Editorial

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A 10 kg bag of potatoes and a 10 kg wooden plank weigh the same, but the bag of potatoes feels heavier. Its mass is distributed irregularly and loosely in comparison to the straight plank, with weight spread evenly across its whole surface. This condition can also be applied to a relaxed body and a tensed body. A person in an eased physical state offers resistance—loose arms and legs hanging down increase the leverage required to grip them. A slightly tense body can actively help the carrier by adapting, holding on, or centring its weight. When muscles contract slightly, their spindles create basic tension, and joints are stabilised. The body feels as stable as a plank and seems lighter.

Physical tension arises from the ongoing interaction between the nervous system and the muscles. Muscle tone—the state of tension that is necessary for maintaining posture, enabling fluid movement and bracing the body even at rest—is the result of this interplay. This tone depends on innervation by the somatic and autonomic nervous systems. The somatic part is under voluntary control, allowing one to decide, for instance, whether to tense or release their muscles. In contrast, the autonomic part controls involuntary bodily functions. It consists of sympathetic and parasympathetic branches which allow the body to move freely when working in balance. The sympathetic nervous system increases heart rate and respiratory activity and dominates in stressful situations. The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, slows the heart rate, and promotes digestion, gaining the upper hand during periods of relaxation.

Without rest, the sympathetic branch's activation is prolonged, and muscle tone increases, even without conscious effort. Through the loss of equilibrium, the body becomes less flexible, and its posture changes. The risk of accidents rises. In the event of a fall, increased muscle tone reduces the body's ability to cushion or catch itself when hitting the ground. Instead, one falls like a plank. As a result, impact forces are concentrated on single points, such as the hands or head. This can lead to an increased fear of falling, which can result in an even greater increase in muscle tone. Nevertheless, falling can be practised. In any fall, it is crucial to quickly bring the body's centre of gravity towards the ground. Rather than falling with outstretched legs, one should bend their knees to protect their head. When falling backwards or sideways, one's chin should be kept on the chest to prevent it from hitting the floor. The buttocks absorb some of the energy of the fall, but only briefly. The body then curves into the shape of a banana to dissipate the energy—through a synergy of slight tension and release.

There is no pause without prior exertion, and this issue of the magazine explores rest and all its associated contexts and contradictions. Amidst increasing environmental pollution, a tenuous global political climate, and a performance-oriented society demanding ever greater productivity, the balance between rest and labour becomes skewed. Pausing carries the risk of falling behind, but this risk can be mitigated by knowing when to rest. This issue examines rest as activity and as resistance. It questions how the individual body, in cohesion with a community, can generate weight through relaxation and distribute it.