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***'Tissue of making' in practice-led research: Practi-care,  
prepositional thinking and a grammar of creativity***

Abstract:

This paper, as essay, elaborates on Barbara Bolt's notion of the 'double articulation' of practice-led research and its relationship to knowledge, and also draws on the work of Ross Gibson and the insider-outsider view of the artist-researcher; the restlessness of narrative acknowledgement. It builds on ideas of practice, where the primary focus of practice-led research is 'to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice' (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 65). Where this leads is to a definition of a prepositional mode of articulating knowledge through practice, where the relations *between* are key, the *abouts*, the *within*s, the *ofs*; how the different parts of the process or 'tissue of making' (to use Bolt's term) connect with, interrelate, link, belong, resist. It does this by mapping a series of iterative creative works that have been created and/or made over time through the workings of a specific practice. It traces intersecting lines of thought as a way to explore the processual nature of research; the space of, and value in thinking prepositionally; and the syntax or grammar of creativity.

Biographical note:

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Practice-led research in the creative arts, including Creative Writing, has a sometimes muddled and varied history, signified by terms such as practice-led, practice-based, practice research and creative research being used interchangeably (Candy & Edmonds 2018; Magee & Brook 2012; Green 2018; Green & Williams 2018). At the heart of *practice-led* research is a practice of some kind, where the primary focus of the research is 'to advance knowledge *about* practice, or to advance knowledge *within* practice' (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 65, emphasis added). This kind of practice research is not dependent upon the creation of an artefact per se, although artefacts often form part of the practice; it is *founded* in practice, whatever that practice is, or however it is defined (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 65). Barbara Bolt in 'The magic is in the handling' speaks of the 'double articulation' that is central to practice-led research, 'whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory' (Bolt 2010: 29). This process, she argues, 'enables a shift in thought itself' (29), where thinking about practice – which in the case of Creative Writing is *writing* and thinking and writing about the thinking of writing – allows the practitioner to consider practice from different perspectives, to demonstrate 'a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice' (29). For Bolt, who is a visual artist who draws, her materials are pencils and pens and paper, 'hand, eye and mind' (30); for writers, this is writing, this is fingers on a keyboard, pencils making letters and marks in a notebook. Also: hand, eye and mind. Central to Bolt's working theory, is this concept of 'material thinking' (Carter 2004: xiii), or as she likes to put it (taking it further than Carter), the materials and processes of production that 'have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence' (Bolt 2010: 30). In other words, the collaboration that is forged is between the artist and her materials. The hand, eye, mind that comes into play is in relation to the processes of practice, the handling of materials, and bifold intelligences.

Bolt's measure of success for practice-led research is the articulation and enunciation of the relations between that take place 'within the very process or tissue of making' (Bolt 2010: 29). It is, as I argue in this paper-as-essay, a prepositional space and practice, where the relations *between* are key, the *within*s, the *ofs*, and *abouts*; how the different parts of the process or 'tissue of making' connect with, interrelate, link, belong, resist.

In the essay that follows, I test this idea by situating my study in a symposium-led model of practice-led research in Creative Writing – the Practice Research Symposium or PRS [1]. In this model, where the practice is the research (Aung Thin et al 2020), creative researchers, PhD students and their supervisors allow their practice to grow and evolve through reflection, self-interrogation and rediscovery. The challenge in the PRS is to define the practice (as practised over time), to capture the tacit knowledge embedded in specific practice, and to consider how that practice situates the practitioner in a body of knowledge and community of practice (*The Practice is the Research* 2019). If we were to think of this practice-led research challenge in Bolt's terms (not that she references the PRS), it is through the handling of the

'thing' – the thing being practice – that we gain access to the world 'in an originary way' (Bolt 2010: 30). In this study and context, by mapping a series of iterative creative works that have been created or made over time through the workings of a specific practice, I interrogate the processual nature of practice-led research, the space of, and value in thinking prepositionally, and the syntax or grammar of creativity in coming to some sort of knowledge. I do this through Bolt's notion of 'double articulation' and bifold intelligences, or to use Ross Gibson's term when referring to the 'mystery' of knowing, the insider/outsider 'double compulsion' (Gibson 2010: 4).

