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Risk, constraint, play: A new paradigm for examining practice-research in the academy

Abstract
This essay looks at my own learning as a writer in order to ask what constitutes creative practice and then takes particular examples to create a paradigm for examining practice-as-research in the academy: risk + constraint + play = change. I use creative readings of particular cultural encounters I have had during my own writing life – with Cornelia Parker, and Kathleen Jamie and Bridget Collins, for instance – to illustrate these ideas. Practitioners working in academia are increasingly required to defend practice-based-research and in this essay I use one of practice-research's key facets – reflective practice - to provide one answer to a pressing concern. I set out to ask how higher education institutions might best support practice-research, with the aim of developing it, increasing outputs, and deepening its investigations. Throughout I ask the question: how can we resist essentialist positions and reductive structures that do not fit the authentic, process-led version of practice?
Key words: creative practice, risk, constraint, play, autoethnography, reflexivity

My ambition in this essay is two-fold. Firstly, I want to reflect on my own writing practice. Secondly, based on that reflection, I want to list some considerations that can be made by higher education institutions supporting practice-research. There are ten of these, and I have used them as subheadings.

I was recently asked to describe myself for our university website. This was hard, because 'myself' changes depending on the context, who I am talking to, and which version of 'myself' I have been 'practising' as most recently, especially as there are several different 'selves' to which I could lay claim, that 'self' is 'never … pre-determined, but always becoming' (Hubbard 2009: 154). Most often, I see myself as a mother and a fiction writer, a queer person, sometimes as a disabled person, sometimes as a dyslexic writer. If I were to, as Sally Munt describes, take 'another look at identity politics' (Munt 1998: 4) I would most often put my 'I am' in front of those identities, and, of course, all of them affect my writing life. To pretend they somehow stood apart from my creative process would be disingenuous. The website was asking for a slightly different – though related – version of 'myself'. Because it has an academic purpose, I described my interest in autoethnography, queer theory and intersectional feminisms and I mentioned the importance of self-reflexivity. Because I had to focus on research particularly, I stated that I tend to work in four main research areas – these are creative and critical – and that there is some overlap, especially in relation to queerness and marginality. I said that I enjoy work that has begun to emerge recently on 'slow scholarship' (Basu et al 2015), as these separate but related areas of research have been ongoing for several years. This makes sense of both their fermentation and their connectivity. I make no secret of the fact that – because I am a writer – my favourite of these 'research areas' is writing. It is also the form of research I have practised the most: I have published two novels: *The Water's Edge* (2003) and *The Haven Home for Delinquent Girls* (2004), short stories, and some poetry. I am working on another novel at the moment.

Why do I start my essay by talking about myself? Firstly, it is a way of being playful. I am interested in playfulness and in Isobel Armstrong's 'ludic' methodology described by Rob Pope in *Creativity* (2005). Also, I do so because this is a critical reflection essay. In this essay I reflect on my own writing processes – in which 'myself' is deeply embedded - in order to attempt one answer to a particular contemporary debate affecting practice-research in the academy. Why make this deliberately auto-ethnographic move? Firstly, autoethnography fits well with exegesis. I was interested in the number of references Paul Williams made to autobiography in his essay in *TEXT* on 'The Performative Exegesis' (Williams 2016). Without wanting to invoke the intentional fallacy but at the same time interested in, as Williams suggests, 'resurrect[ing] th[e] Barthesian dead author', I think that the exegesis is always auto-ethnographic. My essay is not a 'proper' exegesis in that it doesn't focus on a particular piece of my writing, but it is, instead, self-reflective in relation to the process of writing I have been engaged in, and the influences on it. It is a result of 'slow scholarship', a reflection on several years of writing. I have written before about authentic reflexivity as a methodology (Tondeur 2015a) for reading myself as a 'dyslexic writer' and here I generalise some of those ideas.

Autoethnography is a useful tool for the writer working in the academy, as eloquently described by Steven Pace in his essay 'Writing the self into research' (2012) also in *TEXT*. Pace describes how, through autoethnography, practitioners can 'explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others' (Pace 2012) and I am particularly interested in how reflexivity allows writers to investigate this sense of interaction with the cultural world, a symbiotic encounter that one can call 'creative reading'. I use creative reading in this essay as an exploratory device. In his introduction, Pace holds that:

> [a]utoethnography is gaining momentum as a research method within the creative and performing arts, partly because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers … to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences. (Pace 2012)

In other words, autoethnography is a suitable methodology for an investigation of practice research in the academy. It is an authentic approach to writing practice, where – very often – several 'selves' collide.

My second answer to 'why auto-ethnographic?' comes from queer theory, specifically from *Geographies of Sexualities*, from which I borrowed the quotation at the start of this introduction. In this other context, Hubbard maintains that one

can take on 'the role of activist, seeking to undermine heterosexist assumptions through research and praxis' (Hubbard 2009: 154). Certainly, this reflective essay is a space-claiming exercise. He goes on to say that:

> nuanced ethnographic work with non-heterosexually identified individuals has undermined essentialist and heterosexist accounts of dissident sexuality … the subject of desire is never 'biologically' pre-determined, but always becoming. (Hubbard 2009: 154)

As well as describing the shifting idea of self, and the queerness of my writing practice, this (rather co-opted) quotation also describes how *as a writer* I am 'never … pre-determined, but always becoming' (154). How do I fit that shifting writing 'self' into an academy that wants me to define my practice? With that in mind, this essay looks at my own learning as a writer in order to ask what constitutes creative practice and then takes particular examples to create a paradigm for examining practice-as-research in the academy.

