

Interview with Mette Edvardsen by Agata Jankowska.
For the Polish website "Elewator kultury" – May 2014.

I would like to ask you some questions about your project ("Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine") which will be shown during the festival in Szczecin.

What is the main goal of your work/performance? What do you want to say through memorizing books?

The two main intentions when starting this project was to develop learning by heart as practice and what that would mean, and to create reading experiences for the audience. With a group of performers, or 'books' as we call ourselves now, we have been developing the practice of learning by heart and entering a process of memory (and forgetting). It really started out as an experiment. For me the most important thing is to bring the focus to the engagement of the "doing". There is no final result, but an ongoing activity. And memory is unstable, it's changing. Even if you learn a book by heart you need to continue to practice, otherwise you will forget it again. I am interested in this connection to that we have to be 'doing' something.

What do you exactly expect from your audience during the performance? Is there any interaction with the people who are watching the performers?

The audience is not expected to 'do' anything. I, or we, don't expect anything from our readers. They can just sit down and listen. Our aim is to create a reading experience. But of course there is more to it, we are not regular books in a shelf, we are people like our readers. And this situation that we share is a big part of the experience too.

We know that the idea of your work comes from the science fiction novel Fahrenheit 451. It describes the vision of society devoid of books and knowledge. Is it possible in the future in your opinion? Do the humanity strive for the world without books and knowledge dominated by technology?

Yes, the end of the book Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury was a starting point for the project. Or one of the starting points. We do what the characters in the end of the books does, learn books by heart. But we are not making any adaptation of Fahrenheit 451, and instead of continuing the story, we develop just that, the learning by heart, as a practice. My main fear about the future is not about whether or not books will exist. I think there will always be people who will want to read books, and there will always be people who will want to write them. The book, as object or as media, has changed and developed throughout a long history. I welcome new technology and what it has to offer, also for book-making. But I worry about which are the books that will remain for the future. What is the knowledge, practices, and ideas that we pass on for the future.

In how many countries did you present your project so far? What was the

reaction of viewers?

Since the first time we did the project in 2010 we are a growing number of people learning books by heart. Till now we are about forty-something 'book-people' and this will be the 18th time we do the project. The response from readers have been very nice, it is a direct and intimate meeting of books and readers.

How difficult is the process of learning book by heart? How much time you have to spent to learn and how many times you have to repeat the text?

I have no idea how many times I have repeated my book. Many! To learn a book by heart you need time and desire to do it. We start at the beginning and advance little by little. The point is not so much the achievement of learning the whole book by heart, at first, but more the commitment in doing so. I am interested in the engagement of the continuous doing, the ongoing. And all of us are very different, some learn fast and some learn slow. But more important is the process of learning, and what we learn from that. Learning a book by heart is much more than putting content into the mind.

How strong is the experience of the person who „read” the book by heart during the performance? Is there any difference between the actor's acting on the stage or is it just the same?

We are not performing in the same way as an actor on stage. We are not acting. We are not interpreting the book, we 'are' the book. It is not a matter of style, but even if we share the situation of the performance, we are not on stage, in a theatre. We are in a more casual, intimate, or 'normal' situation. Of course we are not neutral, that's impossible, but we try to stay as close as possible to the book, to the writing. In order to let the audience read, imagine and feel. And we trust our books and the situation to provide for an experience.

What is the library for you: the library as the public and common place?

What I like the most about libraries is that it is a public space. A space open for everyone, it has opening hours. I think that libraries are endangered spaces that we need to protect. Libraries are important spaces for a community. It is a place to be.