

Verdensteatret *Bridge Over Mud*
Press (English Translation)

A DIFFERENT ROOM

Bridge over Mud by Verdensteatret is equally giving, as it is demanding.

A spectator that wishes to get full payoff from *Bridge over Mud* must be willing to meet this artwork with its own thoughts, feelings and associations.

You can either create your own personal "meaning" or just lay aside the need for a meaning and surrender to the experience as it is.

A room for contemplation

Bridge over Mud is a spatial sensuous multimedia live installation consisting of sonic expressions -on the border of music- and transforming images apparently without any narrative. A "Gesamtkunstwerk" in the fullest meaning of this word.

It is a contemplating room, a room that think, dream and feel, more than a theatrical performance with a story. The spectator can choose which kind of room he or she wants to enter. For me it awakens associations to construction and deconstruction, death and creation, using mechanical and technological means as a metaphor for life. For others it may be very different. Maybe my interpretation is coloured by my knowledge of some of the background for this work.

When the work was first presented as part of the *Ultima Festival for New Music* last year, one of the central forces in Verdensteatret, Lisbeth Bodd, was terminally ill. She died a few hours after the last show.

Bridge over Mud has not been performed again before now at Black Box in Oslo. But Verdensteatret has kept on developing the piece and this version is not identical with last year presentation.

For the spectators the most striking difference might be the change of venue, from the Henie Onstad Art Center to Black Box Theatre where a podium is used. At the art centre everyone saw it from the floor and was close to the installation. Now the theatre space with a podium makes it easier to get an overview but also gives more distance to the richness of details in the installation.

Technical magic

The audio-visual design is the main character in *Bridge over Mud*. Mechanical movement dominates. The persons on stage are more withdrawn and act more like operators, not as actors.

The main element is a huge railway model where several trains, mounted with optical lenses, led-light and mini-speakers moves in different patterns. Video images, some abstract, some naturalistic is projected onto different walls.

The sonic effects and the visual movement are often synchronized into the same rhythm, -and sometimes not. The slow tempo, the volume that shifts from very low to unpleasantly high, demands a concentration by the spectators.

The combination of the constant and the variable, the known and the unknown, gives *Bridge over Mud* an air of being both in the moment and simultaneously outside time itself. It is therefor tempting to call it "magic", -but would also be misleading.

Bridge over Mud is far too technological aware, far too structured and complex in its construction, that to call it "magic" could be an adequate description.

The magic that this work creates is the same magic that lies in the fascination towards something finely tuned and in the exuberance for scientific precision.

- Lillian Bikset, <http://dagbladet.no>, August 26, 2015

KUNSTKRITIKK.NO

Do androids dream of electric sheep?

If they have nightmares they might be reminiscent of what plays out in Verdensteatret's new performance "Bridge over Mud", which was premiered on Henie Onstad Art Centre last Friday.

Maybe allusions towards science fictions is to simple, it is easy to deport things one doesn't understand to the future.

Theatre is nevertheless not a sufficient appropriate term, for it is part shadow play, part kinetic sculptures, part video and animation, part noise music, part installation. The sculptural elements are situated somewhere between Tinguely, Calder and Raymond Roussel's mechanical obsessions.

It is also more than appropriate that the premiere of "Bridge over Mud" coincides with the conclusion of Henie Onstad's exhibition of experimental performing arts from the Bauhaus school.

It starts with a video projection in the total darkened room.

An endless array of driverless yellow taxis, which seems hover just above the cobblestones, are passing the image frame accompanied by a creaking sound that might be intended as a permissive hand brake, but sounds more like something you would hear if you put a stethoscope up to an aging alcoholic's knee.

Eventually, one can make out that the floor is covered by an vast network of railroad tracks that stands on half-meter high piles of plywood bricks.

Miniature trains with attached lamps throws out images of a shadow landscape constantly changing as they pass mirrors and constructions of chicken wire.

The soundscape – tuba, a homemade string instrument, electronics – are becoming intensified to almost unbearable volume as a swarm of digital fragments moves across the canvas.

Tinguely-like metal sculptures passes over the rails and cast shadows that multiply against different projection surfaces.

In the sensuous confusion sounds are reified and the objects reverberate.