I have done this for a practical reason. Individual writers working in academia, along with other practice-based colleagues, are increasingly required to defend practice-based-research – as Paul Williams points out – and to account for its suitability as research. There have been several detailed enquires, of course, including those by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2010), Hilary Collins (2010), Robin Nelson (2013), and Hazel Smith (2009), which I am not attempting to replicate. Instead, I would like to use one of practice-research's key facets – reflective practice – to provide one answer to a pressing concern.

The following is, in some cases, still aspirational; nevertheless, practice-research is a valuable and important part of a higher education institution's research contribution, something that higher education institutions (HEIs) support, but the support required may be different from that given to more traditional subjects. This essay sets out to ask how higher education institutions might best support practice-research, with the aim of developing it, increasing outputs, and deepening its investigations.

1 Provide 'environmental support'. (Sternberg 2006: 89)

The term 'practice' invokes at least four overlapping cultural idioms: 1) an artistic, temperamental, ethereal practice that is hard to pin down, indefinable even; 2) a professional practice, that is, the doing of an activity as opposed to the discussion of it; 3) a rehearsal for a particular project, with an end product or performance in sight; or, 4) a practical everyday repetitive activity, *practised* in order to hone a skill. To which of these do I refer when I describe myself as *practising* creatively in the academy?

In my experience, some HEIs treat practice as if it means one or all of the first three definitions on my list, whereas when I am writing, number four (the most mundane?) is the most useful approach. As Dinty Moore points out: 'Instead of the lightning bolt to the forehead, the million-dollar insight, a writer finds the best ideas in trial and error' (Moore 2012: 15-16). Later in the same chapter he says 'show up and get to work' (1995: 16). In order to function as a practitioner, one needs to develop a regular routine. Is routine the same ascreative practice? Is 'showing up' (Cameron 1995: 175) the creative practitioner's defining feature?

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi one needs an interest in the domain, 'access to the domain' (Csikszentmihalyi 2013: 53), followed by 'access to the field' of experts, connection with the community (2013: 54). Robert Sternberg puts it this way:

> one needs an environment that is supportive and rewarding of creative ideas. One could have all of the internal resources needed to think creatively, but without some environmental support (such as a forum for proposing those ideas), the creativity that a person has within him or her might never be displayed. (Sternberg 2006: 89)

When Sternberg says 'environment', one also needs to understand the implications of 'cultural capital' a philosophy applied to practice by Estelle Barrett in *Practice as Research* (Barrett 2010: 163). For my purposes it is enough to say that 'environment' includes a social, and, more specifically, intergenerational element. For me, the evocation of 'environment' should imply interdependence on cultural context, not an individualist notion of practice plus support.

Although 'showing up' (Cameron 1995: 175) sounds straightforward and the responsibility of the individual, commitment to practice is, in fact, deep, far-reaching and connective. The process of writing is not only about 'showing up'; this 'environmental support' is necessary too. Therefore the HEI that is supportive of creative *outputs* will acknowledge this need to support the *process* and will understand the importance of the practitioner's context.

2 Withhold judgement for as long as possible.

Both routine and 'environmental support' are important because of another ubiquitous feature of creative practice. In the 1930s, Dorothea Brande called it 'the judge in oneself' (Brande 1981: 56). One might best understand 'the judge' as a two stage process. Firstly, the acknowledgement by the practitioner that s/he is involved in a critical (in both senses of the word) context, one which can be changeable, contradictory, and judgemental. Secondly, that external critical voice is internalised and repeated. One might even describe it as sartorial: the negotiation of one's relationship with the critical voice is part of the way a writer presents to the world. The HEI wishing to support the creative process must take this into account.

At the beginning of her poem 'A Policeman's Lot', Wendy Cope cites Ted Hughes' assertion that 'the progress of any writer is marked by those moments when he manages to outwit his own inner police system' (Cope 1986: 5) and she satirises this idea in the rest of the poem, which gives voice to Hughes' inner policeman. In it, Cope parodies the 'regulatory force' that Judith Butler famously interrogates in *Bodies That Matter* (Butler 1993: 1). Ironically, Butler's 1993 text could be described, alongside Foucault whom she reads, as a foundational to the understanding of 'regulatory

force' and its action on and within culture. In Cope's poem 'Ted Hughes' might figure for any writer caught in reiterative anxiety about regulatory systems, that is, the writer coming to awareness that s/he is caught within in a 'matrix' (Butler 1993: 14) of such forces.

This notion of 'patrolling the unconscious' (Cope 1986: 5) evokes Foucault's reading of the Panopticon. I have written about this elsewhere in relation to body hair (Tondeur 2015b), but it is worth repeating in this context. Writing about hair removal, Sarah Hildebrandt points out that in the Panopticon:

> the inmate cannot be sure that she or he is being observed at any given moment, but is acutely aware of that potential at all times. The effect is thus that the inmate behaves at all times *as if* she or he is being watched. (Hildebrandt 2003: 66)

This, she continues, causes acute 'awareness of the inspecting gaze' and 'creates the self-policing, self-managing, docile subject' (Hildebrandt 2003: 66). The writer's sense of a 'regulatory force' can be internalised as a critical 'self-policing' voice. Given that our context as writers involves a negotiation with a reiterative critical, judgemental and sometimes, in addition, commodifiable commercial / socio-economical reception, one might argue that we are caught inside a sociocultural Panopticon. A writer – and certainly this writer – while s/he is in creation mode at least – works best when s/he is not being watched by the 'police system' (Cope 1986: 5) or when the sense of being watched is sufficiently diminished.