This paper-as-essay is a working experiment where supervisor becomes student (where the PRS is flipped, so to speak), where a creative writing researcher who is also a PRS supervisor submits their own practice to scrutiny, in order to reflect and frame that practice, and to rigorously engage with the next phase or rising possibility.

She wants to compose cartography but in writing. In the end, I come to share her anguish – if that's right – in her father's death and his strong creationism, but cartography seems to be her way of suggesting ... knowledge. (Wood 2014)

### **Using our colleagues to help us in making good work [2]**

I want to approach this task of thinking about my practice as research *head on* (I want to employ first person too), allow practice (and practise) to inform, direct, shape the research and these findings. Give practice – even the making of this flipped slice-through of writing-as-research – its place, its friendship circle, its centre and outside rim. Be an outsider and insider to the making of stuff and then insider/outsider to the thinking about the making and the making of thinking of stuff: an insider-outsider-insider view watching things – how they grow creatively, ethically, materially, critically. Be a student to/of my own practice. Be a researcher-practitioner in the presence of other researcher-practitioners, other peers, a community of practice. Engage in Ross Gibson's 'double compulsion' by stepping 'both outside and inside the mystery' (Gibson 2010: 4): 'Inside – but also outside – but also inside – but also outside – but also inside. The rhythm of this narrative acknowledgement is restless. And it's necessary' (10). Necessary. Must do.

### **Help us think and test our practice and thinking and making**

A beginning point is to think about what practice is as definition – the *practice is the research* – where practice becomes the application of ideas, beliefs and method (as opposed to theory about practice). Practice is the *carrying out*, the way/s of doing something, repeated exercise or performance, such as, in simple terms, weekly choir practices or Auslan lessons or walking; a period of time to give to something – skills, activity, experience, method. You

put *into* practice – there is movement, direction, action, a change of state. '[P]ractice connotes *doing* something that extends beyond everyday thinking into actions that may lead to new outcomes' (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 64, original emphasis). Practise *practice* as both verb and noun, from the Old French *practiser* or medieval Latin *practizare*, which is an alteration of *practicare* 'perform, carry out'. *Practi-care*: where there is always and must be *care* (related etymologically through Old High German to grief and lament: *chara*). Where there is also a sense of renewal and change, optimism; the practice of care to make things better.

### **Practice is the research is the practi-care is the provision of what is necessary**

For us writers our practice is a *writing practice*, the application and/or performance of writing *and* making work as daily routine: writing exercises, drafting of work, experimentation, crafting, re-drafting, the process of writing itself, what happens with pen and paper, keyboard and fingers, dictaphone and iPhone, grammar and syntax, vocabulary choice, register, cadence and so on. A practice that then translates and *transforms* into genre and form, into poetry, nonfiction, fiction, poetic prose, novel, memoir, essay, editorial, article, reportage, theatre, short form and extended long form, elongated haiku, autofiction, creative/critical work, critical scholarly work, performance, performance-as-critical, poetic-prose-as-creative-critical and so forth.

Coupled with this everyday routine of writing practice, there are the umbrella research practices or *practi-cares* – thinking through what unites or joins together ways of doing and imagining things, where the revisiting of previous work and/or appraising of current work and thinking longitudinally about practices and practises enables a joining up and expanding of ideas, allows growth and movement, the shifting of gears – 'joining eye, hand and mind in a process of material thinking' (Carter 2004: xiii). How experimentation and trying and failure can extend and trouble and contest and move and generate even more. Research as 'immersion and then somewhat by exertion and reflection' (Gibson 2010: 5). Then, too, the sharing of these findings near and far with others like us, like here, like now, across borders and back again. Encounter and exchange. Praxical knowledge as Bolt would say, where

tacit knowing and the generative potential of process have the potential to reveal new insights: both those insights that inform and find a form in artworks and those that can be articulated in words. (Bolt 2010: 31)

