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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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Hesitate
and
2. question



Pipilotti Rist, *Ever Is Over All*, 1997



Valparaíso School, *Torneo Luodo/Tournament games*, 1984

Related to the values of not-working and being bored are those of slowing down and taking one's time, two strategies that can be achieved, for example, via the route of hesitation, obstruction and questioning.

In his essay *Über das Zaudern*, the German philosopher Joseph Vogl re-assesses the space between action and inaction: the space of hesitation.¹ Vogl re-evaluates hesitation as a positive act, an alternative strategy in which the pause, the re-examination and the act of questioning are assigned a central position.² Vogl distinguishes between doubt and hesitation: 'when in doubt, reasons and motives have become weak, frail or hard to recognize'.³ The doubter is someone who lacks sufficient or proper arguments to reach a decision.

With hesitation, on the other hand, an excess of (good) reasons and motivations causes the delay. The hesitation-problem consists precisely in having to choose in the face of strongly motivated opinions when not (yet) ready to choose.⁴

Hesitation is regarded as a form of weakening of the will in our culture: 'Hesitation has, in a long Western tradition, been equalled with indecision. As such it has been disqualified as a capricious act that frustrates work.'⁵ Today still, we condemn 'unproductiveness, distraction and lack of motivation'.⁶ In the face of the bad name hesitation has, Vogl grants it analytical power and counters a culture and politics obsessed with action, fast responses and the use of opportunities.

The analytical power of hesitation lies in the countermovement of this act 'against the solidity of world systems, the irrevocability of verdicts, the finality of solutions, the determination of consequences, the duration of conformities, and the weight of results'.⁷ In a culture dominated by the laws of action, hesitation is more than the lack of movement. For Vogl, the hesitator is a hero of reluctance: 'hesitation accompanies the imperative of action and achievement as a shadow, as a destructive opponent'.⁸ In hesitation, the problem of decision-taking acquires a particular form, it shows itself and is therefore made visible. Hesitation calls for a revision and is imbued with the sense that every answer and every solution always include new questions and problems that again must be answered and resolved. Hesitation confronts us with 'the question of the consequences of actions and the consequences of those consequences, the inevitability of chains of action and reaction'.⁹

In Vogl's essay, we are treated to various literary 'hesitation-figures, athletes of hesitation' (from the Greek tragedy *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, Friedrich Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy to Herman Melville's novella *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and the work of Franz Kafka and Robert Musil) who resist being, doing, and knowing and who take the 'gesture of questioning' to new levels. In a culture and society where speed, action and doing have value and hesitation, reflection and questioning are perceived as a slowing down, a dragging of feet, the athletes of hesitation are considered annoying characters indeed.

Jan Verwoert writes about his annoyance with the obstruction of moving on, which inevitably

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results in having to slow down, in his seminal essay 'Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform' (2007) where he asks:

Have you ever found yourself screaming or wanting to scream at an uncooperative clerk behind a counter: 'I haven't got time for this!' only to realise that, yes, he *does* have time for this—an entire lifetime dedicated to the project of stopping people like you from having their way? This slow man may turn out to be a guardian of the social equilibrium, protecting peace and sanity by preventing insanely restless performers like you from changing things for the worse.¹⁰

In other words, we should welcome and embrace people who are trying to stop the 'restless performers' from taking over the world and forcing their speeded-up way of living on each and everyone of us.

The Dutch theatre collective Wunderbaum has an artistic practice in which social, urban and metropolitan issues are studied over longer periods of time in various forms and collaborations.¹¹ In their four-year project *The New Forest* (2013-2016), they focus on transitions, social, economic and political changes taking place in a society in crisis. Borrowing from the French philosopher Michel Foucault, they aim at working towards a so-called heterotopia.

A heterotopia, according to Foucault, is a place and space for the 'other', for 'otherness' and alternatives. It is an existing place in society that holds up a mirror to society. Heterotopias

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are spaces that are neither here nor there, that can be both mental and physical. Foucault advocated a society with many heterotopias, with multiple spaces or places for affirming otherness, differences, and where one could escape from authoritarianism and suppression. Heterotopias have a disorganizing influence. Once you have crossed the boundary of a heterotopia, you will notice you belong to something, someplace else altogether.¹²

In *The New Forest*, Wunderbaum tackle topics such as democracy, health care, the law, the possibilities of change and personal action, digitalization and the advent of the participation society as a replacement for the welfare state. These topics are questioned, the audience confronted with its beliefs and assumptions, the actors themselves with limitations of what one can change and achieve.

In their 2015 performance called *Let's do it ourselves*, a vaudeville-type of rollercoaster show taking the audience on a participatory ride through the Dutch post-welfare system, the posing of questions is taken to extremes.¹³ The actors start with the empty questions posed by marketers to extract data from willing audiences ('Who of you here has a contract?' or 'Who works independently?') and gradually work towards the more painful questions that are, needless to say, far more substantial and so much more difficult to answer ('Is there anyone in the audience with a substantial fear of losing everything?').

Unlike with Vogl's 'athletes of hesitation', here the questioning is not introspective. However, in the context of a theatre performance, the power of this 'gesture of

"NATIONALISM"
IS AN
ISSUE?

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questioning' is still encapsulated. Therefore Wunderbaum actors also take these questions to non-theatre contexts and pose them, for example, at conferences. A question such as

Is anybody here surprised by the fact that they do not identify themselves with the government, and later come to the conclusion that they really don't give a shit because they think that everything will be okay in the end. And if not, then it will be okay anyway?

is far more confrontational in a conference setting far removed from the vaudeville character of the theatre performance, where these questions could be laughed away. It creates confusion and hesitation because, as one of their questions points out, we often pretend to know what we are doing: 'Does anybody here say they know what they want, but when asked questions, have to admit they don't have a clue what they are doing?' This unmasking is the whole point of asking poignant questions.