3 Facilitate 'deliberate practice'. (Ericsson et al 1993: 368)

Made famous by Malcom Gladwell's *Outliers* (Gladwell 2009: 38-40), Anders Ericsson's research holds that practice alone is not enough. In the study of Berlin violinists that Gladwell used in his book, Ericsson et al state that'the maximal level of performance for individuals in a given domain is not attained automatically as function of extended experience' (Ericsson et al 1993: 366). They use the word 'deliberate' to separate any practice from practice designed to improve the violinists' performance:

> the level of performance can be increased ... as a result of deliberate efforts to improve. Hence, stable levels of performance after extended experience are not rigidly limited by unmodifiable, possibly innate, factors, but can be further increased by deliberate efforts. (Ericsson et al 1993: 366)

The co-authors repeat this idea throughout their essay: to improve, individuals are required to take specific and deliberate action towards a particular area of the domain during their practice, arguing that 'the current definition of practice is vague' and that in order to understand it better 'we must analyse the types of activities commonly called practice' (1993: 366). Here I am reminded of an idea touched on very briefly in a previous essay (Tondeur 2013a): for a writer, this kind of practice may mean gradually moving into Lev Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal growth' (Hammond et al 2003: 16); in other words accessing the challenging but acceptable area just outside one's existing area of expertise.

Although I did not think of it that way when I did it, when I went to specific locations in London to write short stories 'in situ', when I sought a teacher so I could adapt my first novel into a screenplay, when I experimented with 'list' poetry, these were all instances when I deliberately practiced writing by expanding my comfort zone. These were all specific elasticising tasks that I set myself. However, there is another aspect to practicing deliberately: I describe it as 'creative reading' in my introduction, taking reading in the broadest sense of the word, or one could describe it as 'creative reception'. For me this has been 'deliberate' in a highly selective and subjective sense. There are certain works that I have been drawn to because they touch on my own creative process somehow, and have therefore made me think. Some of these I have encountered once but they continue to resonate, such as Barbara Hepworth's sculpture garden in St Ives, in Cornwall. Others, such as Mark Rothko's Seagram Murals (1958-1959), I have returned to (physically) many times in my life, in a (sometimes synchronicitous) pilgrimage. In the next part of in this essay I discuss some of my own creative readings, those that I find connect with the work I am doing now.

What, then, do I mean when I say I am *practicing* in the academy? In sum, routine is not enough without Sternberg's 'environmental support' (2006: 89) or the specificity of 'deliberate practice' (Ericsson et al 1993: 368), both in terms of specific 'uncomfortable' tasks, and in terms of important creative encounters with the world. Together they illustrate a fuller – more contextualised – understanding of what practice means within the academy.

4 Support reflective practice.

In the second half of this essay, I use a reflexive practice that connects particular creative readings to my writing process, to continue to examine how higher education institutions can support practice-as-research. It is therefore worth pausing to point out that another point for higher education institutions to consider is the importance of self-reflection. As Figure 1 illustrates, it is tempting to conceptualize process as cyclical but otherwise causal and sequential, even teleological.

A supportive HEI will acknowledge the stages of the process, as well as, or even instead of, focusing on outcome. However, the crucial next step is to acknowledge the necessity of disruption to the sequence.

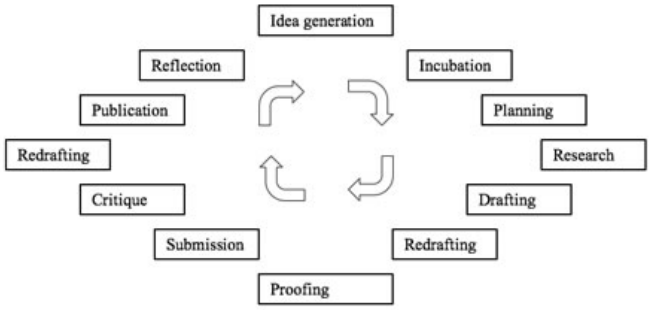

Figure 1. The cyclical (teleological?) process

Figure 2 shows a cyclical process where the so called ‘stages’ of writing are repeated, and not necessarily causal:

