

VOICING PIECES

Bojana Kunst, May 2017

She, the reader, is always a beginner, initiating something. That's why reading is so seductive: a delicate conception and an initiation of change, a fragile start, which is also a practice of liberation. This quality of reading appeared so evidently, when I put the upper part of my body into the mushroom-like structure in the performance *Voicing Pieces* and opened the first page of the huge book, waiting there for me to be read out loud: with the first word the reading opened itself into the unstoppable, overflowing, almost overwhelming sequence of events. My voice tested itself, checked its color and intensity, adjusting its frequency, the ways how it is forming the consonants, but at the same time, it was also given back to me, to the reader. The text started to run through my body with its various shades, repetitions, echoes, coming closer and departing, until my voice and the text finally uttered the opening of the performance and I read out loud in the isolation of the mushroom: I'm speaking the beginning. I'm starting this sentence without knowing where it is going.

Isn't this exactly what reading is? We never know, when starting the reading, where we are going, where the voice of the read words (be silent or loud) is taking us. Lisa Robertson, a poet, whose delicate essay on reading echoes strongly with my watching of this performance, described that quality of unknown in the reading in a wonderful way: „As I read, my self-consciousness is not only suspended, but temporarily abolished by the vertigo of another's language. I'm simply a conduit, its gutter. This is a pleasure.“ And pleasure is exactly what is continuously experienced in the performance *Voicing Pieces*, in our playful reading of the text, waiting for us in the three mushroom-like stations. There is a sheer pleasure in the ways of reading and voicing the words loud into the unknown, towards something, which has yet to come, and our reading is establishing the very event, the very performance we are in. We are playing with words, inclinations, rhythms, repetitions, echoes, sounds, continuously voicing and amplifying these various non-semiotic dimensions of language, which give language its affective and emotional qualities, where language is touching us in the way, how it is made, how it is coming together, similar as the poetry affects us. This performance is as much an exploration of the voice as it is an exploration of the reading, an exploration of the complex relation between the reading of the written word, its typography, form, its position on the page, and its dependency from voice; from its sensual, vocal and auditive dimension. We are then always reading on the paradoxical limit between the outside and the inside, the reading belongs to this strangely combined notion extimacy: there would be no reading, if something foreign could not take place in the most intimate parts of us. Maybe that's why, when we are reading, it seems as if we would have our heads in the clouds, or, in this particular performance, in the cloud-like mushroom, which looks from the inside like a cave. We are inside, isolated, alone, but at the same time in the obscene vicinity of our voice, returning to us through the multiplicity of voices, shaking the ways how we are inhabiting our bodies and our lonely reading rooms. This can be linked to the very politics of reading, which is hanging in-between the written structure of the page and the multiplicity of reading voices originating from it, where through the extreme singularity of reading process, we are also becoming participants in something in-common. In this performance we trigger the very performance we are in with the singular and isolated gesture of reading aloud, but at the same time, in the very moment, when we are actively taking over the reading, we also become a vehicle of the events, which overflow us in their intensity and proximity to our body and to the text.

Voice of the reading is then moving between the passivity and the will, between ourselves giving us to the performance and the ways we work on it, actively composing and performing it. When we open the mouth to voice the text, the voice not only liberates itself from the text, but also from the body,

which utters it; however the liberation is only possible, if we are at the same time faithful to the text, to the materiality of the written book, to the pages, which are there to be read. In the performance *Voicing Pieces* another paradoxical feature of reading becomes so evident. It seems that reading is this sheer immaterial force, a force of thinking, which can, with its strength, change the ways we reside in our bodies. But reading is also a labour, a bodily effort, which is true to the book, it holds itself to it, it works through its pages. This paradoxical relationship between materiality and immateriality of reading is in the performance disclosed through the movement of the voice, which can be heard only when depending on the text and being simultaneously independent from it. The voice is traveling through different kinaesthetic and embodied experiences of reading, playing with our senses and affecting us, but at the same time we are also consciously playing with our voice, joyfully playing with reading on the very brink of the abyss, in which we could get lost.

This actually happened to me, the reader, towards the end of the performance, when I visited the third cloud-like mushroom, in which the pages were now exhibited all around me. The mushroom was hanging from the air all over my head and I was reading the text inside about writing and being drunk. My voice came back with a delay, manipulated auditively, so that it was deaccelerating and loosing the rhythmical balance, it was a voice of a drunken person. In one moment, I had to hold myself not to loose the balance myself, so independent was the voice of my reading. But the structure in which I was, was also moving and the only thing, with which I could stay on my legs and get balance back was to continue reading. „Now I'm speaking the end of the piece that will be the piece echoing itself.“ This is reading. „It's a timely dallying and surge among the cluster of minute identifications. I prefer to become foreign and unknowable to myself in accordance with reading's audacity.“ (Lisa Robertson).