounding of the work in everyday sites; recognition of the importance of nurturing relationships; and value placed in the input of others, including providers of beds, makers of tea, and typists.

So Long, and Thanks for All the Typing

In early conversations about the data, we noticed frequent reference to typists among the acknowledgements from the University of Auckland (UA) and the University of Melbourne (UM); however, there was no mention of these contributors in the data from Keio University (KU).³ While there are a range of possible reasons for this, including the fact that several of the Japanese

3 We have used a simple code of the first letter (or first few letters) of the surname of the author plus identifier of the university for quotations from the data.

theses were hand-written in 1980, we conjecture that, in this context, it may not have been appropriate to include non-academics or non-researchers in an acknowledgement in a published research work—for example, none of the Keio acknowledgements mentioned family members and friends, although these were evident in theses from Australia and New Zealand. Although typists are no longer commonly engaged, they typify the kind of contributor to a thesis who is invisible in (or expunged from) the main body of the text but who appears in acknowledgements, much like present-day third-party editors or proofreaders. Like these typists, editors, and proofreaders, “The Secretaries” acknowledged by one thesis writer (B, UA) in his geology doctoral thesis possessed skill and expertise essential in the thesis’ final production, enabling it to conform to the conventions of the academic discourse community (Fairclough, 1992; Thomson & Kamler, 2013), to meet requisite university standards, and to be a text appropriate for the context.

A corpus of acknowledgements from one particular time and place, the University of Auckland in 1980, created an impression of typists as skilled and knowledgeable discourse community *brokers* for doctoral writers—similar to the role that Thomson and Kamler (2013) ascribed to peer reviewers. In the New Zealand data, there were several examples of different authors in one discipline thanking the *same* typist. For example, three from chemistry acknowledged the assistance of the same administrator, Margaret. Noticing that these theses shared the same presentation and format style—with identical font, border, and layout—we saw material evidence that the documents were the work of *one* person and one machine. The likeness between the three also created an impression—reinforced by references across the same set of acknowledgements to Room 6027, a shared *place* of writing (Kelly & Manathunga, 2020)—of a communal approach to scholarship in this department, involving the team of researchers and other members of the department, both academic and non-academic.

Acknowledgement of Margaret’s input in these theses prompted us to reflect on and examine the distinctions thesis writers sometimes make between different types of writing tasks. The acknowledgement of “Margaret... for all those last minute corrections” (R, UA) implies *more* than a straightforward typing contribution and is closer to a form of input often attributed to supervisors. Similarly, the statement, “the first class job Margaret ... has done in typing this *magnum opus* . . . from my unremitting scrawl” (T, UA) signifies her writerly agency, her knowledge of the subject area, and her capacity to interpret the work—*her hand* in the production of the “magnum opus.” Similar contributions were acknowledged in the Melbourne data. One woman thesis writer fulsomely acknowledged the help of her typist in “translat[ing] my

illegible, handwritten scrawl into neat typewritten words and mathematical text—and ma[king] a very good job of it indeed” (C, UM). There were other examples from Melbourne where typists were thanked for going beyond typing skills: from “eliminat[ing] many errors and inconsistencies” (H, UM), to help with “references and proofreading” (E, UM), or “typing research reports and correspondence” (Ha, UM). One contributor was not only responsible for “*superb* typing and proofreading” but also “for many of the excellently drawn diagrams” (M, UM). These comments prompted us to wonder—like Clark (2006)—where does correction end and collaboration begin? The data indicates it is not only the author who contributes to the content of a thesis; other contributors read the thesis and bring vocabulary, knowledge, expertise, and understanding of the subject to contribute to its final form, underscoring the connections between the *mechanics* of the writing process and the *meaning* of the text.

