

# A short note on waiting

## 1.1 *Waiting is a positive medium*

The imperatives of efficiency and productivity force us to think of waiting as wasted time. MAFA teaches us to “make make make”. By establishing The Waiting Residency I aim to shift value from productivity to the act of waiting itself. It is also a form of establishing bonds and collectivity, i.e. an artists’ network. Since we are being forced to wait by COVID19, we might as well do it in good company.

Waiting does not mean lack of agency. Waiting as a positive medium has been recently described in great detail by Jason Farman<sup>1</sup>. In artspeak, one could say that without waiting there is no criticality.

Waiting is effectively forward thinking.

*To pause, we give ourselves the space to ask questions. With a longer pause we create space in which to think about the answers to those questions. To pause is to evaluate.... This pause is open-ended: we must not rush to fill it, abolishing the horizon. Let us use this space to think, not show more and ask of others to produce more and to consume more. Yes of course let us use art to reflect and to help us understand, to come to terms, to heal, to imagine other possible futures.<sup>2</sup>*

As Cathrine Brun<sup>3</sup> puts it, the act of imagining these “other possible futures” turns waiting into a particular way of experiencing the link between time and power, and one might add, to turn powerlessness into powerfulness (see also next article on an alternative future world currency)!

## 1.2 *Short-term vs long-term waiting*

Scholarship has conceptualised long-term displacement as ‘waiting’ (Conlon 2011; Hyndman and Giles 2011; Mountz 2011; Stepputat 1992, cited in Brun 2015). Gasparini (1995) makes a distinction between short-term and long-term waiting, which points to the transformation that often takes place when people’s expectations about the future change. Long-term waiting

creates a relatively stable condition that may lead to a reclassification of a person’s status and may possibly-or ultimately-transition into a social role (lifted from Brun 2015)

It is with long-term waiting that things get really interesting. For example, the current situation in the western world is one of long-term waiting, because of the collective failure in dealing COVID19. Ultimately, in our minds we are all waiting for it to end. Thus it helps to think of our situation as one of ‘*protracted displacement*’ (a term usually referred to internally displaced persons).

## 1.3 *Protracted displacement and waiting*

Protracted displacement is often characterised as waiting. However this waiting is not static – it has a temporal dimension which gives it fluidity. Waiting does not stop everything. People keep moving, if only through the basic routines of living. Waiting does not mean that people are idle, although, as Brun correctly puts it, they may often want to sit down and give up.

Hope – also associated with waiting – is a double-edged sword. It keeps you sane, but if you hope too much and just wait for a return to normality, your situation may deteriorate over time because you haven’t moved on. Displaced persons who accept their displaced status as permanent are likely to fare better than those who merely wait in the hope to go back home one day, because they start to build new lives.

Similarly, many people (and artists) are waiting to go back to a kind of pre-Covid ‘business as usual’. We ought to resist that.

## 1.4 *Waiting is art maintenance*

Waiting is a form of maintenance art. According to Mierle Laderman Ukeles maintenance means “keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change.” It is tied to the “life instinct,” which involves “the perpetuation and maintenance of the species, survival systems and operations...”. Similarly the waiting Residency is a system to keep things going. Now is a time for Maintenance Art.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Farman, J. (2018) Delayed Response: The Art of Waiting from the Ancient to the Instant World.

<sup>2</sup> Gruppo Pause (2020) COVID-19: a call to PAUSE <https://gruppopause.net>

<sup>3</sup> Brun, Cathrine (2015) Active waiting and changing hopes: Toward a time perspective on protracted displacement. *Social Analysis*; 59 (1).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Russeth, Maintenance. Artforum 24 March 2020.