

A SYSTEM OF RADICAL DEPENDENCY

Lili Huston-Heterich, 2020

Lineages

I sit here with the intention to write an articulate, comprehensive recollection of what I have been thinking recently, and who, what, and where has helped me develop those thoughts (in other words, the people I am surrounded by and speaking with, the people who write the words I am reading, the places I occupy, the non-human life I encounter). I'm calling these recollections of who, what and where "lineages". They could also be called "dependencies". I face this endeavour overwhelmed.

So I start where I feel safest, where I know I can trust my memory: in the most immediate past, this morning.

what I'm thinking about

and how those thoughts develop

This double-subject of my writing tangles me. In my artistic practice, they relate more fluidly: I am seduced by a material or a method, and can think through where that material came from, or the history of the technique, or the event that permitted my encounter with that material or method. I can scatter what is in front of me, think of historical and political terms of my relation to the subject, and create a constellation where many possible paths can be followed to navigate this scatter. The narrative paths of the work, transmitted through sculptural, poetic, or material forms, are plural. With my writing, this tangle creates a conflict in form. I write in a document, paragraph by paragraph. It is scatterless: linear and vertical, top-to-bottom. The possibility to navigate alternate paths in a piece of writing is limited.

no: in a digital document

A dependent. I'm thinking about the title of a thesis paper I wrote last year, "There's No Such Thing As A Baby". She Says: "she" is Kate Briggs, who summarised the thoughts of developmental psychologists Donald Winnicott, who I am reminded of now as I read Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, which mentions him frequently. I realize only now that I should have read this last year, when I was writing writing alongside her without knowing.

Active Recollection

Recently, I have been using a method of mapping to track conversations, relationships, and other processes that happen, usually with others, over a duration of time. I met Mmabatho Thobejane, a curator, in June of this year. In anticipation of working alongside her for the duration of the summer, I took notes on our first week getting to know each other. Together, we are Research Assistants in a summer course led by Konstfack University and Index Foundation in Stockholm, where we participate in lectures and conversations in the course, and guide workshops and other group activities. I have been mapping these lectures and student presentations. The maps transcribe my linear notes from a notebook into a scattered form. They illustrate paths that cross chronological time.

Yesterday, Co-Star emailed me my weekly horoscope:

Sun sextile to natal Mercury

It's been difficult for you to pay attention to things other than your subconscious. There will be a chance opportunity that affects the way you articulate yourself. You fit from topic to topic, but sometimes have trouble figuring out what you really believe. The opportunity may have been there all along, but for the first time, you can see it.

This opportunity will see its beginnings in your career or social life where they meet with your subconscious. Keep an eye on your relationship with external validation and need for it. Do you really need it?

This opportunity might be one of your creation, or one that falls into your lap — pay attention to doorways that are newly open to you.

This morning, BBC aired a short interview with Christopher Nolan on the film *Memento*. The interview was introduced as a *break in pandemic-related content*. I was brushing my teeth, so I only really heard Nolan say something like, "we all write because we don't trust that our minds can preserve the moments we experience. We don't trust our memory". The maps I make are tools to dance with the residue I've left myself of an encounter: notes, and a method for memory work.

I just wrote "say something like". I think I wrote it this way to give myself space for inaccuracy, because it is inevitable that I have transcribed Nolan's spoken words wrong. It is also inevitable that the subject on which he was speaking — in this case, the film *Memento* — I am betraying. The subject I've assigned it has nothing to do with the film *Memento*. It's working for me. Perhaps this is about permission. I permit myself inaccuracy. I permit myself to re-word, re-contextualize, and re-define. These "re-" processes are inherently in motion, meaning they always change. I define myself through these "re-" processes. Perhaps this could also be called play.

Granting myself permission to play with information I receive — incidentally or intentionally — means making space for my own subjectivity in a system of reproducing and distributing that information. My hands get all over it. The paths in the maps I draw are my own associations, inevitably subjective as well. What I retain is no coincidence what I remember reflects on myself, and my habits of thought and patterns of attention.