### **Have satisfying, high level discussions about what we are doing creatively**

What I have been thinking about and developing, and now recognise *as a thing* (voicing it out loud), is what I am calling my *prepositional* practi-care. It is a relational practice or care-as-doing spelt out and performed in prepositions – through, across, towards, concerning, against,

athwart and so on. It is a kind of thinking, an approach, a creation of space, even a formulation of method/s (from *meta* expressing development and *hodos* meaning way). It is about elevating practice, then thinking through how practice has progressed over/across time and the nature and connection of the different material parts and processual knowledge – how the process or tissue of making interrelate, belong, resist, within, of, and about. How, in my case, in going back to my own doctoral work as a starting point, perhaps to the very first piece of creative-critical writing published before examination – ‘To the smell of pineapples; writing a Queensland *auto-bio-graphie*’ (Rendle-Short 2007a) – I set out theoretical understandings, relational thematics and tropes. To ask: am I able to piece together in this work and then over time (over a writing-research career) different body parts from which I can establish something of a prepositional method employed in the practice and to claim it as a shift in knowledge or ‘acknowledgement’ (Gibson 2010: 5): a prepositional ‘hodos’ or meta-tissue?

In *Bite Your Tongue*, my DCA thesis (Rendle-Short 2008), by way of illustration, I interrogate the process of language, now framed latterly through a prepositional method, and consider how to language a body – how *to preposition* the body, although at the time I didn’t know I was doing this – through voice (finding voice), the idea of tongue (unbiting tongue), silence and sound (where you can’t have one without the other), the impact of voice/silence and shame/familial love on interpersonal relations (between a daughter and a mother), and the nature of acceptance (possibilities and limitations). How writing, when conceived relationally, makes the writing of a linguistic body possible: ‘writing as a way of thinking: thinking about growing up, about speaking up; thinking *through writing* about a story to make your heart contract’ (Rendle-Short 2007a: 3, original emphasis).

This doctoral work experiments with form and narration, imagined interlocutors, writing/reading as transgression, the employment of a narrating ‘disobedient subject’ (Whitlock 1996: ix). It intervenes into/through history, story and culture, with/concerning/against a very particular history of Queensland at a very particular point of its history to do with censorship and book banning and the politics of power through religion and controversial anti-pornography campaigns. It does this via a series of *inventions*, into and out of the imagination: ‘writing/coughing/vomiting’ the story into existence to live on/beside/near/within the page (Rendle-Short 2007a: 6).

There are all sorts of doublings here, crossing overs, all sorts of revelations, resistances, athwarts. Reflexivity at work. The point being, when employing Gibson’s doubled compulsion to step ‘outside and inside the mystery’ (Gibson 2010: 4), what emerges allows creative elaborations and translations of such kind to be reconsidered across time (which is what I am doing here: reconsidering my doctoral work where time shifts perspectives and positionalities) and for it to be rediscovered in research terms also. The praxical knowledge arising begins to form a logic and argument or kind of ‘sight’ (Bolt 2010: 30).