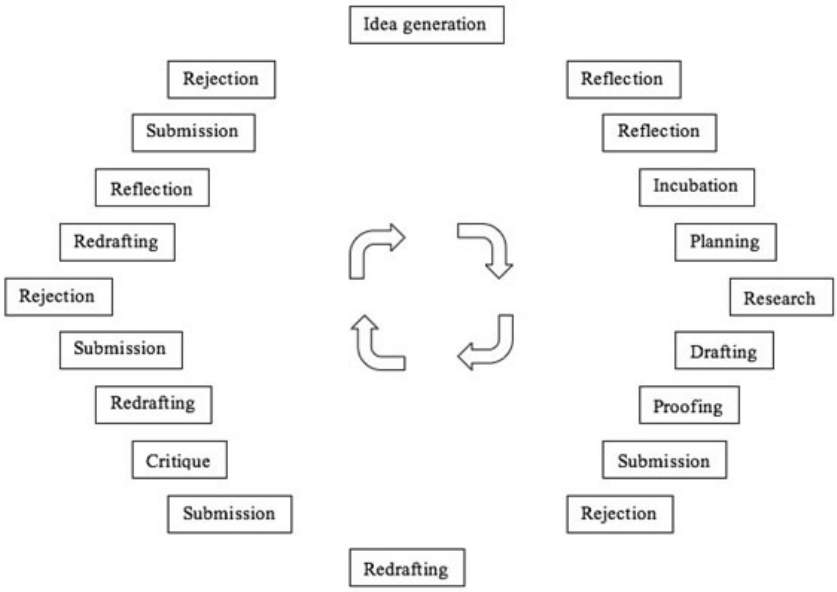

Figure 2. An alternative model of process here

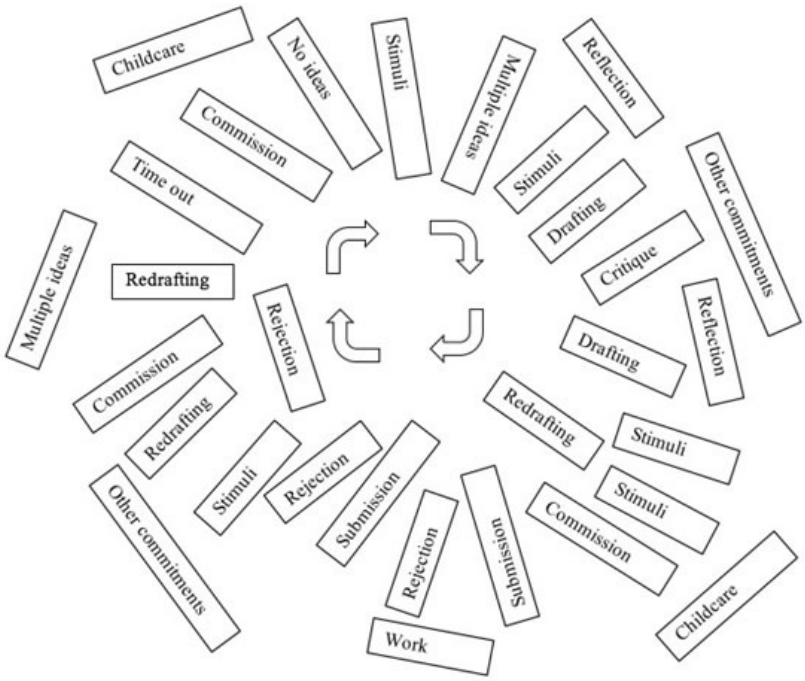

Figure 3. A messy process

Figure 3 shows a disrupted, much more messy, sequence (or anti-sequence?), which gives credence to the importance of the writer's context and its impact on the stages. Of course this becomes more complex once a writer works on more than one project. Reflecting on one's own work becomes even more crucial when the process looks like this. What Sternberg calls 'environmental support' (2006: 89) should include an acknowledgement of the role of reflection in a 'messy' process.

I have found from looking at my own writing processes that there are particular stages or junctures on the route to creative change. For the purpose of this essay, I have named these junctures risk, constraint and play. The terms are drawn from a critical reflection on my own ways of working. Being deliberately subjective and personal, I believe a form of poetics emerges from the connections, contradictions and gaps between these three terms, a way of examining practice as research. Indeed the connections and interplay between risk, constraint and play create a disjuncture and articulate a new paradigm for understanding practice in the academy that is productive and interesting. Of course it is not the individual elements of the paradigm that are 'new', but rather, their placement – and their order – in the equation provides a vocabulary and one possible system for communicating about both process and practice in the academy: risk + constraint + play = change.

5 Facilitate creative risk.

The Tarot archetypes have been personally important to me and I first explored them in writing several years ago in *The Haven Home for Delinquent Girls* (Tondeur 2004) and in a short story called 'Red Roof' (Tondeur 2002). The Fool card allows me to introduce what 'risk' has meant in my own work. A piece of flash fiction I wrote more recently called 'You Are Not Special' (Tondeur 2014) was meant, subtextually at least, to illustrate the link between the Fool and the writing process, via the wanderings of the homeless central character [1]. The first thing one risks in daring to say 'I am a writer' is in the words of e e cummings, being 'nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else' (Firmage 1965: 13). That process is risky, and Foolish.