I was recently reminded of the word "autoethnography" by Mmabatho, who shared with me Robin M. Boylorn's *On Being At Home With Myself: Blackgirl Autoethnography as Research Praxis*. Boylorn uses a metaphor of home to articulate a method where patterns of epistemology — how knowledge is constructed — is "profoundly" dependent on the situatedness of "the bodies we live in, the people we live with, and the social circumstances we live through".

I do not have the specific urgency to an autoethnographic practice that Boylorn describes. Blackgirls do. Though I permit myself, again, a "re-" process — a re-thinking of Boylorn's autoethnographic research methods in order to think about my own artistic practice and methods. The question I have in this moment, while engaging in this material is when does re-thinking become a gesture that simulates or perpetuates appropriation? As a white woman with established social power, trust, mobility, and cultural capital in a white patriarchal society, how far can my permissions of play go?

I use autoethnographic methods to resist singular representations of knowledge, experience, and research, starting with mapping my subjective to create multiple narrations of knowledge, to explore how knowledge is produced and reproduced. Boylorn writes about the "stranger's house" of the academy, and I am reminded of this stranger's house every time I write, especially while taking the words of another writer on my tongue, or the tips of my tapping fingers. In this document that reads from top to bottom, left to right, with a language with its own rules, how is it possible to hold responsibly all of the lineages of the text being written? Academic citation — footnotes, endnotes, reference lists — create paths for tracking knowledge production, but leave little space for references that fall outside traditional citation: a shared moment, a fragmented memory, a feeling, a family story, a virtue embroidered on a throw pillow, a lived experience. The inside of Boylorn's metaphorical home: autoethnography creates a space where the inside can be put outside.

System of Radical Dependency

As an artist, I think through "inside" and "outside" in terms of my practice and the distribution of it. The things that happen *inside* my practice and the things that are presented publicly *outside* as my distributed artistic practice have a tangled relationship. They are inevitably tethered, and influence one another fluidly. Where I walk determines what materials I find, and where I live and travel determines what exhibitions I am able to participate in, and to what material extent they can happen. Regardless, the available outdoor space for representing the *inside* lineages of my practice is limited. Standardised didactic forms leave little space to house, for example: the influences of a conversation from three years ago with an estranged friend, the recommendation of a fabricator or material source by a fellow artist, or the teaching of a technique by a family member.

Over the summer, I was granted financial support to research and produce a method I called *System of Radical Dependency* that takes my existing artistic work as a starting point to retroactively trace the origins of the materials used, the mentors and resources the processes were informed by, and the people and institutions that supported their public distribution. There is an opportunity to redefine how the traces of an artistic practice — through the various support systems that facilitate artistic research, experimentation, and manifestation — can be represented through public distribution. My hopes were that this research and system could be used by artists and cultural workers interested in more dependency-conscious methods of artistic production and distribution.

One Mouth

However, claiming a right way to be as an artist is really not my objective, nor has it been an intention of this work. The verbiage is off here. I see myself writing the word "hopes", which I read now as a way of articulating an intention specifically for a convincing funding application. The confidence in this voice that claims "hope", and even "more dependency-conscious methods" speaks to an audience that asks for convincing. It is one of the many voices I have learned to perform as a working artist — when the funding season approaches, rooms fill with people saying things like "grant speak" or "just the way you have to urtll". Artists pay other artists, writers, or curators — anyone who have mastered the convincing voice better than them — to do their articulations. It is labour — legitimate and potentially outside the artistic practice, and it should be paid.

Despite these collaborations, the final voice, confident and convincing, is expected from one mouth. The expectations of an artistic practice, reinforced by the systems and institutions which support and distribute it, include an individual with a temporally linear practice who finishes projects.

