

Livre

d'images

sans

images

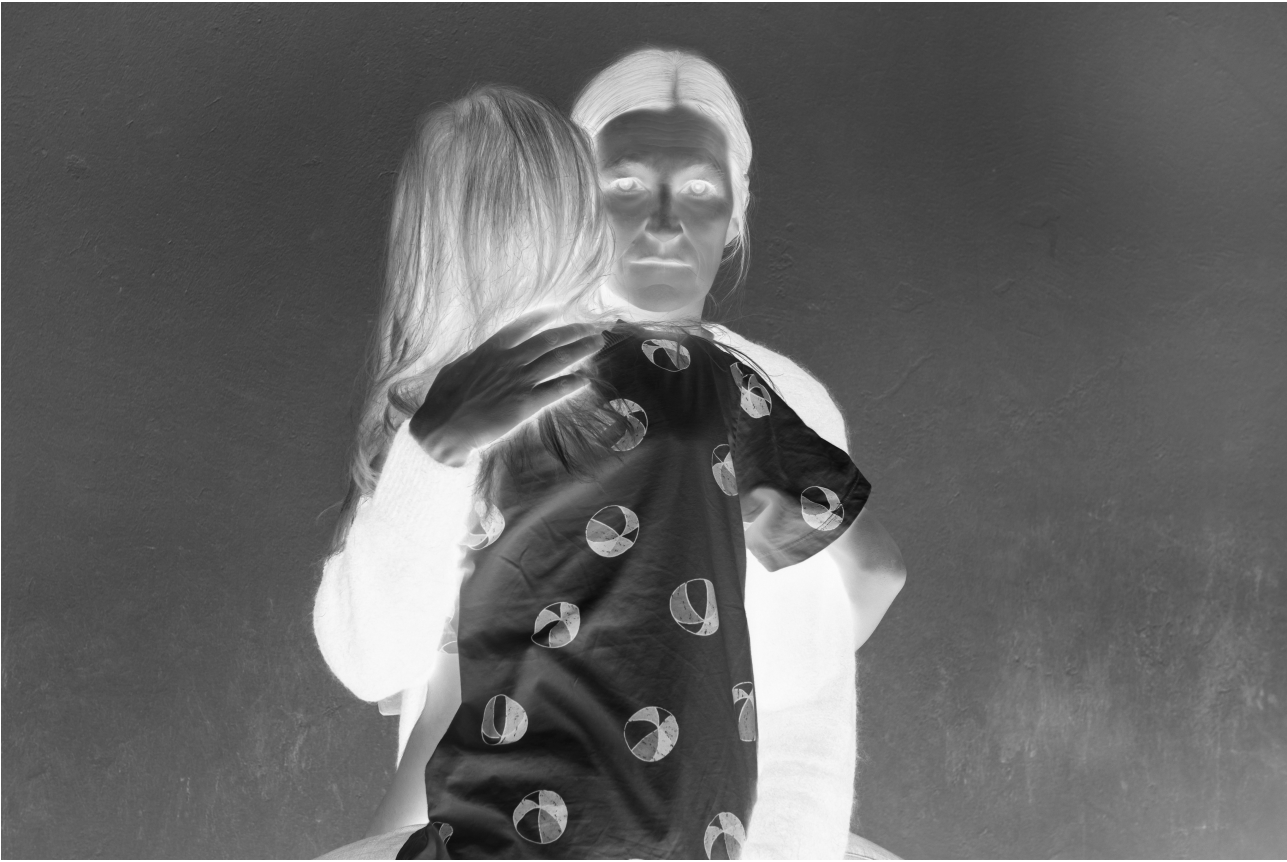
Mette & Iben

Edwardson

MDT program texts

The program texts is a series of unedited fanzine-style booklets available on the MDT website and in a limited cost price edition, printed, folded and stapled on MDT's Konica Minolta All-in-one Copier.

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Mette Edvardsen interviewed by Sóley Frostadóttir for DUNCE Magazine*, February 2023.

'Dance is not primarily a visual art form'

Is the use of text and writing an integral part of your practice? In what way?