Notably, *all* the typists from the Auckland and Melbourne data were women. In both contexts, typing a thesis was sometimes the task of several women; in one set of theses from Melbourne across different disciplines, with authors of different genders, between three and six different women typists could sometimes be named. In Australia and New Zealand during the 20th century, being a typist was a form of paid work as well as a role and identity for many women. Becoming a typist was also symbolic of being an independent working woman in Japan after the Second World War. A range of economic, social, and technological factors contributed to the evolution of the typist, including the growth in use of portable typewriters. According to Joost Beuving and Geert de Vries (2015), “millions of young women . . . typed away at mechanical and electrical typewriters” (p. 146). In their heyday, typewriters opened a new sphere of work for women; the portability of typewriters enabled flexibility, and secretarial work was often limited in hours so it could fit around other commitments. Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell (2005) suggested that the history of the typewriter is inextricable from the contestation *and* reinforcement of gender roles; it created employment opportunities outside the home but also invented a new sphere of ‘women’s work’ to support ‘men’s work.’ It was not until the late 1980s that typewriters and typists were displaced as technological advancements led to the widespread adoption of personal computers (Burke, 2012). Acknowledgements from this era are thus a marker of a significant—albeit waning—technological and social phenomenon bound up with academic writing practices.

The example of the typewriter shows that doctoral writing practices and ideas about who (or what) constitutes a writer are always linked to material conditions and technologies. Although manuscripts were not produced on

typewriters when the Ph.D. came into existence, *typesetting* was a practice used in the production of academic theses even in the early 19th century (Clark, 2006). In 1829, Friedrich Ritschl produced his dissertation with the assistance of “three typesetters” who worked “through two nights to get the dissertation printed on time” (Clark, 2006, p. 234). At the end of the 19th century, wrote Peter Burke (2012), the typewriter came to be regularly used—around the same time that higher education and the model of the research university also experienced rapid expansion. While administration centers were first to embrace this machine, universities and publishers also increasingly (although not universally, as handwritten examples from Keio attest) “came to insist on typescript rather than manuscript for books and PhD dissertations” (Burke, 2012, p. 95). This necessitated someone, not necessarily the author, producing the typescript.

Typing and the Division of Textual Labour

Acknowledging the work of a typist or typesetter reveals a set of connections very different from reference to prestigious scholars and speaks to the idea that *all work* in the university is grounded in materiality. “By itself,” Hannah Arendt (1958) wrote, “thinking never materialises into any objects. Whenever the intellectual worker wishes to manifest his thoughts, he must use his hands and acquire manual skills just like any other worker” (p. 90). Thought and hand are conjoined in Arendt’s account of scholarship, yet writers are rarely imagined as intellectual workers possessing manual skills. According to Price and Thurschwell (2005), the tendency to separate out aspects of writing, to valorise mind over body, is nowhere more apparent than in the division of textual labour, which our analysis of acknowledgements reveals: *Some people* do the thinking, while *others* do the typesetting, typing, or proofreading. In our data, the former group comprised both genders while the latter consisted solely of women.

In these acknowledgements, the task of typing a manuscript was often referred to as *laborious* (B, UA). Although this phrasing implies recognition of and gratitude for the hard work involved, it also categorises this work as *labour*, with implications that it is manual, rather than intellectual, work. Again, we found evidence that textual labour was divided, hierarchical, and gendered: Tasks having to do with “thesis production” (P, UA) or the manual side of writing a text, such as proofing, were distinct from—rather than integral to—intellectual work. This is despite the fact that the range of tasks that typists engaged in could include correction, interpretation, drafting, drawing diagrams, finding references, and writing research reports and correspondence.

Most theses in the Auckland and Melbourne dataset created a distinct order of acknowledgement, with a *thesis production* section at the bottom of the list after supervisors, fellow research students, international contacts, funders, laboratory and technical staff, and archivists and librarians. This order of acknowledgement enacts the idea that textual production happens only at the end, after the research is done. We found that *final draft* or *final manuscript* and *last-minute* were phrases used a number of times in relation to others' textual work, further reinforcing this idea. Sometimes the hierarchy of textual labour was conveyed through other means, as in the case of one thesis from the Keio dataset that included the titles and affiliations of all other contributors—except for the two women named for contributing diagrams. This ordering (and gendering) of labour creates what Price and Thurschwell (2005) referred to as a fantasy of detachment between transmission (the text or vehicle for ideas) and understanding (ideas) that is connected to an age-old division between material and metaphysical understandings of language and writing.

Although acknowledgements of typing and other text-related tasks often took the form of compliment or praise, these could also, through choice of adjective for example, reinforce a transmission/understanding dichotomy. We found many examples of phrases like (with our emphasis added) “her *very competent* typing of the labels and captions for the diagrams” (E, UA), “her *efficient and accurate* typing” (A, UA), and “excellent *clerical* assistance” (D, UM) that were grateful but also faintly denigrating. The typists were valued but put in their place. At the same time, the absence of a compliment also stood out as somewhat ungracious or revealing, as when someone simply “did the typing” (P, UA).

