



Prologue

By Erik Exe Christoffersen and Kathrine Winkelhorn

Hotel Pro Forma is a Copenhagen-based international laboratory for performing arts – a small production company with substantial influence on the performing arts in Scandinavia and Europe. Since 1985 Hotel Pro Forma has staged more than 50 productions shown in more than 30 countries around the world from New York, Sydney to Taipei. Productions are developed through an intensive period of research, and different themes are taken from a wide-ranging field of interest.

The founder of Hotel Pro Forma is Kirsten Dehlholm, (b. 1945), a vibrant woman, who is always concerned with the world around her and who has received numerous awards for her groundbreaking work. In 2015 she was awarded the distinguished *International Artist Award for the Performing Arts* (ISPA) as well as the Danish Honorary Reumert Award of the Year. (The Reumert is the grand award in Danish Theater)

Kirsten Dehlholm is an omnipresent person at Hotel Pro Forma. She forms the signature and voice, colored by a special creative and unusual way of perceiving the world and an equally exceptional way of organizing it as art. Writer Carsten Jensen has reportedly called it “a genre named Kirsten Dehlholm”. Dehlholm brings *un-obvious* elements and conceptual structures into the art field and becomes herself form. Some years ago she talked about the *doppelgänger motifs* in her performances at Aarhus University. The lecture began with a young Dehlholm (a woman dressed like her) who spoke about Hotel Pro Forma’s work. After the break a similar but older Dehlholm (the actual person) in the same clothes continued the talk of twins as form and as performer.

Hotel Pro Forma is located in Copenhagen in an old factory and walking up the stairs you enter directly into an open kitchen. The studio is a large open space of 600 m² with a white floor, white walls and high ceilings. There are large windows with light from all sides. To the right is Kirsten Dehlholm’s cabinet of curiosities with strange shoes, wax figures and all sorts of rarities from countless trips worldwide. The studio is furnished with white work tables and white chairs on wheels. One can effortlessly transform the office landscape into a rehearsal room, an exhibition room, a workshop or a performance space. At the back, we find the library, which is used as a meeting room. Of course, Hotel Pro Forma also offers a guest room. When we step in, we get a feeling for and an insight into Hotel Pro Forma’s practises and its special aesthetic expression. Here rules a systematic order – it is beautiful and elegant, but the beauty is in no way pompous or flashy. It is an atelier that is always open to new constellations and new opportunities. On the one hand, everything has its own place; on the other hand everything is open and movable. The aesthetics that exists between the open and the closed, the stringent and the intuitive, the playful and the pretentious is a paradox that we find both in the artworks and in the atelier.

Naturally, Kirsten Dehlholm relates to other artistic contexts and she mentions four very

Enigma of the Late Afternoon 1992 (Roberto Fortuna)

different artists as inspirational sources. One is the Polish director and painter, *Tadeusz Kantor* (1915-90), who, like her, connects the well-known with the new, where seemingly irreconcilable categories meet, and there is a synergistic effect, which is enhanced.

Another inspiration is the American stage director, *Robert Wilson* (b. 1941), who is known in particular for working with almost static tableaux in opera with scenographic images, lighting design, and stylized figurative plays moving in slow motion. Wilson was in Copenhagen in 1973 with his 12-hour show *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, which caused a scandal among audiences and critics, most of whom left the theater, but for Kirsten Dehlholm was a revelation. A third source of inspiration is the company *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, founded in 1981 by *Claudia* and *Romeo Castellucci* (b. 1960) who accentuates the reality of representation by using special types of performers. Finally, light artist *James Turrell* (b. 1943), who has worked with light as a mirage between surface and sculptural space. As a common feature, these four artists have specialized in developing the sensuous relationships between audience and form, where the senses are sharpened, focused, and made aware through collisions.

Hotel Pro Forma has formed a series of artistic practises between opera, performance art and installation and expanded the boundaries of what performing arts are. The artistic process is explorative and interdisciplinary. Every production is a new experiment and contains a double staging: contents and space. Hotel Pro Forma is at the same time an atelier and a laboratory that examines places and perspectives. Nomadic. Exploratory. Always challenging and always with different perspective on the world. The structure of the performances is strongly anchored in music and in the visual arts and does not follow traditional theatrical structures, but instead uses the architecture and the traditions of the venue as a co-player. Each production is the result of a close collaboration with professionals from several disciplines: the visual arts, architecture, music, film, literature, science, and digital media. Performers are carefully casted according to the qualities of the concept and the nature of the production. Experimental technology in visuals, light, and sound are developed for each work so the subject matter is seen, heard, and experienced anew.

In 2011 *Atelier Hotel Pro Forma* was established as an international art lab for young, emerging artists and students to develop and display transdisciplinary artworks. Atelier Hotel Pro Forma is conceived to inspire, develop and breed the artistic organization through new interdisciplinary and experimental projects, networks, and new ways of sharing ideas, knowledge, and expertise. At the *Atelier* works of art are created for galleries, museums, and projects in public spaces, as well as a monthly exhibition at Hotel Pro Forma. Several former resident artists and interns now work with Hotel Pro Forma's national and international productions.

Hotel Pro Forma is a production company for the performing arts with space, image, audio, text, shape, and light as the key enablers to develop performances that the audience perceives as sensory tableaux without the safe harbor of the central perspective and often without a recognizable narrative dramaturgy. In any case, there is an inherent uncertainty in relation to the viewer's perception. The performances are not trying to interpret the world, but rather investigating and constructing realities with different categories to make the audience experience something they have not seen before. As Kirsten Dehlholm says: "The show must make an imprint on the mind and the body, that is what we strive for."

Kirsten Dehlholm works with concept development, curating, design and staging. An aesthetic study of a phenomenon may depart from perspective and gravity as in *Why Does Night Come Mother?* 1989, a town as in *The Ship Bridge* 1990, a myth as in *Operation: Orfeo* 1993, a country and its history as in *Chinese Compass* 1998, a music instrument as in *Theremin* 2004, a name as in *Ellen* 2010, war as in *War Sum Up* 2011, a novel by Nabokov as in *Laughter in the Dark* 2014, or the universe as in *Cosmos+* 2014.

A 30-year-old production company is rather exceptional and carries a unique experience for an artistic organization, for creative processes, for management etc. In our liquid modernity, the lifetime of project groups is estimated to some 7-8 years. In that sense, it is somewhat paradoxical that a performance theater is considered as one of the stable fixed points in art.

This special English issue of the journal *Peripeti* presents selected Hotel Pro Forma productions. Most readers will probably not have seen the performances, which is why we have been at pains to describe the different productions. We have selected those we consider to have influenced the performing arts the most by expanding the medium of the performing arts. Further we wanted to include a number of photos for the reader to get a more precise impression of Hotel Pro Forma's pioneering works. Some of the articles have previously been published in Danish in: *Skønhedens Hotel, Hotel Pro Forma, Et laboratorium for scenekunst*, Aarhus University Press, 2015. Several of the articles have been abbreviated from the Danish versions. Theresa Bener's article, *Hotel Pro Forma in a European context* and Lars Qvortrup's article on *Madama Butterfly* have been written specially for this issue of *Peripeti* and Anja Mølle Lindelof's and Kathrine Winkelhorn's article on *Rachmaninov Troika* has been published in *Peripeti* 2016.