The Fool card is numbered zero, and signifies being open to all possibilities. In the Rider Waite depiction (Waite 2005) the Fool is about to step off the cliff – and, the story goes, when he does so he will discover he can fly [2]. The Fool has to leap off the cliff first. He has to take the risk. According to tarot writer Rachel Pollack, the possibilities of the Fool come from the leap:

> for those willing to take the chance, the leap can bring joy, adventure, and finally, for those with the courage to keep going when the wonderland becomes more fearsome than joyous, the leap can bring knowledge, peace, and liberation. (Pollack 1997: 25)

Rob Pope cites EM Forster's definition of creativity as 'leap before you look' in the preface to *Creativity* (Pope 2005: xvii). As Forster articulates, 'leap' is a risk. 'Leap before you look' suggests that it is not necessary to know what is possible prior to commencement. We need to know when to 'leap' and when to show caution, when to 'leap' into the unknown and when to plan in detail. That said, it is worth emphasizing that it is sometimes advantageous for the practitioner not to know the parameters or restrictions of the process before undertaking it. Forster's 'leap before you look' suggests that, in creative practice, *process* and *trust* are foregrounded, conceptually, philosophically and practically. Whereas the final product, and planning a route to that final product, are both important, crucial even at certain times, they are not paradigmatic, they do not allow us to define and interrogate practice itself. If developing creative practice is about facilitating creative risk, higher education institutions that support practice-research find a way to facilitate the 'leap' and to trust the process. They do not always demand a plan, or understanding of a product, before that facilitation.

I have found in my own writing process that risk is partly to do with the leap into the unknown, partly to do with one's discomfort zone. Certainly one risks making oneself vulnerable psychologically and emotionally, one risks sharing too much: memories, feelings, personal life, beliefs; one risks being misunderstood; one risks criticism and one risks it whilst in a vulnerable state. To co-opt Cixous (I have edited to emphasise the point):

> And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you ... take it. I know why you haven't written…
> Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great ... and it's 'silly'.
> (Cixous 1991: 335)

However, there is more to 'risk' that the notion of censure. We could attribute all of these risks to the 'police system' described by Ted Hughes (Cope 1986: 5), and to the reiteration of questions about the validity of practice, were it not for the consideration that the risk itself is dynamic and productive. Certainly part of what we risk is censure, but risk is also generative. For all of these reasons 'risk' comes first in my equation; without it, the procedures that follow will not work.

6 Encourage 'creative looking'. (Macnaughton & Saunders 2013)

The above quotation from Cixous is a refrain to which I return often in my writing life. Novelist Andrew Cowan talks about a line from Beckett's *Worstward Ho* – 'Fail again. Fail better' – that has 'become … a kind of mantra' (Cowan 2011: 3) and it is one I share with him. In a hybrid fiction/critical piece for an anthology called *The Creative Critic* (forthcoming) I write briefly about this advice from Rumi's poem 'Childhood Friends'; like the quotations 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and from *Worstwood Ho* it has become something of a exhortation in my writing process, and for me it relates directly to risk:

> Don't turn your head. Keep looking
> at the bandaged place. (Rumi 2004: 142)

When I say that this kind of looking relates to risk, I mean that creative risk happens when we dare to stay curious, when we challenge ourselves to manipulate our art form in a divergent or disruptive way, when we take on the mantle of the unfamiliar that is also familiar, when it would be comfortable (un-risky) to recycle hegemonic discourses. For instance, I found that when I risked writing , in my first novel, about a child in a hotel – I grew up in one – and about coming out, both personally revealing motifs at the time, my writing became more authentic. However, more recently I have begun to associate pain and discomfort with risk, and in particular the *area*, the *locale*, of pain and discomfort. To help explain this, here is Paul Dawson, in another context, describing a particular understanding of creativity:

> instead of being inspired, being breathed into by divine power and becoming possessed with a
> mad poetic frenzy, the poet composes with a power *like* that of God. (Dawson 2004: 25)

One could maintain instead that a creative act (or process) is not God-like, in that it is not confident and certain, rather, it is uncomfortable and uncertain, antagonistic, contradictory and unfamiliar. Both bodily discomfort and lack of mental surety cause moments of disjuncture, in turn leading to creative ideas, forms, stories, outputs or inventions. Once I realized that anxiety, and 'imperfection' *caused* the creative process to move forward, I had a better understanding of myself as a writer. Over the last few years I have written a series of short stories with a scarred central character, in order to investigate this idea of anxiety, so-called imperfection, and 'cracking' [3]. This is the 'don't turn your head' part of Rumi's advice, writing by refusing to look away from the *locale* of a discomfort.

I should say quickly what I *don't* mean by risk. The (most likely) apocryphal story of Turner binding himself to a ship's mast during a storm before painting 'Snowstorm', Ruskin describes how the painter: 'got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it if I did' (Berger 2009: 154) [4].

It is interesting how quickly, in Ruskin's account, the near-death experience is related to practice itself. The viewer is castigated for not fully understanding creative processes, even though she herself has experienced a similar storm:

> "But," said I, "my mother once went through just such a scene, and it brought it all back to her."
> "Is your mother a painter?" "No." "Then she ought to have been thinking of something else."
> (Berger 2009: 154)

In this interchange, it is creative practice, and not the endurance of the storm, that is significant. I recount this story about Turner because it is an extreme – and often reiterated, culturally idiomatic – example of pain and discomfort leading to creative output. I recount it in order to discount it from the current argument. Although clearly interesting, I want to associate creative risk with discomfort and pain in a different way: I am not advocating that we get 'the sailors to lash [us] to the mast' (Berger 2009: 154). I already have discomfort to investigate closer to home, without creating it artificially at sea.