I think of choreography as writing, as writing in time and space. I have been using language as material for several of my pieces. Also the pieces where I don't use language, I think of them as writing. Writing for me is a general term, it's the way that I compose and build the pieces. And as I make performances, this *writing* takes place in space and time, not on the page. Or at least not to begin with. So, what I consider as 'text' in my pieces, is made of the words I say, as well as my actions in space, time, rhythm, presence etc. For a long time there was no separation of 'text' in my work, there was no writing for the page. Also the writing process takes place in space, in the studio. Everything together. I made a piece where I used the format of the book as a space (*every now and then*, 2009), and where the two spaces – the page and the stage – were operating together. This piece was a turning point in my work. Up until then I had worked extensively with objects, and almost no language. I began questioning my relationship to the objects, and wanted to work in an empty space with nothing. To make something with nothing. And with the removal of objects, language appeared (*Black*, 2011). Through the use of language (speech and voice) other spaces opened up in the imagination. I became interested in this larger notion of the written, and what kind of writing it is.

When you have delivered a finished work, what leads you to the next? Is your practice continuous?

One beautiful aspect of performance is that the work is never done. Even if it's made, it's not finished. As long as I am performing the pieces, they are still ongoing. I perform previous pieces together with new ones, and in that way they remain part of my process and how works develop. And this kind of continuity is vital for my process. Each time I perform, I am entering a certain space, a space that doesn't exist in the physical world just like that. It needs a certain attention and presence, a writing, in order to appear and to be shared. Each time it's made anew. And this is also a practice. Like a sort of magic power where we're able to make something invisible become almost tangible. This became very apparent to me during the pandemic, when I could not perform for a long stretch of time, I didn't access these places. I felt that my capacity was fading, and it made me very insecure about everything. As if this kind of 'magic power' was gone. So yes, although a work is finished in the sense that it's written or composed in a certain way, the experience of doing it and what that brings up still continues. And I think this is how I move from one work to the next. My processes are very entangled, and although not in a linear development, there is a sense of one thing leading to the next. Each piece is created in tension with the others.

Can you reflect on negation and the barely visible - do they make an appearance?

Negation is one feature of language I worked with in *No Title* (2014), by naming things and saying they were 'gone', or by negating – 'not this, not that'. But negation was also present in *Black* (2011) by the absence of things, and there are more examples. But as you now link it to the 'barely visible', it is true that I have worked with a sense of absence and negation throughout almost all my works. Absence in order for something else to appear. I have always been interested in creating new spaces in the imagination, and drawing people in. My works are usually not very visual, there is not so much there to see. I want to activate other senses, to make us listen, to tune in. Dance is not primarily a visual art form, other senses are being involved, such as listening, feeling, imagining and memory. So when I started to work with language, it made a lot of sense to me, it opened up a whole new world with new limits and possibilities. Then there's also the voice, how it works in space, how it connects us in listening, and how it allows for other ways of being with a work not only focusing on what we see in front of us, but the images that appear inside of us.

What inspires the work you create?

There are many things that inspire me. Other artists and their work would be what I would name first. But inspiration could also be stimuli or influence, like a motor, a kind of energy or force. Perhaps I am not even conscious of everything I am influenced by, like how events of the world also affect