## Within the field of ideas that shape our practice

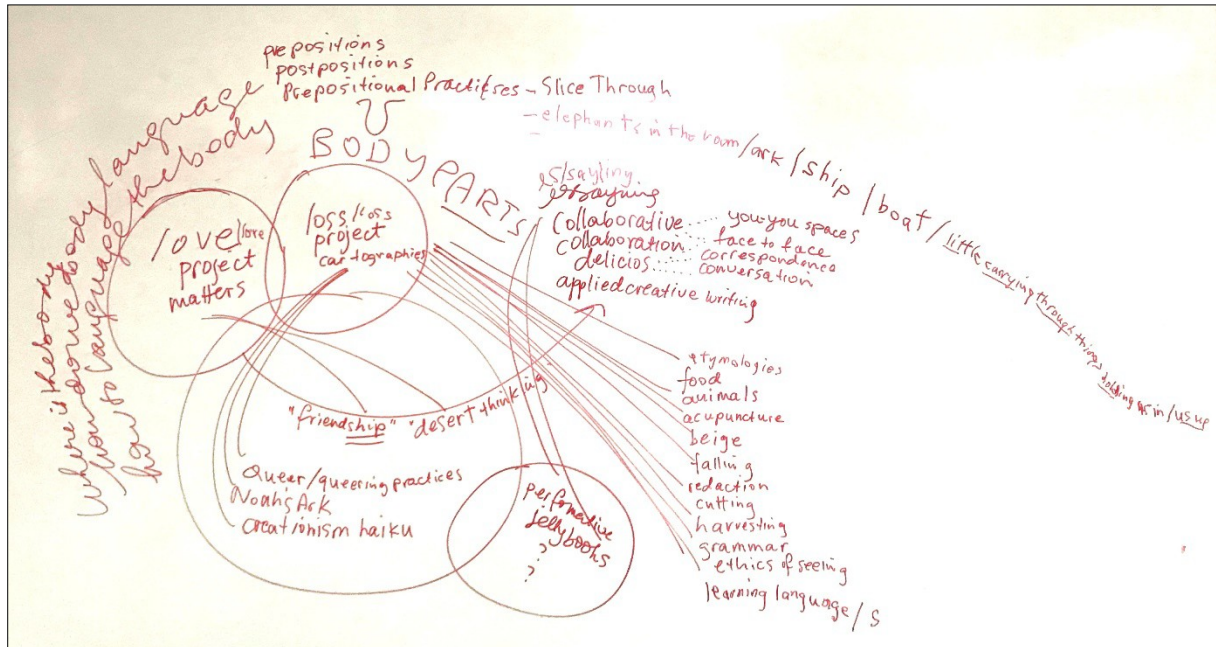
Intrinsic to this practice-led research is the realisation that the work of the book was being made as the work came into existence, characters/narrators coming alive on the page as interlocutors, where the making was as important or as interesting as the thing itself being made; in other words, 'both backwards *and forwards*, as the work is in progress: writing about process as the thing is being processed' (Rendle-Short 2007a: 9, original emphasis).

In another early experiment, with a box of family slides and nerves at the ready, I performed work called 'Illicit desire' for the National Library of Australia, which was later published in *Overland* (Rendle-Short 2007b). In this piece, on love, shame and family slides, I began by riffing off Susan Sontag's notion of photographs being *memento mori*, how to take a photograph is 'to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability' (Sontag 1977: 15). How ideas of being vulnerable and unprotected connect with writing and reading and the possibility of redemption: 'how writing and books can open us up to the idea of "making different"' (Rendle-Short 2007b: 1). How: in making work and in thinking about the making of work, writers put themselves in the way of something – at least this one did – it is a waiting experience: 'waiting until what's inside crosses with outside, outside with in' (1). Conceptually, this notion of doubling and *crossing over* and *with* underpins this work – the pairing and relationship of/between shame and desire, light and dark, fiction and nonfiction – *alongside* the reflexive push-and-pull of the creative-critical-creative dialogue. Ideas of growing a body, in skin and bones, in language, and being nurtured in the process of making the work, are expounded in a set of theoretical annotations written on the novel, titled *A book of pineapple*. In the abstract to these theoretical annotations, the 'movement of thought' takes shape (Bolt 2010: 33), how it is through inventions (and interventions) of a writerly kind that a different calibre of place to be becomes possible. This acknowledgement or 'meta-tissue' takes shape on the page creatively as well as theoretically. That is to say, advancing knowledge *through* practice, *off* practice, *because* of practice.

## We are motivated by the desire to take creative risks

What interests me now, jumping ahead and thinking about contribution and knowledge and the question of situational field in this slice-through, is the presence of acrossness and throughness in the early work – *across* the windowsill, *through* the glass, *through* invention or fiction (the imaginary) – and the value of prepositions when thinking about a grammar or ethics of seeing, what these parts of speech in the syntax of writing and/or research give to thinking – in, out, with, without, into, under, following, and so on. How to navigate subterranean spaces, how to subvert language, perhaps.

Below is a rough sketch or ideogram [3] I drew in Ho Chi Minh City at the PRS Asia in September 2018 [4] in response to the provocation 'draw your practice' (everyone in the writing-research workshop was asked to do this, PhD students and supervisors and visitors alike). It puts together some recent *around/concerning* thinkings.



