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The Void

- Elin Høyland

'HANNAH', the new piece from Verdensteatret, is a ceremony over bygone time and voids with feedback from its own flight recorders.

This time without Lisbeth Bodd, who died after the premiere of the piece 'Bridge Over Mud' in 2014 and whose death left a large, but luminous void behind her in the Norwegian and the international performing arts field, and undoubtedly also in the framework for her life's work: Verdensteatret.

The scenography that greets us at Henie Onstad Art Center in Bærum is more stripped down than usual this time. An elongated white canvas on the back wall (an almost elementary part of Verdensteatret's scenography where different visual occurrences arise), four steel constructions that could resemble low and long 'tent-skeletons'; near the canvas are three smaller felt-sculptures in mustard yellow, two of which resemble reversed umbrellas, and one 'Mad hatter' - top hat. Right in the front, on the entirely aluminium foil covered floor are two grey clay figures whispering Vietnam and Mekong Delta. This is where the show has found its material, partly from a new journey made in 2016 and partly in dialogue with the first trip to this area, which was the foundation for the show 'Louder' in 2007. Maybe that is why four flight recorders are placed at the centre of the room. A symbol of both journey, memory and the possibility of repetition?

The art collective Verdensteatret has since its beginning in Bergen in 1986 developed a significant signature characterized by a visual dramaturgy, where the ritual and the natural take part in different constellations within cultural and technological conditions. The process of creation involves geographical journeys where material is collected on many levels and a basic trust in the 'knowledge' within that material and the technology that catches them. A show by Verdensteatret can be experienced from countless angles and art genres such as music and noise, visual art and installation, performance and theatre, controlled by humans and machines in wavy, jarring contact with both prehistoric and present time, chaos and peace. The human actors on stage become helpers of the real actors; different 'scrap-yard' objects, electronic and mechanical tools and projections. As an audience you are invited on an audio-visual object controlled journey and into a kind of a meditative state.

Verdensteatret describe 'HANNAH' by saying that they are exploring ideas about geological time and attention fatigue and summarize with: 'There has never been so much past as there is right now' and that they will create a series of elaborate audio-visual compositions generated via an electronic feedback system. It is when this electronic feedback system appears on the white canvas that the heart of the piece opens up. Circles in sand, beige, brown, a hint of orange and black; audio noise meets visual granulated pixels in a kaleidoscopic formation. Circles appear like wooden plates partly covering each other in different sizes and creating harmonic figures. Through the centre of these plates a small wheel is growing, moving inwards, crossing, drilling. It makes a path, a canal, a spine. It causes me to think of nervous systems and Buddha-figures, sawmills and a thousand year old trees. I feel the heart of the world pulsating, warmly and without purpose or meaning. A heart that can withstand penetration.

More down to earth elements characterize the rest of the scenography; an empty high-rise building, slum-like. Construction sites and harbours. Unpopulated. Two robot speakers with soft drum sticks beat softly, beat harder, it crackles in the flight recorders, jarring speakers covered in felt are being turned. Felt. The yellow felt creates warmth, there is hope. Even if there are no words to describe where we are right now. The six human performers on stage are turning the speakers in a compassionate choreography; in line with soft, listening movements that hear the waves of an ocean in a dysfunctional radio. A man is standing in flight position. Two full length rolls of aluminium foil cross the stage vertically, worthy of a Hedda Prize for best actor. Steel constructions fall apart and new ones are brought in, now with glass in all kinds of colours. Crackling and emptiness, seaweed and plastic. The associations are many and as the situation encourages us to observe; it is individual for everybody in the audience.

Verdensteatret is undoubtedly still alive. With Lisbeth Bodd in the heart of the flight recorders and with her

partner Asle Nilsen at the front of what looks from the outside like an almost self-driven organism. There is something about the void in this piece and it quivers in line with the title 'HANNAH'. At first I was searching for meaning in the word (it can be grace, mercy and flower) but it is of course not what the title means but what it is which is the essence here; HANNAH is a palindrome, a word, expression or number that gives the same result whether you read from right or left (...) from the Greek words palin, 'back' or 'again' and dromos, 'lane' or 'road', and so there we were, inside something both noisy and quiet, in contact with the infinite, *palindromic*.