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# Facing Value

Radical  
perspectives  
from the arts

Valiz

1. Be unproductive

2. Hesitate and question

3. Share

4. Improvise

5. Invite and participate

6. Embrace the void

7. Play!

8. Support

9. Unite



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Yto Barrada, *Briques (Bricks) (Backsteine)*, 2003/2011

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The quote by Oscar Wilde that this book opens with, served as the guiding principle for the long-running 'Upcycling' programme organized by art and architecture centre Stroom Den Haag (2009-2014). This investigation into alternative ways to understand, create and 'measure' value led to three exhibitions: 'Up to You' (2010) with works by Yona Friedman, Thomas Lommée and Navid Nuur, 'There, I Fixed It' (2011) with R. Buckminster Fuller, Krijn Giezen, René Heyvaert, Mark Manders in cooperation with Roger Willems, Reto Pulfer and Josué Rauscher, and 'United We' (2013) with Frank van Klingeren, Potential Estate, Conditional Design, Itay Ohaly, gerlach en koop, Pratchaya Phinthong and Ante Timmermans, the creation of an e-flux Time/Bank in 2011 and various lectures and events.

The term 'upcycling' first became known as one of the catchwords of the Cradle-to-Cradle movement. Different from recycling, upcycling adds more life cycles to products or materials because they are designed with an eye towards subsequent uses. Moreover, these products gain more value with each new life cycle. In practice, the value creation that upcycling represents is complicated and technically difficult to achieve. In addition, upcycling has recently become popular as a design process in which waste is turned into luxury products.

We believe that the word carries a lot more meaning than either the overtly technical approach in which ice cream wrappers carry

flower seeds or the banality of reusing old car tires to create high end purses. Upcycling can especially refer to the development of alternative ways of producing, consuming, and organizing in which the creation of value takes central stage. The programme at Stroom Den Haag followed from that belief, as does this book.

True to the argument this book makes, the making of it was not a question of taking the shortest route to a predefined and sure-to-be-reached destination. This book is the result of a meandering process, a long route towards an unknown end result. What drove us was clear: a wish to reclaim value, recast it in a different light and in doing so reactivate older, less-appreciated, sometimes laughed-at values that are easily cast aside by a dominant discourse on productivity, speed, and control. The crutches that supported us along this meaning route were rich and manifold, they came from the most surprising quarters and from men as well as women, from artists as well as bankers, from philosophers and economists alike. This further strengthened our belief that a book like this would find many friends in very diverse fields and would, as it did for us, provide solace and hope.

We divided our resources and inspirations into nine propositions, roughly organized in the clusters 'work', 'insecurity' and 'society'. The first cluster of three looked at unproductivity, boredom, hesitation, questioning, sharing and giving as valuable counter strategies against the dogmas of hard work, competition, certainty and monetarization but also as vital moments



in allowing us to let differences, dissonance and heterogeneity into our lives. Stumble and fall. Hesitate and wait. Look again, look hard.

The second cluster can be grouped under the heading 'uncertainty' because it finds value in improvisation, in the embracing of the void between the abstract and the concrete, and in play. All three are moments in which we let go, let loose and step into the unknown. These are acts that can make us insecure because the end result is unknown, unclear, the rules are not set and conditions may change. We found it crucial to highlight the value of these gestures against a culture in which we are told to follow pre-set rules, in which specialization is taken to extremes, bureaucratic mechanisms and hierarchy are taken for granted and where calculation, rational explanations and risk management hijack intuition and our gut feeling.

Finally, there are the propositions that perhaps deal most specifically with our 'society' and how it is organized. We pose the options to invite, to support and to unite against the common structures of control, system-thinking, exclusion, self-reliance, efficiency, individuality and a 'gated community' way of thinking. No man is an island, we all know that, but hardly act accordingly. We need real or figurative crutches to support us. There is no shame, nor weakness in recognizing this. Rather, there is pleasure in allowing others in and reconfiguring our lives according to inclusive, open and social structures.

## Acknowledgements

The programme at Stroom was developed in close collaboration and inspired by many artists, designers, architects and thinkers, organizations and a very enthusiastic public. We wish to thank them all for their inspiration and dedication to this topic.

Ad Verbrugge, Alex Straathof, Angelique van Grootel, Anna Moreno, Anne Nigten, Ante Timmermans, Arjo Klamer, Arne Hendriks, Arnold Reijndorp, Bart van Rosmalen, Basten Stokhuyzen, Biba Schoenmaker, Bik Van der Pol, BMB con, Camiel Berns, Céline Berger, Césaire Peeren, Christian Ernten, Clara Pallí Monguilod, Conditional Design, Damaris Matthijsen, David Hamers, David Lingerak, Denis Guzzo, Dennis Lohuis, Ed van Hinte, Elias Tielemans, Eric Holterhues, Eric Vreedenburgh, Ernie Mellegers, Ester van de Wiel, Femke de Vries, Fiet Hinfelaar, Floris Kruidenberg, Frank Hemeltjen, Frank van Klingereren, Frans Benjamins, Gavin Wade, Geert Lovink, gerlach en koop, Gerrit van Es, Gillian Lonergan, Hans van Beek, Hedwig Heinsman, Helene Fentener van Vlissingen, Henk Heijkens, Henk Schaik, Herman Hertzberger, Huib Haye van der Werf, Itay Ohaly, J. Bot, Jacco van Uden, Jan van Belkum, Jan Jongert, Jelte Boeijenga, Joeri van Beek, Joop Hazenberg, Joop Vrijman, Joost Nieuwenburg, Jos de Krieger, Josué Rauscher, Julieta Aranda & Anton Vidokle, Karin Mientjes, Kilian Wawoe, Klaas Kuitenbrouwer, Krijn Giezen, Laurens Knoop, Leo Oorschot, Léon Thier, Linda Shaw, Lizet van Kempen, Manon Bovenkerk, Maria Janssens, Marina van den Bergen, Mark Fisher, Mark Manders with Roger Willems, MatriX, Maya Ibrahim, Meersma Holding BV, Mels Crouwel, Mieke Coupé, Mieke Moor, Miel Karthaus, Monique van Heist, Navid Nuur, Nico Feragnoli, Niels van Haften, Nora van Klingereren, Norman Beierle, Onno Mostert, Onno van Sandick, Pascale Pere, Paul Marselje, Peik Suyling, Peter Zuiderwijk, Piet Vollaard, Pieternel Vermoortel, Pot & Van der Velden, Potential Estate, Pratchaya Phinthong, Richard Buckminster Fuller, Rayke Verhoeven, Remco Torenbosch, René Heyvaert, Reto Pulfer, Robin van den Akker, Robin, Ron Nansink & Katja Kotrchova, Ruth Benschop, Ruud Kaulingfreks, Ruud Ridderhof, Sander Stuijt, Sandra van Kampen, Sara Pape, Saskia van Stein, Simon Delobel, Sue Ball, Thomas Lommée, Timotheus Vermeulen, Topp & Dubio, Wendelien van Oldenborgh, Wies Sanders, Yona Friedman, Zeger Reyers & Pietertje van Splunter.