The necessity of risk is better understood by the addition of the gaze, the kind of looking which is so crucial in Rumi's 'Childhood Friends'. One might call it a transformative gaze. Here is a longer quotation from the end of the poem:

> Trust your wound to the teacher's surgery [...]
> Let the teacher wave away the flies
> and put a plaster on the wound.
> Don't turn your head. Keep looking
> at the bandaged place. That's where
> the light enters you. (Rumi 2004: 142)

There is a sense that painful place or the point of discomfort encourages one to seek a guide – 'the teacher' in Rumi's words – which one could read as a new way of looking rather than a person. Once the locale of discomfort instigates proactive searching, according to Rumi, the next stage is not only to look at the discomfort, but to 'keep looking'. It is

the act of looking that is productive, but more than that, the act of not turning the head away. The act of not turning the head from 'the bandaged place' is a decisive aspect of creative risk. We can extrapolate from this running theme that when we 'keep looking / at the bandaged place' (Rumi 2004: 142), we engage in a transformative process. In other words, this kind of creative risk instigates change. In my own writing, the times when I have refused to look away from my own queerness, my (culturally attributed) sense of oddness, Foolishness and Otherness that have been most creative. This has involved a curious, but non-judgmental, patient gaze.

We can see these ideas in action in a contemporary collaborative work called *Frissure* (Collins & Jamie 2013), a project leading to hybrid pieces containing words and images, an exhibition, and a book length project. During the process, Brigid Collins created art works using the line of Kathleen Jamie's mastectomy scar [5]. In Jamie's words, 'I asked Brigid if she might draw this curious line of mine' (Collins & Jamie 2013: 10). As *Frissure* progresses, the line of the scar is transformed by the drawings and art objects, which are intermeshed with Jamie's words. The line does not only become other things: the stalk, the island, the rock formation, but also the line gradually becomes subsumed by the drawing. Clearly looking is important, right from the start of the project. In the introduction Jane Macnaughton and Corinne Saunders describe how 'the creative looking of the artist takes over and what has been regarded as a mark of disease and of violation undergoes an extraordinary flowering, to become a thing of beauty' (Macnaughton & Saunders 2013: 1-2). As the later images are of landscapes, the line becomes part of that landscape, blending with it, and – although it is present – it is no longer self-evident. The line has been transformed by looking. Jamie describes the artist's gaze as follows:

> What I noticed ... was the way she looked at me, at my body, before she moved to make a mark on the paper. She'd spend some long moments looking steadily, considering. Then she'd make a move, that first line. As she worked, her eyes flicked up and down. To me, to the paper, me, the paper me, as her hand moved. (Collins & Jamie 2013: 13)

In this instance, looking at 'the wound' (Rumi 2004: 142) with a curious gaze, is transformative. Looking is not passive, it *generates* 'the light' that 'enters you' (Rumi 2004: 142). In *Frissure*, creative risk – dwelling on the point of discomfort – leads to change. Rachel Falconor, in her critique of Jamie's work, draws our attention to what Macnaughton and Saunders call the 'fissure bathed in light' (Macnaughton & Saunders 2013: 1). Truly a process of light entering the 'bandaged place' (Rumi 2004: 142). We can also understand that 'looking' leads to a paradigm shift:

> the surgical scar becomes a fissure bathed in light illuminating the path to a new way of seeing... Jamie's writing, through the acuteness of its observation, enables the reader to be surprised about everyday things, to see things anew. (2013: 1)

The creative process illustrated in *Frissure* makes the viewer / reader look differently. The idea of *looking and what it does* is returned to us as a new and re-understood curiosity. Rachel Falconer relates Collins' images to the Japanese art of kintsugi or kintsukuroi – that is, mending ceramics with gold. Falconer discusses how these damaged pieces repaired in this way are notable as 'the embodiment of the aesthetic of wabi-sabi, the central tenet of which is the acceptance, even celebration of transience and imperfection' (Falconer 2014: 143). As far as the creative practitioner is concerned, risk-taking predicts, envisages and welcomes breaks and imperfections. Creative risk-taking demonstrates that the artist is equipped 'to repair with gold'. However, creative risk goes further, too; it is also a process of 'acceptance ... celebration' (Falconer 2014: 143) of the artist's gaze that looks curiously at the break (or the wound or the line or the scar) and refuses 'turn [her] head away' (Rumi 2004: 142). How does this influence the HEI and its support of practice-as-research? The supportive HEI recognizes that 'celebration of transience and imperfection' (Falconer 2014: 143) has a firm tradition and will encourage 'creative looking' (Macnaughton & Saunders 2013), and all that entails.

7 Consider constraint as dynamic.

'The crucial thing ... is to grasp creativity as constraint (not in opposition to constraint)' (Pope 2005: 122).

The influence of the Tate Gallery on my writing process is ongoing, particularly the Seagram Murals (Rothko 1958-1959) and wandering around the gallery itself, as well as my own return at different stages of my life. In particular, Cornelia Parker's *Cold Dark Matter* (1991) is a creative influence with which I have been fascinated for a long time, at least since my MA in Creative Writing 15 years ago, and it is Parker's work I turn to here, in order to speak about constraint [6].

When one first starts to practice one adheres to constraints, typically games or rules one gleans from contextual reading or from experts in the field. Part of becoming a dexterous practitioner involves learning to apply constraint, and to negotiate with it, in an involved and sophisticated manner. That said, until one takes creative risks the work cannot transmogrify into an authentic and defamiliarising process. One can only appreciate constraint once there has been a commitment to risk.

