

Dear Diary,
Another Full-Moon-Midnight,

Last year, when I invited Bronwyn Lace to collaborate with me on the NOTION of **SUPPORT SYSTEM**, I told her that the **support** that **The Centre for The Less Good Idea** gave me during a 2019 residency roused in me the confidence and ambition to start this project, 'Hand to Mouth.' The correspondence we started very quickly became a kind of Love Letter between an **artist** and **institution**. This was cute, but also conflicting: an **artist** and **institution** in love? What kind of utopian art world do you think we are living in? We decided to **hold** on to the Love Letter vibe, and instead of directing them at each other, to find something else to bestow them upon.



I. This Love Letter is about a **donkey**. **The Donkey** is desperate.

The Donkey is desperate because the monumental **amphitheater** built to **hold** her work has no mechanisms for **holding** her. If **The Donkey** was the chair in the diagram above, the walls were the **amphitheater**, and the tension pole was the **support system** --- **The Donkey** would be very disappointed.

Ostensibly, the pole is **supporting** the chair in its position, but in a weird balance of tension and friction, the pole is the one being **supported** in this scenario. The pole is performing its ability to maintain tension, but this tension is dependent on the certainty of reliable opposing surfaces. Once secure, it can provide its **support** as a performative act. The real **support** is located in the symbiosis of this arrangement. The Pole is also in **need** of everything in the **system** to participate, for it to provide the act of **support**.

Past-forward to Johannesburg in 2019, still unaware of each other's being, both **artist** and **institution** existed in a similar PRE-FICTION, a condition in which we **held** similar **placeholders** for each other to fulfill. From the first introduction to each other's work, almost immediately we recognized in each other, and appreciated the aesthetic and the commitment to rigorous processes, but fell short of predicting the synergy that would manifest in our personal connection. This synergy did not require extra effort, it was feeding on the deficiencies and generosity we were already invested in. But something else happened, a new **need** was triggered and a new desire manifested, a zeal to prolong this singularity, to extend it beyond its genuine temporality and last for at least ever, or even better, forever. Bronwyn, the director of The Centre and an **artist** herself. Deville, an **artist** flirting with the idea of becoming an **institution**

through the sculptural **system** of his dance company. We reflect on institutional **holding**, and on the intimacy of being **held**, while resisting **holding** on. We found ourselves on the **support** pole, balancing between **care** and **control**.

We use the word **holding** often: **holding** space, **holding** tensions, **holding** time. We talk often about the confidence and ambition in our synergy. The Centre enjoys financial stability in combination with an organisational flexibility that gives space for an attention to internal processes and relationships between **artists** and the **institution**. We see how instrumental this security is in providing a safe space for others. In this tender exchange of **care**, we also tend to practice **control**. As directors of circumstances of collective art making, we recognise the importance of **care** while practicing **control**. In navigating the production's responsibilities and demands of timelines, budgets, and outcomes, we realize that we have both the ability to create damage and to be damaged at the same time; we find ourselves being even more **careful**. Being **careful** and being **care-full** (full of **care**) are two different things, and we don't think we can be **carefree** quite yet. Some damages are ongoing, and some damages are not yet done.



II. **The Donkey** is desperate because the **arena** is about her but not for her.

The **coliseum**'s cogs have no capacity for her processes. She is the muse within the **museum**, but she is not invited to the cocktail party. She is asked to be there, to be exposed there, to entertain the cream, but sadly there is no coinage for this concert. It has already been spent on the heavy-gram, high-gloss invitation cards. Her rigorous strategies, processes, methodical approaches developed by trial and error go unseen, unheard. Her commitment and passion are often taken for granted, and sometimes taken advantage of. It is impossible to be more vulnerable than she is: her body, her thoughts, her questions, and her ideas are all laid bare as she is easily consumed at the same time as the cheap fancy cocktail platters and expensive bad wine.

If the **coliseum** looked closely, it might recognize the **cracks** on her surface as the web of **scars** they truly are. Those scars **hold** records of brave attempts and necessary risks. With some wisdom and better muscle memory, some damages could have been prevented. Those battle **scars** are also a record of previous personal and institutional failures and absence of **support**, resulting so often in the lack of a safe, soft landing ground.

The Donkey is desperate and she can't afford to not be in **need**.

We **need** to talk --- suddenly a conversation.