**Figure 1. Ideogram (by author)**

You can read shadow and light in this diagram, words and design. There are kernels of new ideas: applied creative writing, delicious, 'desert thinking'. Notice the boat (or ship) sailing away to the right, the intersecting circles and universal sign to suggest the mathematics and relational aspects of a Venn Diagram, useful lists and the cataloguing of thought, the word ship in *friendship* above Noah's Ark, and questions asking where is the body?, 'How do we body language?', 'How to language the body?'. Perhaps the idea of body (this ideogram-as-body) is being used (thought of) in different ways: body of work, body of knowledge, and the body-as-flesh itself. (Drawing writing-research is a useful, repeatable exercise to do at different intervals.)

Prepositional thinking/practice – what I see now as an approach-as-glue holding my practice together – is processual by nature (with progressive and interdependent steps); it needs time; it can't be cooked quickly. You could also call it an eisegetical practice [5] – how to language the body not through explanation or explication (exegesis) but through loose thinking, faulty interpretation, submission to ongoing change in the process of writing and reading: reading forwards, reading back; reading in, reading outwards (Rendle-Short 2010).

Some of this thought-thinking through practice and across time or *because of* time – that is to say, thinking within and around my own writing practice as durational exercise (through and

beyond: insert a suitable preposition) – has progressed over time in various guises (both as critical and creative works) to interrogate such things as:

- how to parse an ethics of seeing
- the archive as residue and experience as a way of working-through
- the curating of proximities as an ethical project
- the you-you space of collaboration and cartographies (ethics of exchange and collaboration)
- nonfiction as prepositional space
- the essay as a prepositional project (not being 'about' but *through, into, across* etc)
- the nears, besides, towards, beyonds, includings of practice.

I continue to be attracted to the idea of 'relations-between' (the in-betweens, the out-betweens, the across/with-betweens, including-betweens etc) and find myself doing more and more thinking about prepositions, the affordances of these very small connecting words in the English language and what these small interstitial words can do, the weight they hold/bear/carry not just in sentences but in terms of thinking and space(ing) and threading and a grammar or syntax of being – how *we be* and *are being*, how we human beside other humans – and what this methodological space of preposition might look like in research terms (Rendle-Short 2020).

### **To articulate how our creative work and our research are aligned**

Prepositional thinking is an examination of relations through the prism of prepositions, thinking about how prepositions orientate nouns and pronouns, in a technical sense, how they indicate the relationship of these nouns and pronouns to the rest of the sentence. As discussed elsewhere (Rendle-Short 2020), prepositional thinking is invitational, to think and do something, it takes you on a journey, it invites the writer/researcher to think relationally – near, without, across, behind – about what is being investigated. A preposition provides a sort of schema or metaphor, a picture of what's being said or indicated. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue 'such metaphoric orientations are not arbitrary. They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 20). Prepositional thinking is an ethical project. It is 'a way of seeing things – for example, how to inhabit non-acquisitional space, the intricacies of mapping cartographies of relationships through inventory and list, enlisting the practice of eisephrasis' (Rendle-Short 2020: 10).

An everyday example of enacting prepositional thinking by way of illustration is what I call 'a beer moment', unpicking the complexity of a personal exchange after a gig singing gospel at Federation Square in the Melbourne CBD on a hot summer night, when it is over thirty degrees when the sun goes down – so glad it is not still above blood temperature. What follows is a preposition story, which then can be subjected to the inside-outside-inside methodological work of prepositional thinking.