In a brief essay, Ali Smith compares writing practice to Cornelia Parker's sculptures (Smith 2001: 24). Cornelia Parker's *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991) [5] is an exploded garden shed, hanging mid-explosion, in which Parker pauses the moment of explosion as if time has stopped. Fast, violent, following a particular trajectory, explosions are precisely that which we cannot witness first hand. Parker's sculpture interrogates the impossible: it causes the speed and violence to pause, to allow us to examine it.

Because *Cold Dark Matter* is a paused explosion, because it is an invitation to examine a usually unexaminable moment, it defamiliarises. Indeed, defamiliarization and the paused moment are synonymous in Parker's work. With *Cold Dark Matter*, Parker intimates that any creative process engages in defamiliarization via a methodology of *attentiveness to the paused moment*, that which is habitually unobserved.

As viewers we are invited to consider the constituent parts of this methodology of *attentiveness to the paused moment*. Firstly, the project of seeing (experiencing / sensing) minute detail, of scrutinising overlooked detail, is an vital part of the creative process. Simultaneously, Parker confronts us with the whole, forcing us to witness it, and cajoles us into a

tour around this (ordinarily) uncircumventable thing. Furthermore, the viewer is tempted (if it were allowed) to walk in-between the fragments; Parker suggests that looking from a multitude of angles is integral to examination of the paused moment / explosion.

To walk around *Cold Dark Matter* is to witness a moment of creative power, paused for long enough so that one can experience and examine it. The viewer's storytelling facility is roused, our love of narrative suggests that the explosion will reverse and the shed will reform, or begin again and disperse fragments throughout the gallery. Therefore the final part of this methodology of *attentiveness to the paused moment* is to do with directionality and the nature of the explosion itself. Each piece of exploded material has a trajectory, a direction. In any paused moment, each observable (experienced) object, person, sensation has a trajectory: its story was instigated at some time and place. For instance, the spent match left on the pavement, litter to which one has become 'habitualized' was once part of a tree, which grew somewhere and was planted somehow, so too was the splinter of exploded shed. The explosion - the sum of a huge variety of trajectories (or narratives) – demonstrates the modus of constraint. Each (usually unexamined) moment is like Parker's exploded shed, containing a huge variety of trajectories or narratives. Ordinarily, we cannot control the trajectories of the constituent pieces of an explosion. The creative process invites us to gain some control over the explosive nature of the moment, first by observing it, second by following one or two of its trajectories.

Parker has applied her constraint in painstaking, one might call it obsessive, detail. She has adhered to the rules of the game with precision, from its first imaginings through to the dynamism it creates when installed. The detail and precision developed from the rules Parker set herself and her commitment to them. She has created a paradox: the fastidious application of constraint illustrates an explosion, that is, a complete lack of cohesion, with ordered-unordered pieces flying-unflying everywhere.

How is this useful to the higher education institution's understanding of how to support practice-research? It illustrates, I think, the idea that constraint is dynamic, not a one-time stop on the journey, but something to return to. When it comes to my own disorganised, chaotic, messy creative process (which I think is usual and possibly crucial), it is useful to see a dynamic constraint in action, hence this sculpture's hold over me.

8 Acknowledge the need for play and playfulness.

The third term in my formula is play. Why have I put play third, after risk and constraint? To answer that question I can turn to Rob Pope, who suggests play and constraint are in a symbiotic relationship: 'it is precisely through game-like constraints – as long as these are not too many and too inhibiting – that playful creativity is stimulated to emerge' (Pope 2005: 122).

Of course, when it comes to play, total freedom is not only undesirable, it is conceptually impossible. One cultural idiom in circulation in popular discourses imagines creativity to mean (or come about because of) *unconstrained* play, freedom to dream, to sketch, to dance, to sing, or 'to be'. The paradox is that dreaming, drawing, dancing, singing – even 'being' – all come with their own contexts. Play requires risk followed by constraint in order to function as a creative tool.

Frissure and *Cold Dark Matter* illustrate both creative risk and constraint. They do so clearly through their processes, the products of those processes, and reception of those products. They do so to the extent that they could be said to *embody* risk and constraint. However, to stop there would be to create a misnomer: they do not only embody risk and constraint. One could go as far as saying that if *Frissure* and *Cold Dark Matter* embodied only risk and constraint they would not be creative. Integral to both processes, intertwined with risk and constraint, is play. In each we see experiment, curiosity, and a distinct lack of seriousness, a light-heartedness, a playfulness. The role of the practitioner is that s/he sees things new, or experiences the familiar as unfamiliar, and it is only through experiment, curiosity and playfulness that this can work. Play is associated with childishness or child-likeness, as Csikezentmilhalyi (2013: 59-60) and others have pointed out. Rob Pope puts it this way:

> For better and worse, "play" is what gets left behind in childhood; and there is an air of something suspiciously childish about creative writers and artists in so far as they persist in "playing" into adulthood. (Pope 2005: 71-72)

The discourse that is suspicious of play treats play and work as oppositional. The idea that one can 'play' for work is an anathema, a foolishness. I used a quotation from a letter written by e e cummings earlier. Here is a slightly longer version, which I have coopted to illustrate this point:

> To be nobody-but-yourself – in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else – means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting. (Firmage 1965: 13)

We might conceptualise this as the Flâneur who must continue to wander, to watch 'in a world which is doing its best / night and day, to make you everybody else' (Firmage 1965: 13). This resistance to becoming 'everybody else' or part of the 'crowd flow[ing] over London Bridge' (Eliot 1922) eyes down, without wandering, without watching, is crucial to the writing process. To coopt e e cummings:

> To [continue to play] – in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to [stop you from playing] – means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.' (Firmage 1965: 13)

Creative practitioners resist the call to leave playing behind. Like Fools, they 'persist in 'playing' into adulthood' (Pope 2005: 72), so the HEI supporting practice-as-research acknowledges the need for play and playfulness, protects the practitioners right to play, and understands the 'playful' practitioner's role as a commentator and observer.