What happened to all this unspoken un-invested, pre-fictional synergy?

Washed away with the **need**.

This Love Letter is about what is triggered: **(in)security**.

In this moment, we realize the uncertainty and codependency in our desires.

That this is not set in stone, someone **needs** to set it.

The **need** is not only for securing the eternal future, it is also to resolve all the **(in)security** it generates, a premature rejection management.

DC: I enjoy thinking about my time at The Centre as a time in which I was **held**. It brings to light the ongoing instability and risks. My relationship to security is in its absence, I can't look back at many situations where there was security, provided or cultivated, on a financial or an emotional level. The interesting thing about an absence, as opposed to a deficit, is that a deficit can register a lack, and out of **need** or desire, create a **placeholder** for what is missing. Absence is a void, an unregistered scarcity. It is not a shortage of a thing, it is its non-existence.

BL: The fungus is thriving. He took root and discovered himself in a warm and welcoming habitat. His mushrooming is due to his ability to absorb the nourishment found within his current abode. In an interdependent and effervescent dance with the space, he discovers a fermenting, parts of himself proliferate and relish the culture of the room, he reciprocates, and a ménage à trois flourishes.

DC: **(in)security** is not the lack of security, it is its absence, and the absence of the things it provides: confidence, ambition, and **support** being some of them. Being **held** by The Centre brought to light not my **insecurities**, these I know and negotiate on the daily. I think what was triggered is the absence of a **placeholder** for security. When I saw it and was **held** by it, I had no negative space to fill. There was no deficit waiting to be charged. A new **need** was triggered.

BL: The terms culture and codependency continually appear in our dialogue, we speak about them in relation to the space, to institutional **holding**, to what the **artist** brings to the space as well as what both **artist** and **institution** **need** from one another. For me, both words conjure a picture of health. I don't imagine that is the same for all individuals who fill a role of heading up an arts **institution**. I feel the well-being and robustness of the Centre's culture is because, as a physical space it has, by design, taken its cues from **artists** and artistic process. It is an **institution** that knows in its bones that supporting art and therefore **artists** is an honour, a cause for celebration, and that the resulting codependency is seminal to the culture experienced in the room. This culture is one of empathy, intimacy, and trust. A space that invites **artists** to reinvent disciplines and shift our worlds also **needs** to encourage honesty and self-awareness. Rather than insisting **artists** are good or right, it asks **artists** to be present. **Holding** gives birth to a synergetic relationship, which often has the capacity to mature into an energy with the ability to radiate out of the space and far beyond its institutional womb.



III. Dear **coliseum** of cold hard ground,
this Love Letter actually means a break up.
We **need** to break up so we can be WITH each other.
The Donkey removes herself from the ill-fitting structures that failed to **hold** her,
she refuses to be rejected into definitions of inside and outside.
She is always at The Centre.

As a time-based art form, **The Donkey** **needs** to be given the same attention and resources allotted to the **museum** show so she can redirect them into **supporting** other **needs**.
Others' **needs**.

She **needs** the three P's—partners, producers, presenters—to have as much of a stake in what we make. To be exposed to the risks, damages, and potentials of our situation and share its load and its responsibilities. Power dynamics are seldom acknowledged, some doing the invisible labor, others giving out the thank you notes. You are not welcome. This is neither a blame game, nor a complicity competition.

Fast forward to now, this new collaboration two years later is our POST-FICTION. For the next 28 days of the NOTION of **SUPPORT SYSTEM**, we approach structures of **support** as a subject matter, a method, and a sculptural **system**. We know now what is **needed**: a responsive structure of **support** built from **needs**, and a soft crashing ground for when it fails. All at fault and similarly disillusioned, we ultimately seek societal change, but this is not possible without radical intimacy, transparency, and vulnerability within our relationships. For this moon cycle we will constitute an incorporated body of equal partners, sentient and inanimate collaborators forming in coalitions with individuals and **institutions**. The tendency to separate creative processes from operational realities sow division within the **system**. Instead, we aim to take a holistic approach that provides nuanced **care** to its variety of **needs** --- the studio, backstage, administrative porn, box office, and showtime --- issued by a deeper understanding of the **support** we **need** and the **support** we can provide.

Hand to Mouth, SUPPORT SYSTEM --- Deville Cohen & Bronwyn Lace, March 29, 2021
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