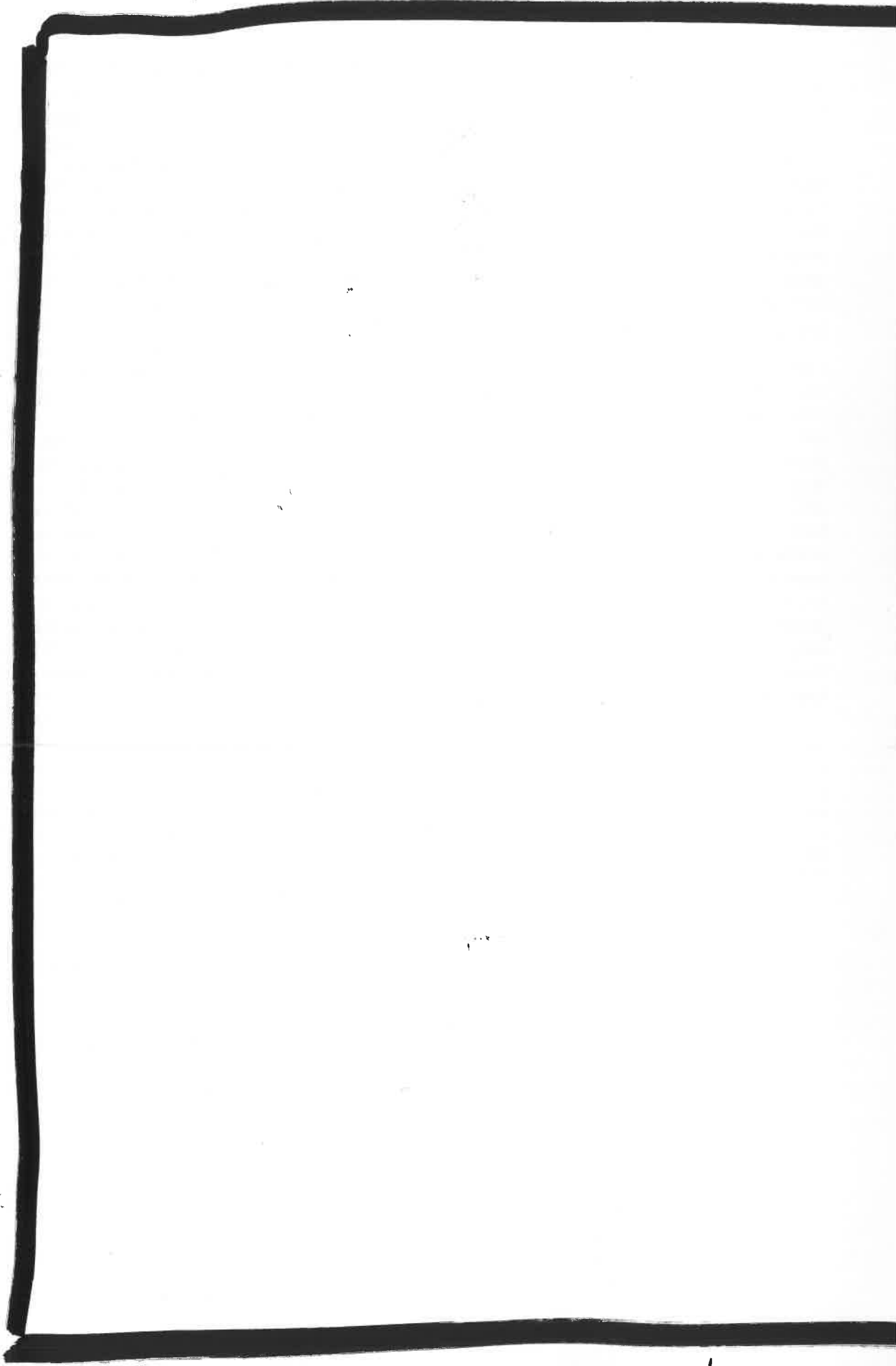
me. When I create a work, there are certain intentions and interests, and I look for ways to respond to them for myself. I make work not to express my inner self, but because there is something I want to figure out, there's a curiosity and desire to make something, and to share that. Then I need to find the form for that, its poetics. There's always a form of abstraction. Sometimes there are inspirational material that are specific to a certain work, like sources and references. They become forms and figures to think through, to be in dialogue with, to lean on, to feel supported by. Other times it can be aspects of something, a feeling, a space, an atmosphere, a colour, or an event that help me access my own material. As if they speak together, and guide the way. And then there are works – art works, performances, books, films, music – that inspires me on a more existential level. They make life worth living and of course inspire me in my work always. Sometimes I think we take art a bit for granted, because we don't understand what it would be like to live in a world without it.

Where do you go from here?