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*The heat makes us sweat and that's before the stage lights come on. We all have drink bottles hidden behind our legs. We're all wearing summer dresses. There is a lot of hanging around before and between sets, precision timing for the medley set itself of six gospel songs, set to a bespoke animation. Between songs in an on-stage-whisper one of my lovely gospel friends from the altos asks me whether I'd like to grab a drink after. Isn't this how this sort of thing goes? A hot night, socialising, drinking? I'm thinking this is how you make friends, establish nearness, relations, how you sally across, in a good way, how you thicken a relationship? There is something wonderful here, attractive, a not-far-awayness of something sweet. But – I'm trying to quickly figure out how to do this – this is not in my DNA, not part of my natural habitat – do I ask others to come too? Would anybody care for it? Do I want a drink anyway (I can't decide) or do I just want to go home? I don't even drink beer! Would cider do? Is this what it means to be with friends? She's asked me. How does this go again? What's the next move? What happens following this first move? Do I go around to ask others? How is it done? What happens if they say no? What if I'm left exposed, wanting, without?*

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In using this as an example of how to think prepositionally, I'm not interested in how socialisation here is a second language; how it doesn't come instinctively. I'm interested in prepositional thinking as a way of processing the process of thinking through thought and language, how thinking patterns itself, the self-talk, self-noticing, the inter-personal awkwardness that comes with it, and how one might map out the relations that draw bodies together to be *in relation* through language. A slowing down of reaction to take it in, respond, to work out the next step.

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people... Since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 1-2)

How prepositions work and what they can and can't do metaphorically and as a part of speech in the grammar and structure of language is a way of thinking about this exchange. If I get close or near or work through, at what point of the exchange is there a *with*, a *without*? How close do you have to get to be *near*? What happens *around*? Or *between*? Also, how different prepositions work differently, each one maps a divergent sense of what any one relations-between means for what is going on here, how it works, what the nature of the exchange is about in emotional and psychological terms. Prepositions as cartography. They

are nuanced parts of speech, each one characterised by a subtle shade or shift of meaning as to what it can and cannot do. For example, in a film (I can't remember the name of it), one character says to another character: 'I can work *with* Nat but I can't work *for* Nat, it's a preposition thing'.

**We want to make work that keeps us satisfied as creative people, which, of course feeds our productivity**

Where this is leading is into a subtle, delicately balanced space. We might, for example, think of prepositional space as a new form of clearing, of camp (Veijola et al 2019), but if so, we have to ask what does this felt-body-experience or writing of experience (the experience of writing) look/feel/sound/*ear* like in this space of contemplation and openness, headroom? How camp (tent-camp not queer-camp) gives us something not normally experienced in the everyday. How it is a 'shoreless time', how 'there, on the verge, one dwells' (Veijola et al 2019: 24) – 'while experiencing, simultaneously, both the *permission* to make a move and a *release from an obligation*' (24, original emphasis). For example, thinking about creationism and Noah's Ark (my current project) and the parade of queer animals going two-by-two into the Ark: *because* fur, *between* fin, *through* wings, *near* beak. How do you float or breaststroke towards Noah's Ark, towards something you would rather not acknowledge is there, rather not believe in? Noah's Ark is a fairytale, right?

Another example of what could be meant by this 'preposition thing' comes out of dialogue a number of us had in a practice-is-research flipped workshop at the Abbotsford Convent in Collingwood when presenting new drafts of research thinking to each other. Specifically, the group of peers talks to me about my work, a Noah's Ark project, and how to preposition my father. A comment is made about my father's library, how it sits above my desk in my library in my house where I work, but how I don't open the books to read these books in this library, and yet how important it is that the library of his books is there, with/alongside me as I write, in close proximity.

You won't open them, really?

But are they interesting?

Will you open the door to the devil if you open them?

Have you ever opened them?

How for this writer-researcher, at least up until the point of writing these words, this world that I am seeking to write about – as contained in/by these books, My Father's Library – this world that I have all my life tried to escape, this world that I eschew, this world, *HIS world*, is a closed book. No matter how near I am. This is research and writing that pushes into a space of vulnerability, in my case *into*, *through*, *away* from my father. It is exactly what we ask of

our students in the PRS, as Alvin Pang writes: 'uncertainty, vulnerability and humility in the face of the new are powerful sources of innovation' (Aung Thin et al 2020: 13).