9 Acknowledge the role of the creative arts in creating change.

Change is the last part of my equation: risk + constraint + play = change. Creativity brings about change of some kind, and this creative change occurs at either an individual or a community level. It causes a shift in perception, a new 'way of seeing', a modification of paradigms, or it transcribes a different – often concrete – way of solving a problem. That paradigm shift might produce some kind of practical change in approach, thinking or behaviour. Creative practice often brings about change in line with Shklovsky's famous notion of 'making the familiar seem strange' (Lemon & Reis 2012: 5).

In a previous publication I speak about learning styles and cite a chapter on learning environments (Tondeur 2013a) in which the co-authors describe how one moves from 'dualistic views of the world' towards a position where one can 'accept knowledge as ... transient and contextual' (Jonassen et al 2004: 80). They suggest that 'cognitive conflict or dissonance ... forces individuals to alter the constructs they have used to reason about certain situations' (81). This is as a result of 'concrete experiences' which involve several 'paradoxical points of view' (84).

This process of shifting paradigms is most productive when it is 'playful', for example, in the way that Collins' landscapes 'play' with the line of the scar. Indeed, in *Frissure* we view the process of recovery and the incorporation of a scar and in so doing we witness a diverse range of overlapping discourses – medical, artistic, personal – and our perceptions shift; the defamiliarization operates through and with playfulness and openness. Despite the difficult subject matter, the work is both playful and immersive, and it requires a response from the viewer / reader. The process of experiencing the art works is transformative.

In *Cold Dark Matter* we undergo a similar process. Parker has certainly made us see the shed differently. Our understandings of form and of time are challenged. Although viewing *Cold Dark Matter* can be a sombre meditative experience, what we are witnessing is a game taken to extremes. Its playfulness is found not only in the careful construction of the sculpture but also in the moment of the pause it engenders. Therefore both *Frissure* and *Cold Dark Matter*, ultimately, create change through play.

For me, *change* connects all of creativity's diverse and conflicting meanings. The HEI that supports practice as research acknowledges the role of the creative arts in creating change, through new ways of seeing, and through cultural experiences.

10 Look for the cracks.

In sum, I have said that my formula for supporting creative practice in higher education institutions, drawn from my own subjective reading, is a deliberate reflexive, autoethnographic move. Why formulate this paradigm? This has been achieved in order to foreground and celebrate *process* as well as product and to allow for the inclusion and authentic evaluation of process in the current chain of appraisal. In my concluding thoughts I would like to say a final word on textual gaps and change. We can connect Rumi's 'bandaged place ... where the light enters' (Rumi 2004: 142) to the Japanese practice of kintsugi, and the concept of wabi-sabi (Falconer 2014: 143). From the late twentieth century, Leonard Cohen's song 'Anthem' (1992) seems to riff on Rumi's poem. The 'crack' in Cohen's lyric is interesting: it contains its own 'crack', in that it plays on the notion of brokenness or madness (being cracked, broken, insane) and the notion of the crack, or gap, in the wall, or person or text (Cohen 1992).

I suggest that these cracks, gaps, and liminal spaces, are productive. Cracks are produced by moments of figurative collision, when ideas come into contact and explode, starting new trajectories, or by wounds inflicted on a body or a place that can be made new by a curious unflinching gaze. Cracks are produced when one experiences discomfort and scarring. The gaps between divergent – dissonant – discourses generate change. Indeed, instead of cracks, we could read the *possibility of change*.

Notes

[1] There is a blog post about the story 'You Are Not Special' here: http://www.louisetondeur.co.uk/stoke-newington-writing/ (accessed 31 October 2016). return to text

[2] An image of the Rider-Waite Fool card can be found at http://tarot-study.info/articles/tarot-fool/ (accessed 31 October 2016) return to text

[3] 'The Swim' (Tondeur 2013b) is a short short story published by *The View From Here*, an online literary magazine – so you can meet my scarred character if you would like to. return to text

[4] An image of *Snowstorm* is available on the Tate Gallery website: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530 (accessed 31 October 2016). return to text

[5] Images from *Frissure*,from 'North Sky' to 'What is a Line?', are available on Brigid Collins website: http://www.brigidcollinscouk/gallery_298772html (accessed 31 October 2016). return to text

[6] Various images of *Cold Dark Matter* are available on the Tate Gallery website: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-cold-dark-matter-an-exploded-view-t06949 (accessed 31 October 2016). For more about Parker's *Cold Dark Matter* see: http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/cold-dark-matter/introduction (accessed 31 October 2016) and Installing *Cold Dark Matter*: http://wwwtateorguk/learn/online-resources/cold-dark-matter/installation/installing-the-work (accessed 31 October 2016). return to text

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