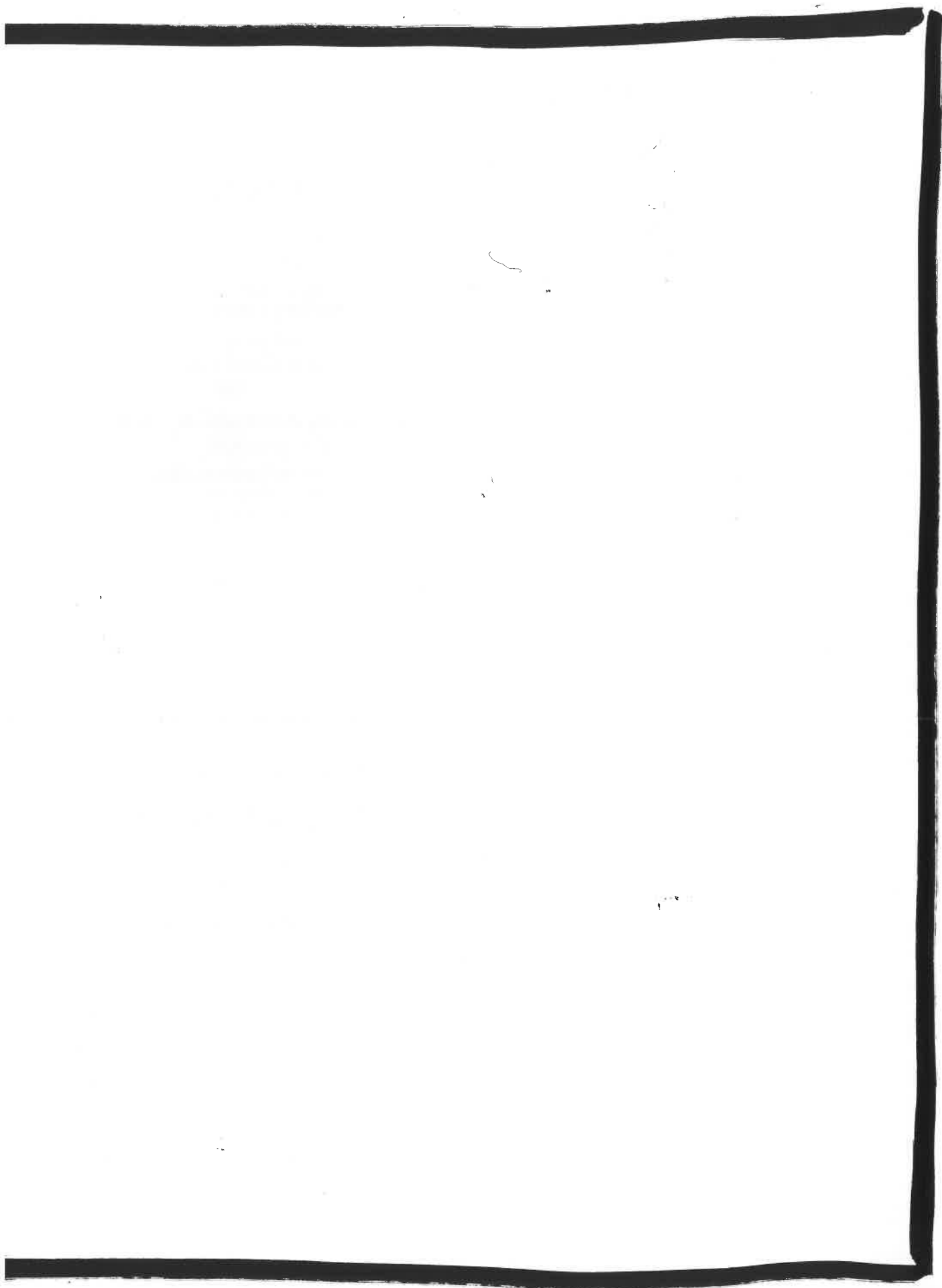
I am in the process of making a new piece which will premiere this spring. It's quite a special work for me, as it's existing on the threshold of many things: it's a piece that I started just before the pandemic together with my daughter. She was then ten, now she's thirteen. And it's been a long process of postponing, again and again, due to the pandemic, followed by local political calamities, and finally personal events. It feels like a reverse of my practice of performing, beginning again and again. Time stopped. In parallel, I am continuing the project with *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010 -), a project where we are a group of people that learn books by heart and form a library of living books. This project has since its beginning developed into various formats and practices. Also a kind of 'stopped time', I guess. It's been ongoing now for 12 years. I have learned so many things with this work, and it is still generating new questions and experiences. I am now in my second year of a two-year residency at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (outside of Paris) with a research developed out from this project. I have invited a small work group to join me, with Léa Poiré and Victoria Peréz Royo, to work on four Appendixes to the project and with several invited guests along the way. It's a kind of dream situation to be able to open the project in this way, and it will keep me busy for quite some time still.

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Dunce Magazine is an artist-run, independent publication situated on the border of visual art, performance and choreography. The magazine, founded in 2020 in Iceland, is run by the choreographer and editor Sóley Frostadóttir, and visual artist Sigurður Atli Sigurðsson. Art direction is led by graphic designer Helga Dögg Ólafsdóttir and Sigurður Atli Sigurðsson. This is a platform for discourse around artistic processes for all readers—for the sake of new perspectives and creative inspiration.