After, I go back to my desk and look again at what readers might be looking at through my writing, to notice things again. Do some prepositioning. This sort of noticing is a process of writing and thinking too – the process of re-engaging with text and the stuff of that text that I have already written about (stuff I have already made something of, once off, but in draft form – maybe work is always in some sort of draft form) to reconsider, rethink, re-vision it, to re it (once more, afresh, anew) to see, notice, listen in for a second third fourth fifth time to pick up the threads and dance with them in a different way to a different tune maybe the same tune but shift key and modulate from C to A major to A minor. This time, for this reconsidering, I don't want to simply think *about* what this is about in terms of subject matter; I want to submit myself to the process of noticing again and allow a different set of relations to take hold, relations made possible when thinking about certain prepositions. See what happens next, after, beyond. Bring the artist in close proximity to her materials; enact a tissue of making.

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*The body of my desk dances like this. Over. Towards. Across. On its surface in amongst knick-knacks and fountain pens and different coloured inks and teacups and bicycle helmets and old VHSs and plastic roses and small artworks and Dad's handkerchiefs, there are piles of manuscripts with pages bound together in rubber bands (the writer Carrie Tiffany gave me that tip) and drafts of things receipts to the books I have bought in the year Quill LockerClip Files with my mother's writing on the box Dad's file: JOHN: All Business Letters & Queries a folder of artwork I've done collaboratively with a visual artist flyers and brochures to Noah's Ark How Can I Become a Child of God? and From Creation to the Cross a book on climate change published by Answers-In-Genesis 'A biblical perspective to the controversy' Moleskine notebooks with lots of notes in them a book on Big Bone Lick, a national park up the road from Noah's Ark in Kentucky, the birthplace of American palaeontology a copy of an IQ test I did when I was seven years old marking me as 'Superior' at 122 (on the Binet Intelligence Scale) which my parents gave me because they worried I was mentally deficient in some way because I didn't talk until I was five the vocabulary I knew back then (as defined by this Binet test) shrewd lotus*

*disproportionate*

*tolerate*

*regard*

*priceless*

*the tests I did across years VII to XII on*

*comprehension*

*verb absurd*

*'fall in the mud'*

*days of the week*

*rhymes*

*word naming (twenty-eight words in one min and I got  
twenty-five)*

*abstract words*

*finding reasons*

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I like the play of ironies here, how the threading through of ideas brings me, or perhaps more accurately *puts me*, in relation to my father in new and sometimes difficult ways. Plus, following, concerning. Gets me asking questions, such as, how do you reconcile difference? How can you be proud and ashamed at the same time? What are the ethics of noticing? And I haven't even looked above once at My Father's Library, sitting in the floating bookcase over my head. Looming.

How do you hold these complexities within, without? How do you language feelings? How do you preposition this experience? Preposition a library? Make this felt experience become – including? Despite? Until?

Is love *this* difficult?

Then, just above the top edge of the computer at eye-level there are two books that I love, that I read again and again, propped up on a small sixties wooden desktop bookshelf. I have been staring at them as I have been writing these words not noticing them or seeing them there, right in front of me: staring *through* them, *beyond* them, *except* them. Roland Barthes's *Mourning Diary*. John Berger's *Confabulations*.

In *Confabulations*, there is a quote from Berger on the back-cover blurb taken from the opening essay that speaks directly:

A spoken language is a body, a living creature, whose physiognomy is verbal and whose visceral functions are linguistic. And this creature's home is the inarticulate as well as the articulate. (Berger 2017: 5)

I think here of this spoken language-body I am playing with (and making), my living creatures of the articulate and inarticulate, Noah's Ark as method – collecting plastic animals in plastic bags, restaging Noah's Ark as a station of the (very) cross as Peripatetic Panel, re-staged for the Digital Writers Festival (Rendle-Short et al 2018), re-figuring Noah's Ark as a way of finding voice, queering Noah's Ark, thinking of pairings, likelies and unlikelies: likely pairings like straight opposite gendered pairings and unlikely pairings of the same and cross queer kind, two by twos. I'm also thinking of the nineteen-year-old who has sex with her lover while menstruating in the very small bathroom in a shared house in Barney Street who knows it is her mother who is at the front door knocking wildly, bible in hand, because she has flown across the border to be angry with her daughter because she is living in sin. (A different kind of encounter and exchange, this.) Coupled with the story of doing a bowel test when turning fifty: blue sticks and red sticks, faecal material everywhere, Float Collection Sheets, and Transport Tubes. You write: 'This free bowel test is more difficult than writing' (Rendle-Short 2018: 47).