An Ongoing Failure

But just as a *System of Radical Dependency* cannot end, this essay will likely be forever incomplete. The truth is, research questions in my practice will not be answered completely, or with permanent certainty. Dependencies in my practice will continue to populate. The spread of the practice, uncontrollable by the systems and institutions that are responsible for distributing it, will leak puddles of excess, detritus, "flotsam and jetsam" that is impossible to contain. Any new system of containment will inevitably fail. All containment systems are exclusionary. Any system will have cracks, and those cracks will let whatever is intended to be contained leak or fall through. Any intended system in pursuit of an organizational method for information will perpetuate a violence of erasure. "Flotsam and jetsam" could be the puddles that sit beneath these cracks, but setting a bucket under a puddle won't catch the rain that still sits in pools on top of the roof. So, *System of Radical Dependency* also fails, inevitably. This essay contains less than it could and should, inevitably. If anything, it tracks the way these thoughts have surfaced over a specific duration, in a specific life.

Here is a puddle of words, leaking and continuous, unfinished, to accompany an incomplete map, tangled and navigationally tangential, distracted. Reader, viewer, my "hope" — spoken from my mouth, here to convince you — that you may permit yourself to navigate these things defiantly. Ignore some, pay attention to others, understand that any way this essay or map is read inevitably and necessarily excludes some of its parts.

I'm not done and not alone. You know that already.

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Co-Star iPhone application.

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Many present tenses: "we are". I began writing this sometime in June, and am still struggling through it now, in early November. The duration of these thoughts have preceded June, and will exceed past this month. November. Writing is a difficult practice for me. It happens privately, continuously, and often feels endless. I have a deadline determined by CBK Rotterdam, who funded this research from July through August. I've missed my deadline to submit to them a finished work. The work is still in progress, and this is how I'll submit it. But I am convinced there is no moment the work will ever not be.

I intended to continue this as a short list, but I can't recall another female author that sat on these shelves.

I'm reading *The Argonauts* now, because it landed in my contextual bag, bored with cramps on a Sunday after finishing a novel with the library of a lover at my disposal. His shelves are mostly filled with male authors. I told him Bukowski abused his wife, and he removed the rare first editions he had collected from display. Nelson sat in the spare company only a handful of other (white) women: Nita, So, within these circumstances, I have finally begun to read *The Argonauts*, originally for the purpose of filling two idle hours.

I know I shouldn't be using my phone right now but I just quickly sent this quote to a person I'm dating, who finished a poem last night inspired by both a walk we took in the forest a couple weeks ago and another poem by Maggie Nelson which describes "memory weather".

Here are three lineages that point to who, and what, aids and triggers my thinking: my lovers, Maggie Nelson, the forest with sappy trees.

Maybe a fourth: the bar the new poem was written in last night, a bar I frequented as my introduction to the city I am currently living in, Stockholm.

my own "orientation", thank you Sarah Ahmed

Does this count as a fifth lineage?

Boylorn's "we" are black women. I am not a black woman: I am a white woman, raised in the United States in what I experienced as a comfortably white middle-class home. Boylorn is working towards a method of what they call *blackgirl autoethnography*, a resistance of stereotypes against black girlhood that has systematically silenced Blackgirls.

Boylorn on the use of *blackgirl*: In the context of my life, my femininity, my politics, my lived experience, my autoethnography, I put the two words together so that when you see them, hear them, think about them, read them, and write them, you see the connectedness of those pieces of me, of those pieces in me, and my story.

Blackgirl, not black then girl.

There is no pause in my identity. (Boylorn 49)

From CBK Rotterdam's emergency COVID-19 funding, April 2020.

This was done to the best of my recollection, which inevitably has led to a flawed, or incomplete, result. It is important to this project that the limited capacity of memory is acknowledged. Any attempt of a "whole picture" of acknowledgements and dependencies will fall. A history, as narrativized and told, will contain exclusions. In a *System of Radical Dependency*, any traces that are linked to a project are linked to more than one temporal determinant: not only their memorable presence or importance in the process of a project (i.e., the streetworker who produced the arguments for the sculpture), but also the day they were recalled (the day I was revisiting that project, I was also thinking about fabrication of new metal works, which led me to recall Serge at Duurwerken on Dupont Street in Toronto in 2014).

In both cities I have lived as a working artist, Toronto and Rotterdam, there are noticeable "funding seasons". The community shared the same deadlines, and in that way affected the way both public and private events were planned — whether to schedule your birthday before or after a deadline, or your talk on the day of the deadline as a collective celebratory exile. Artist-run institutions in Toronto schedule a long exhibition, or an exhibition by a local artist, to coincide with the two-year grant deadline cycle so staff's labour is not over extended. The institutional patterns emerge in life beyond the institutions.