The nature of the acknowledgement and the choice of verb or adjective led us to thinking about the nature of the exchange between thesis writer and typist. On the one hand, typists were sometimes employed by the doctoral student's department—like Margaret in chemistry at Auckland—in which cases it was unclear if the typing up of a thesis was undertaken as part of paid employment or done as a favour—or something between the two. Reflecting further on this, we wondered about the absence of references to typists in the acknowledgements from Keio: Was this because in the Japanese context, a typist was considered a paid professional, so therefore it was not deemed necessary to acknowledge them in the same way one might when such work was carried out as a favour or as a gift? Using Japanese typewriters required professional training—there were around 2,400 characters on them (an English typewriter had around 100). Kazuchika Ota (2003) suggested that Japanese typewriters would have been found in administration offices in the university

that and non-academic staff with training would have typed documents and manuscripts when necessary. Perhaps a secretary to a professor acted as a typist for a student's thesis. For example, in Professor Hitoshi Yoshida's memoir (as cited in Tanaka, 2016), there was a description of the staff of Yoshida's chemistry laboratory buying a Japanese typewriter in 1980 in order to become the administrative hub for an academic society; the memoir also described how the professor's secretary typed society documents.

Conversely, we found instances in the New Zealand and Australian acknowledgements that showed when a typist was *not* a paid member of the department, she was often a friend or relative. Wives were thanked for work on the "first draft" (Pe, UA), for "typing the manuscript" and "proof-reading and colouring maps" (Pet, UA). One writer thanked his "mother for typing part of the first draft" (D, UM) – another his "sister Janne for typing the final draft" (Haw, UM). There were also times when wives were thanked for assisting with proofreading and improving the first draft – such as one Auckland writer who thanked his wife for "the help she gave with the onerous task of proof reading" (A, UA) and one from Melbourne who thanked his "wife Jan for the numerous improvements she made to the original manuscript and for a large amount of proofreading" (M, UM). Remind us, when *is* correction collaboration? Interestingly, in the Melbourne data, while most (but not all) of the women thesis writers acknowledged typists, none of them acknowledged their husbands for typing or proofreading or other tasks relating to the writing and preparation of the thesis.

While departmental typists were paid to do the work, mothers, sisters or spouses were usually not. This speaks to Beuving and de Vries' (2015) point that *personal* projects often rely on networks of family and friends who give their time and effort on the basis of reciprocity, or other informal yet meaningful exchanges, rather than payment. One thesis writer thanked someone for "being *persuaded* to type" (M, UM). While a wife is "a cheap worker," there is also *trust* that comes with asking a close relative or friend to work on a thesis (Beuving and de Vries, 2015, p.148). Some thesis writers acknowledged other kinds of support alongside typing, such as one from Auckland who cited "patient help and advice" from a relative named Margaret (Pet, UA). Although, predictably, women tended to be credited in thesis acknowledgements with providing what could be termed emotional labor, there were also references to "help and friendship" (S, UA) from men too. One woman thesis writer referred to "Donald's love, patience, critical acumen and painstaking care with the manuscript" in a rare reference to a combination of emotional, intellectual and manual support—although Janice was also named as an "excellent typist" (McM, UA). In contrast, an analysis of the Melbourne data set suggests that

several of the women thesis writers acknowledged the emotional support of their husbands but never referenced their help with the manuscript.

“... to Sylvia for the Loan of the Office Typewriter”: Writing and Technology

One acknowledgement invited further reflection on the material practices of writing and research (Kelly & Manathunga, 2020), as it included many references to objects, one of which was the office typewriter loaned by “Sylvia” (B, UA). In this acknowledgement, writing was not only imagined as a social activity, it was also material and technological. Paul Standish (1997) offered insights into the relationship between writers, writing, and technology and suggested that, rather than perceive the relationship between the *knowing subject* and an *object*—like the one a writer has with a keyboard—as objective and neutral, we should acknowledge the impact of what Heidegger termed *ready-to-hand* technologies on our capacity to work and think. While we may not always be particularly conscious about such objects, they nonetheless enable a “smooth functioning” for us (Standish, 1997, p. 445). The word *typewriter*, as Price and Thurschwell (2005) pointed out, can refer to a machine or a person. The three New Zealand theses in chemistry with identical extratextual elements were produced by one person *and* one machine.