MAP OF THE OCEAN



Stockholm 28 October 2023

full moon at 22:24

Livre d'images sans images at MDT 28 and 29 October.

Every time we perform this piece new notes are written, new quotes, phrases, thoughts, poems are included. A work is not static. Each time we begin again, we do it again, we continue. New stories, references and encounters are collected.

- Sophie Nys has made a book, ⁽²⁰²¹⁾ ~~the~~ with a man who was collecting versions of Tristram Shandy, and has edited a publication with all the black pages. In Laurence Sterne's original book (1759) there were black, blank and marbled pages. In later editions, pocket books, these pages are made into signs. A square of black, a short blackened paragraph.
- Moritz Küng curated an exhibition in a museum in Düren with a large collection of artist's books with blank pages: Blank. Raw. Illegible. Artist's Books as Statements (1960-2022). A catalogue from this exhibition exists with all the works included.
- Le nuage; dix façons de le préparer (the cloud, ten ways to prepare it) - Ryoko Sekiguchi, Sugio Yamaguchi, Valentin Devos (2019). How to cook a cloud from a cookbook series.

Traces of dialogues (incomplete)

1. *Livre d'images sans images (Billedbog uden billeder/ Picture Book Without Pictures)* by H. C. Andersen, 1840.
This book came to us in another book, 'Le maître de livres', vol.3, Japanese manga by Shinohara Umiharu, 2011.
2. The map of the ocean, or ocean-chart, illustration from *The Hunting of the Snark* by Lewis Carroll, with illustrations made by Henry Holiday, 1876.
Although the original illustrations are made by Henry Holiday, there are different theories of who made the map. In the edition illustrated by Tove Jansson there is no 'map of nothing'.
3. *It looks like snow (On dirait qu'il neige)*, picture book by Remy Charlip, 1957.
In response to this picture book, Bruno Munari made 'Little White Riding Hood' (Le chaperon blanc), 1981.
4. *The Birds* by Aristophanes, ancient Greek play from 414 BC, and the song *The Beginning of Memory* by Laurie Anderson, 2010.
Aristophanes' play revolves around Pisthetaerus, who convinces the birds to create a great city in the sky to regain their status as the original gods. Pisthetaerus eventually transforms into a bird-like god himself, and replaces Zeus as the king of the gods. It is Pisthetaerus who tells the story about the lark, who is burying her father in the back of her head. Laurie Anderson's song is about this story.
5. *The Accidental Room*, Providence Place Mall, episode 332, 99percentinvisible.org
This story came to us through oral storytelling, by a friend.
6. The first recording of a human voice by Edouard-Leon Scott de Martinville, 1860.
Made by etching a soot-blackened paper, called a "phonograph".
7. La Monte Young's Composition, #5, *Butterfly Piece*, 1960.
The performance consists of releasing a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) into the performance room, and let them fly around. Doors and windows are open, and the composition may be of any length and ends when the butterfly flies away. Our version is the 'bat piece', listening to the bats in our garden with a bat detector. This was eventually recorded, summer 2019.
8. *The Wind in the Willows*, children's book by Kenneth Grahame, 1908.
The Rat (to the Mole): "It was so beautiful I almost wish I'd never heard it."
9. *The Golden Record*, a time capsule made for Voyager 1 and 2 in 1977.
It is a phonograph record, a gold-plated copper disk, where sound recordings and images are encoded, as well as instructions of how to read the material. Information available on the NASA website.
10. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne, 1759.
Inspirational for its play with the materiality of the page and the format of the book, with its blank and full black pages.
11. *Thirteen ways of looking at a Blackbird*, poem by Wallace Stevens, 1917.
*Among twenty snowy mountains,
the only moving thing
was the eye of the blackbird*
12. *Clair de lune*, piano piece by Claude Debussy, 1905.

I wish children didn't die. I wish they would be temporarily elevated to the skies until the war ends. Then they would return home safe, and when their parents would ask them: "where were you?", they would say: "we were playing in the clouds".

— Ghassan Kanafani

MDT

MDT is an international co-production platform and a leading venue for contemporary choreography and performance in Stockholm. MDT was founded in 1986 and has ever since presented Swedish and international emerging artists. MDT is supported by Kulturförvaltningen Stockholm stad, Kulturrådet and Kulturförvaltningen Stockholms läns landsting.

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