Meaning: there is an end to a project, and the end there is a text or reflection, and within it a tidy connecting thread to both past and future projects, which will also neatly end within a maximum 2 year timeframe.

I am echoing the title and sentiment of Leahy Costanzo, the research feminist that Index Foundation, a Speculative contemporary art space, hosted in September 2020. The festival was conceived collaboratively by Emmell Persson, Marti Manen, and Jasmine Hinks. I worked with Index on the festival website and graphics, using mapping as a graphic method. In summer 2020, I also worked with this team as a Research Assistant for a course called Art & Distribution, led in collaboration with Index Foundation and Konstfack University.

It cannot end so long as time continues to progress, and ideas repeat themselves, and people leave and return, and places change or are returned to (read: all non-stationary).

My own, in bedrooms and offices and studios in Rotterdam, Stockholm, and again Rotterdam.

With the passing of time, I expect much of what I believe now will be proven wrong. There is a temporal context to certainty: it is resolved *for now*, answered in the context of what we know or information I have access to today.

My own, in bedrooms and offices and studios in Rotterdam, Stockholm, and again Rotterdam.

"Futures, of course, goes hand in hand with capitalism... Inhabits requires that everyone live in a system that equates success with profit and looks before to the inability to accumulate wealth even as profit for some means certain losses for others." (Halberstam 98)

Here, I am removing Halberstam's reference to ideas from Scott Sederberg's book *Beneath a History of Failure in America* (2005). What is my responsibility to carry the lineage of my references?

Some corresponding words: uncooperatively, disbelievably, feebly, instinctively, spontaneously, impulsively, distractingly, unintentionally, synchronized with the pace of your feelings, thoughts, or day.

I watched this film once and didn't pay attention to it on purpose, but I have forgotten what purpose. I remember hating the DVD cover.

nah

I've got the wild page for the film up now, and am thinking about whether I should re-watch it.

(Any thought of adding new items to the "to read/watch/listen" list feels like a threat. I am daunted by content I assign myself, and in turn resist it through perpetual procrastination (see: *The Argonauts*).

a word borrowed from Boylorn quoting Dillard

another image borrowed from Boylorn

on a daily level: working with materials in the studio, talking with friends, reading, working as an employee, walking down the street

on a daily level: working with materials in the studio, talking with friends, reading, working as an employee, walking down the street

i.e.: exhibition texts, portfolio websites, 150 word lists, material lists, work descriptions

on a daily level: working with materials in the studio, talking with friends, reading, working as an employee, walking down the street

Collaborative labour: - an editor's labour of organising ideas - a reader's labour of feedback - a lover's labour of affection - the reciprocal labour of a friend to "take our mind's off"

Meaning: one who can be articulated as a singular by/for/by, can be exhibited as a solo project, can be funded with an artistic fee that reflects the substance costs of one human body

Meaning: a practice that can be separated into articulations like "new works by", "retrospective", "early years" and can have a practice that "progresses", that can encounter "new methods" and that can have the need for financial support to "push forward the capacities of the studio practice"

i.e.: System of Radical Dependency

Although necessary to the survival of it

Is this bad research practice? What happens when something you read starts to feel its relevance — comes to you when you least expect it, off hours, without pen in hand or the thought to mark down its origins? Where is the place for this kind of information, which inevitably shapes artistic and research practices, but memory fails to reconstruct its lineage? What happens if, four months from now, I come across it again? I would like to make space in this work to accommodate a continuity of reviews.

Now, I am repeating these alternatively seductive words — "flotsam and jetsam" — that I have used before to describe the materials I use in my practice as "the world's flotsam and jetsam, forever replenished by digital and re-usable" which were words originally from a text I read somewhere during my MFA degree, but were marked down from where it was during the time I was reading *Flotsam and Jetsam* in the *Text*, so it is very possible it was from an essay in this book, but I can't be sure.

July to November 2020