Although the main thesis text allows a few glimpses of the writer’s relationship to technologies, acknowledgements *can* make visible the contribution of objects that, like other people, enable doctoral scholars to do research and write a thesis. Something happens in the *backstage* moment of writing the acknowledgement: As writers reflect on the contributions of others, they are telling an alternative story of the thesis’ completion. In this story, the presence and agency of objects and technologies, such as the office typewriter, also sometimes emerge. In the Keio acknowledgements, references to high-speed cameras and newly developed laboratory equipment for experiments reveal the range of technologies integral to the doctoral writer’s research. In others’ acknowledgements, such as several found in the Auckland set, humble and homely objects were referred to, from cups of tea to a vehicle that was particularly reliable. For the most part, however, thesis writers tended to overlook the *things* that support the work of writing, further contributing to the imaginary of the singular, solitary work springing from the mind of an author (Barthes, 1977) or from an ego (Kristeva, 1973). The danger of allowing the elision of our reliance on things *and* others in our contemporary, late-capitalist epoch is that we contribute to the idea that such work is smooth, easy, efficiently productive, and individual—all those qualities that our era of fast-capitalism demands and rewards (Peters, 2015).

Personal computers have contributed to the reduction in the time it takes to complete doctoral theses, and there has been a significant re-imagining in the last 30 years of doctoral writing as a result—with no need to write up a manuscript from a tangle of “unremitting scrawl” (T, UA) a thesis can be written anytime, anywhere by the doctoral candidate. We were struck by references in acknowledgements to how long research and writing took in 1980 (one from the Japanese data set took 20 years), which reminds us this was an era in which *time* was less compressed, scholarship less urgent. As Michael Peters (2015) has shown, speed and “fast knowledge” (p. 15) are hegemonic concepts in our “techno-epistemological” (p. 11) era, deeply transforming the university.

Yet laptops and personal computers, and the smooth texts that are produced with them, perhaps disguise rather than eradicate the nature of writing *as time-consuming work*. By making less visible the relationship between thought and the hand, technology also makes it harder to acknowledge the relationship between understanding and transmission. We found many handwritten dedications and signatures, or corrections *by hand*—such as the application of liquid correction fluid—which do what Standish (1997) described as “the sort of revealing that technology would otherwise cover over” (p. 446). Crucially, concealing the work of writing makes it *more* “susceptible to the imposition of a calculative rationality” and subject to contemporary utilitarian demands, such as shorter timeframes to completion of degrees or greater numbers of doctoral theses per institution (Standish, 1997, p. 450). Looking at historical texts like these acknowledgements from 1980 makes *more apparent* the work that goes into writing: Because technologies were simpler, we can see the presence of a hand or another’s labour in a way that modern technologies gloss over.

Concluding Remarks

Analysing doctoral thesis acknowledgements allows different stories about doctoral writing to emerge and enables us to reflect critically on the ways that writing is situated, the ways it involves textual labour that extends beyond the efforts of a single author. Writing involves intellectual work and it involves manual skill, although sometimes these elements are divided, with some tasks being performed by other people and/or things—contributions that can be elided in the name of an authorial scholarly text. Barthes (1977) commented that it suits a capitalist ideology to privilege the single author; Derrida (2004) pointed out that an author is a construct of the logocentric and ontological system of which the university is a part and to which it contributes. Academic writers work within these ideological and systemic constraints, yet it behoves

us to find ways to resist them. In a recent blog entry, academic and historian of higher education Tamson Pietsch (2019) wrote that she was becoming more conscious of “expertise and its history and the ways that academics like me deploy it to underpin our knowledge and authority claims” in texts like academic biographies (para. 1). These same texts can be written differently, she suggested, to make different claims about authorship and the situatedness of knowledge. Acknowledgements can likewise undo claims to authorial-ness and make plain the other people and things that go into the work of writing a thesis. If writers can get better at challenging the single author imaginary, we might be able to contest some of the worst aspects of our individualistic academic traditions, point the way toward greater opportunities for “common action” (Pietsch, 2019, para. 12), and resist the old hierarchies that dog our writing practices.

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