



The Ship Bridge 1991 (Jan Rütz)

Invigorating the City of Holstebro

By Erik Exe Christoffersen

The Ship Bridge (1991) was a collaboration with Odin Teatret. It took place on a parking lot on the roof of a supermarket in the middle of Holstebro, a city with some 50,000 inhabitants in west Denmark. Stage director Eugenio Barba from Odin Teatret in Holstebro invited Hotel Pro Forma to create a performance with locals with the theme *The Danish Columbus*. *The Ship Bridge* was a spectacle involving 700 participants from local associations such as sport dancers, riding clubs, the motorcycle police, the army, dog clubs with dog handlers, the archery association, an accordion orchestra from the local music school, the fire brigade and many more who were invited to demonstrate their skills. *The Ship Bridge* took place during seven days, 24 hours a day in August 1991. A large mirror was installed at one end of the roof to mirror the cityscape. There was one single ongoing action: a ship was being built and every four hour something was happening on the roof. *The Ship Bridge* could be seen as a non-organic montage in which everyday behavior or what anthropologists would call ritual or performative acts were juxtaposed in unexpected ways. The performance thus acquired a metaphorical character, as a visual display of the city's unconscious life.

For seven days activities by specialists in archery, dressage, motorcycling, dog training, sports dance, etc. took place. All participants exhibited a particular physical and precise skill and talent accompanied with music, or put together with actions from dancers, horses, soldiers, motorcycles or archers. This created a new meaning without any kind of plot. The approximately 700 performers were precisely what they did merely presented in a new context and framed by the staging on the roof. The activities were just as they were practiced in the many associations and clubs, but in this context theatricalized through repetition and enlargement seen through the optics of the outsider and not least the framing. The performers were exhibited as moving images, not as social or psychological characters, but with 'ritual and mythical' dimensions connected to their appearance. Through certain principles, figures and actions were explored or isolated by which their formal diversity was curated to obtain a metaphorical character. For seven days Kirsten Dehlholm lived in a trailer on the roof and saw everything. *The Ship Bridge* ended with a funeral of the completed ship in the city park, where Odin Theatre's renowned figures carried out a funeral ritual with a wheel loader that threw earth on the boat. An audience of more than 3000 people sang a newly composed song. *The Ship Bridge* made the local residents say that they did not know so many talented people inhabited their city. Even more than 20 years later a large number of people is still referring to this pioneering event in Holstebro.