The most transparent illusions are often the most potent; that imagination is sparring with sanity is something both Immanuel Kant and a six year old at marionette theatre knows.

The fascination aroused in the spectator of "Bridge over Mud" lies in the admiration of the complexity in the production, at the same time as you are lured into a narrative that is impossible to summarize.

Verdensteatret was founded by Lisbeth J. Bodd and Asle Nilsen in 1986. The ensemble has had some core members in the last fifteen years, but is otherwise a changing constellation of artists that come together to work with the individual performances. This production counts twelve artists involved.

They have a flat production structure meaning none of the elements – the sound, the electromechanic machine marionettes, the images – are subject to the others.

The Bauhaus exhibition showed how the schools exploration of contemporary technological possibilities, combined with a consistent idiom, even today seems to point towards the future.

Verdensteatret's production has a similar timelessness, and it challenges the audience's expectations of genre conventions.

- Simen Joachim Helsvig, Kunstkritikk, September 23, 2014

BEYOND TIME

Venue: Henie Onstad Arts Center, Oslo

Review

Broen over Gjørme (*Bridge over Mud*), the most recent work to emerge from Verdensteatret, is low-key and strangely touching.

On previous occasions, I've compared Verdensteatret's performances/installations to dwelling inside an animal in a coma. It's not a particularly original description, but it's a recurring image of all the Verdensteatret productions I've been witness to. The group transforms its stage or art space into a dramatic body, pulsating between its visual and audiovisual elements, and all the fragments that float by have a certain dreamlike expression.

Just like its predecessors, *Bridge over Mud* is such an installation – an all-encompassing work. Dramaturgically, it's not plot-driven, and there's no obvious narration for the spectator to follow.

Instead, there's a fragmented form that opens for countless interpretations and entry points. Verdensteatret was founded in 1986, and the twelve artists who make up its current constitution all come from different artistic disciplines. The company has been on a number of international tours, and received an honorary Hedda Award, Norway's most important theater prize, this year.

Nevertheless, I feel *Broen over Gjørme* presents a more fragile sound structure. Their earlier works had installations that also occupied more of the vertical space in the room. This time the setting is a wide flat “field” of railroad tracks. Small wagons chug around, and the emission from their headlights is projected through glass prisms creating landscapes and formations onto the walls of the room outside the construction.

After a while, the stage becomes better lit and small periscope-like loudspeakers are raised and suspended (a closer look seems to reveal they're made of cheap plastic glass). In between the tracks, where the trains roll along and figurative (almost Bauhauesque) boards are being pushed to and fro, you can also glimpse some formations that could look like coral reefs.

There are a number of associative trains of thought, but there is something about the tracks and the rest of the visual setting that makes me think of Tarkovsky's science fiction movie “*Stalker*” (1979). The film works well as a prism for this work, but while Tarkovsky lets his characters leave their everyday life and enter “The Zone”, in so many ways this work embodies a (timeless) “Zone” by itself.

Amongst other things, the spatial imagery is made up of wires, tracks, glass prisms and loudspeakers, yet the combined expression or experience is most organic.

In the film “Stalker” its main character states early on that whatever happens in “The Zone” does not depend on it, but on us. You can say the same about “Bridge over Mud”, as none of the images, plots or soundscapes are unambiguous. The room or universe created by Verdensteatret seems familiar in a peculiar way, though alienating, leaving the on-looker to choose how to imagine the implications of each image created – be it through long trains of associations or smaller, fragmented sequences.

The images and soundscapes that emerge lead me to think of something prehistoric – it's as if we hear the distant echoes of the creatures that is the origin of what today has become petroleum and raw oil hoisted out of their reservoirs.

The hall at the Henie Onstad Arts Center provides a good space for this work. The sounds come closer and closer while the room gets better lit – and the energy built up throughout the nearly one hour long performance of “Bridge over Mud” finally recedes.

The span between deafening cacophony and the somewhat more scrawny, fragile space this performance creates seems to reflect the extremities of human life. To get back to “Stalker”, there is another quote brought back to life by “Bridge over Mud”: “*Weakness is something fantastic, strength is nothing.*”

- Anette Therese Pettersen. Klassekampen, September 22, 2014