In a world dominated by economic laws, speed and the conviction that stagnation means decline, hesitation and questioning are important instruments to take pause, ask for the consequences of consequences and they force us to reconsider decisions, answers and solutions. Art too can create such an interspace located between action and inaction that embodies a counter-gesture against the completely inflated pressure for consequences and effectiveness, what Vogl calls 'the weight of results'. Like hesitation, art can bring us 'to

would
to change
the language
around
Art.

2 HESITATE AND QUESTION

the edge of an emerging world, about which possible histories and futures nothing has been decided yet'.¹⁴ Following Vogl, Verwoert and Wunderbaum, we should take the acts of hesitating, slowing down and questioning more seriously and recognize them as tools of a countermovement.

- 1 Joseph Vogl, *Über das Zaudern* (Zürich: Diaphanes Verlag, 2007).
- 2 See also the more recent book by Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) in which he analyses economic theory as deeply theological and introduces the term 'oikodicy' to talk about the unflagging belief in the self-regulating mechanisms of market forces.
- 3 Maaïke Lauwaert, interview with Joseph Vogl: 'Helden van de tegenzin: Over aarzelen als actieve daad', *Tubelight* 66 (22 January 2010), <http://tubelight.nl/articles/891/helden-van-de-tegenzin>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.

- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Jan Verwoert, 'Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform', *Dot Dot Dot* 15 (15 December 2007), pp. 90-112, p. 92.
- 11 www.wunderbaum.nl/.
- 12 Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', *Architecture / Mouvement Continuité* 5 (October 1984), pp. 46-49; originally published as 'Des espaces autres' (1967).
- 13 <http://thenewforest.nl/en/show/the-new-forest-we-doen-het-wel-zelf-2/>.
- 14 Lauwaert, op. cit.

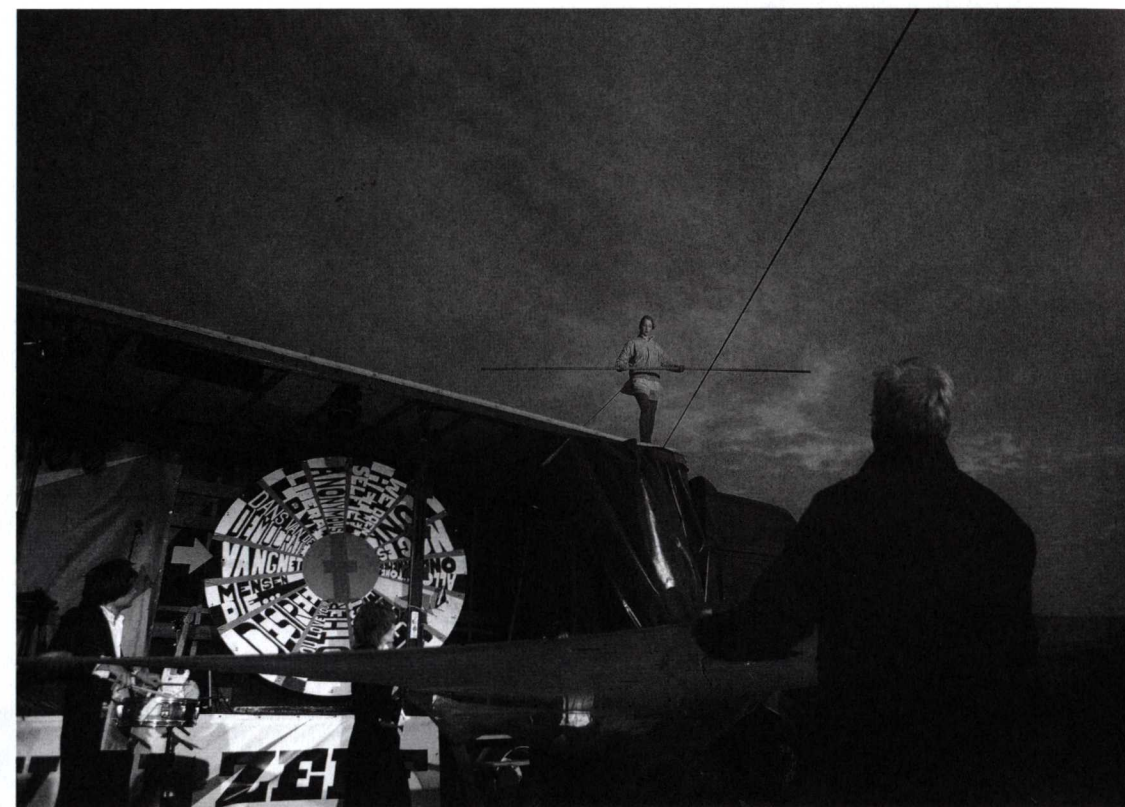


Jeffrey Shaw, Theo Botschuijver and Sean Wellesley-Miller, *Homage to Bladen*, installation in Park Sonsbeek, Arnhem, 1971



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *How to Work Better*, 1991, mural on the corner of Houston and Mott Street, New York City, 2016

FACING VALUE



Wunderbaum (by and with: Walter Bart, Desiree van Geel, Matijs Jansen, Yannick Noomen, Maartje Remmers, Marleen Scholten and Jens Bouttery [music] in cooperation with citizens who do it themselves), *We do it ourselves*, 2015

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