Questions – How can you preposition the body like this? Is it even possible? Human body, animal body? A mother's body? A Noah's Ark body? How does it look on the page? What are the variables? How spoken? Performed (a circle of plastic animals found in local junk shops are starting to emerge)? What implications does prepositional *practi-care* have on questions of form – what does it mean to carry out (to practice) / perform? To be vulnerable? To doubt? What, if any, connection is there between prepositions and affect (loosely: feeling, emotion) – thinking here how there is *movement* in prepositions, a relational movement or dance from site to site (beside, under, between, across) – and *affect* as defined as 'complexity of the world in movement' (Freud defined affect as somatic *as against* the psychic). Affect as intensities, coming together, moving each other; affect as situational. What happens but what does not happen also: 'Affect as a series of forces that are in-between bodies, within bodies, and between bodies and world' (Murphie 2010: 1).

### **To be challenged, to be pushed to the edge of our capabilities**

In a recent work which forms part of my 'Cemetery Work', in order to come close to prepositioning the father, in order to *search out* a way to relate to him – to language difficult love – I find myself prepositioning the poet Anne Carson. Second person. I feel a bit sick doing this, making excuses. Getting this close to notice skin, touch finger, hear breath. Feeling the magnetism, an equal and opposite force drawing me in but pushing me away also. Newton's third law is very simple. When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction to the first body. In other words, the exertion of force between two bodies is the same size or magnitude on or against each body and points in opposite directions in terms of force on/to/against the other. That is to say, for every action, there is an equal and opposite

reaction. You could say this is also the law of prepositions, the exertion of force for these function words, the push and pull, equal and opposite. I/me/him/her/they: why this, now, when this morning writing Dad, writing Anne Carson, I was writing you/you. Distance. Proximity. And purpose. The world is a small place.

I can't get to sleep. Anne Carson is in my head. I think I'm talking to her in understandable sentences. One at a time. But I know it's all gibberish... Or does she like those nights on her own when he can't sleep, when she has the double bed all to herself? When she can lie crossways like a starfish? When she prepositions the bed. (Rendle-Short 2019)

There we have it. Where breath becomes the air around us, where 'we allow meaning to unfold' (Yoo 2019: 405). Bodywork. The nearness, throughness, never-complete-ness of friendship. And rising possibility.

## Notes

[1] The PRS (Practice Research Symposium) is a PhD program in Creative Writing at RMIT University, a higher degree research model in practice-led research for professional practitioners to: reflect on their practice; frame their practice; and rigorously engage with the next phase of their practice. It is a symposium-led PhD program (the Creative Writing program began in 2016, with its first graduates in 2020) having its antecedents in the RMIT School of Architecture and Design where the PRS has been running successfully in Asia, Europe and Australia for more than thirty years. The focus of the PRS PhD is on a holistic investigation and development of a candidate's established and ongoing creative practice rather than on an individual project (Aung Thin et al 2020).

[2] Section epigraphs in this essay come from email correspondence with a group of academic peers concerning what it is we researcher-writer-artists are doing – as creative researchers – in what we call the 'Flipped PRS': practising the PRS model on each other as an experiment and model of practice in 'reverse pedagogies'; that is to say, articulating what it is we are doing in our practice *and why*, just like we ask our PhD students to do.

[3] Ideograms are a common practice or method in architecture; they are a way of thinking out loud, thinking as process. Leon van Schaik, a founder of the PRS, is famous for drawing ideograms as a way of explicating ideas. In fact, he writes a history of the PRS in ideograms in *The pink book* (2011).

[4] RMIT PRS Asia Creative Writing students and supervisors meet at a symposium every six months in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

[5] Eisegesis: something Creationists call a 'deadly virus' – '[Creationist] scholars feel safe only in a world of black-and-white thinking, a world without digression, implausibilities, a world with border control' (Rendle-Short 2010: 7).

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